

Denkbild

Dreaming with a Hammer: On Critical Theory in the Philippines (A Philosophical Fiction)

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A Visayan folklore disclosed that although the human and the spiritual worlds were two separate dimensions, there were special times of the day when the barrier in between them opened to allow some spiritual creatures, the *enkantos*, to roam freely on earth. For the Visayans, these special times were both holy and unholy and were marked by the hours of the midday, or *udtong tutuk*, dusk, or *keilomkeilom*, and midnight, or *tungang-gabii*. Hence, at noontime, these folks stayed at their huts and rest, and at sunset they walked home from their fields in solemn silence, in deference to the good natured but often mischievous spirits that may have wandered out of their domains. But at the middle of the night, they should be sleeping on their mats with their doors and window shutters securely barred, for at that time evil spirits ruled the darkness. However, as the country and its people struggled to modernize, this folklore, the good and evil spirits, and the special hours of the day were gradually forgotten, except for one: the midday, the holiest and un-holiest of all times.

Even at the university belt, this remained a sacred stretch of time, for it is not the Spanish siesta, nor the greasy value-lunch, and neither the sweltering heat, that made the eyelids of the students magically droop in between twelve noon and two in the afternoon, but the potent spell of the midday, cast a long time ago by the beings of the other world. Professors and instructors instinctively avoided as much as they can any assignment that falls on this enchanted time, for when the mental activity of the students plummets to the lethargic state of semi-slumber, teaching would become an impossible task to accomplish.

But Peter Mirano seemed to be shielded from the pervasive power of the midday spell. For this assistant professor of literature, time-slots would not make any difference, as all of his classes were invariably filled to the rafters with enthusiastic and interactive students. Aside from his regular students, there were many others, like Fred and Juliana, who flocked to his room to follow his masterful analyses and readings of both local and foreign literary works. At mid-thirties and still single, he had already more than a decade of teaching experience in his own field of expertise. He knew the fact that the average Filipino student is a sparse reader, who regards literature as a matter of the otherworld, and who considers a literature class a torture of boredom and

required readings. Thus, instead of forcing his students to chomp through voluminous literary anthologies and straining their notoriously short attention span with abstruse discourses on literary forms and structures, he would start by stoking their deep seated questions on the possibility of socio-political justice, the immediacy of the Filipinos' intellectual and cultural transformation, the fragmentation of the self, family and community brought about by modernization, the role of the intellectuals in society, the necessity of building solidarity among the workers, and the meaning of one's existence. When the flickering flames of these questions finally blazed into bonfires, he would pull his students towards the rich repository of answers, reflections and further questions which literature is all about. Hence, he made his students pick up roughly the same anthologies without them feeling the tedium and resentment that otherwise would impede their passage to the literary world.

In an educational system where political science is a three-unit course that is neither scientific nor political but a plain exposition of the Philippine constitution, and where philosophy is another three-unit course that narrowly focused on logic, his literary classes served as entry points for these young Filipinos to explore and quench their experiential and existential musings about everyday Philippine realities.

On the part of the students, they found themselves at ease listening to and interacting with this very casual looking academician who was given to wearing denims, earth colored jackets, and hiking shoes, and whose eyes, framed with black rimmed glasses, simultaneously suggested intelligence, passion, and kindness.

It was already one in the afternoon and he was wrapping-up his lecture on the figure of the mystical religious-political leader who presides over an equally mystical mountain commune that recurs in Philippine fiction. The variations of this literary symbol could range from a holy hermit to a rebel priest, and from a cultic leader to a learned scholar. Nick Joaquin, F. Sionil Jose, Alfred Yuzon, Eric Gamalinda, and Charlson Ong were but some of the leading novelists who deployed this captivating character type in their stories. Peter had just presented to his students two explanations for the persistence of such literary phenomenon. "The first of these reasons, my dear students, is psychoanalytic and it is founded on our collective disgust with the corruption, abuses, and incompetence of our current political leaders. To compensate for this, we consciously or unconsciously desire for alternative leaders with purer souls who will show us the way to political, economic and spiritual salvation. *Kung baga, 'yung mga hindi natin nakikita sa ating mga politiko ay pilit nating nililikha sa ating mga pangarap at panaginip.* This compensatory desire, ladies and gentlemen, is recorded in our literature by the presence of the said figure. To sum up my first explanation, the recurrent symbol of the mystical religious-political leader is part of our utopian wish for a better world. *Naintindihan nyo ba ang ibig kong sabihin, bago pa man tayo tumuloy sa aking second explanation?"* Many of the students nodded in agreement and some whispered to their seatmates their insights.

His second reason was historical and started with the historian Zeus Salazar's itemization and classification of the pre-colonial Filipino leaders into four: the *datu*, or the political leader; the *bagani*, or the *bayani*, the charismatic community leader; the *panday*, or the technocrat who controlled the manufacture of tools and weapons; and the *babailan*, or the shaman. "Okay, students, when the Spanish colonizers came, the *datu* was transformed into the elite *principalia*, the rich and powerful landowners, who mingled with the Spanish and Chinese *mestizos* to become the ancestor of our present day disgraced politicians, while *panday* became a lowly craftsman. '*Yung isa naging kasabwat ng mga mapag-aping dayuhan, samantalang 'yung isa naman ay bigla na lamang tinanggalan ng kanyang dating social standing.* On the other hand, both the *bagani* and the *babailan* were obliterated from the supposedly civilized and Christian colonial society. *Ang bagani ay pinalitan ng militar at guardia civil, at ang babailan naman ay malinaw na pinalitan ng mga prayle.* However, in our fictive world, *sa mundo ng ating panitikan at imahinasyon*, the *datu* is reincarnated often as the villain and evil politician; while the *bagani* as the economically and politically powerless hero who is out to save the community; and the *babailan* as a secondary character who assists the main protagonist by imparting to him wisdom, hope, or power." Thus, Peter's historical explanation for the recurrence of the symbol of the mystical religious-political leader was hinged on the idea that this figure indeed existed in the past as the *babailan*, and although it was wiped out by the colonizers Philippine culture remembers it in its literature.

Niña, a student from the college of commerce, raised a clarification: "Sir, is it possible that the same explanations that you have just discussed could also shed light on the fact why we, Filipinos, recognize the tremendous political power wielded by such religious figures as the late Jaime Cardinal Sin, the archbishop of Manila, or Bro. Eraño Manalo, the executive minister of the *Iglesia ni Kristo*, or Bro. Mike Velarde, the founder of the *El Shaddai Movement* and television evangelist?" Before Peter could make a response, Jerome, a senior political science student posted a comment: "If such is the case, Professor, then Bro. Eddie Villanueva, the founder of *Jesus is Lord Movement* and another television evangelist, could have packaged his bid for the presidency better by capitalizing on the same icon of the mystical religious-political leader." That observation invited still another remark from Ivy, a junior education student: "Professor Mirano, our explorations has led me to the possibility for the Roman Catholic priests to re-engineer their self-images from being seen as perpetrators of colonization and obstacles to development into proactive and dynamic religious-political movers."

"Ladies and gentlemen, the ideas streaming out from your minds are fascinating. I regret to tell you, however, that we cannot extend our discussion any further. You are needed for your next classes, and another professor with his students will be using this hall shortly. You know what I mean, of course." Peter acknowledged their interesting points and apologized that they really have run out of time. "For the meantime, I suggest you write some notes about your insights, and I promise you all that we will continue excavating

some more implications from the literary symbol of the mystical religious-political leader the next time we meet. Have a pleasant day, guys!”

As he moved out of the classroom towards the cafeteria, a handful of students, including the ones who just spoke in their class, trailed him with more questions and comments. Unlike the other instructors and professors, he did not mind his students joining him for lunch. In fact he loved the arrangement for several reasons, the loftiest being he can have the chance to nurture their minds further even after class hours, while the basest being that it would distract him from noticing that the foods in their cafeteria are only different in names and appearance, but never in their taste. At the counter each of them perfunctorily picked up a well battered aluminum tray, randomly pointed to his or her choice, and received his or her hot servings on chipped ceramic wares. They proceeded to their favorite spot at the farthest end of the cafeteria, near a wide window shaded by some well-pruned *figus* trees, the name used for the *balete* tree when yet small and potted, where they would not disturb the other diners.

Peter Mirano, tall, fair skinned and robust-bodied professor of literature, whose handsome face was perennially bordered with some day old stubbles, was often mistaken as a Middle Eastern graduate student who made Manila his English training ground in preparation for a subsequent incursion into the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. At the height of the terrorist paranoia that was spawned by the historic attack of the twin towers in New York, he had learned to deal with the more systematic frisking and longer inspections every time he enters a mall or other similar establishments. But Peter was a Filipino from Zamboanga City, who merely inherited his distinctive Mediterranean features from his Tausug mother whose father was a descendant of an Arab Islamic missionary. He grew up with the books that his father, a Visayan public school teacher, either borrowed from the government library, or purchased at the second hand book stalls, just for him. The alternative worlds and the immense information revealed by these materials simply enthralled him. Thus, after finishing high school as a valedictorian, he decided to deepen this childhood interest by pursuing a degree in comparative literature at the country's foremost state university in Diliman, Quezon City.

In the woody and sprawling campus of his chosen school, his native Chavacano tongue, after just a few polishing at the Department of European Languages, gave him the edge to explore that body of local literary writings in between the late 19th and early 20th century that was otherwise inaccessible to non-Spanish speaking students. Thus, he was able to digest the works of Jose Rizal, Pedro Paterno, Fernando Guerrero, Jesus Balmori and Claro M. Recto in their original and unadulterated forms. Having mastered the language, nothing stopped him from moving on to the rich literary troves of the Iberian Peninsula itself, the masterpieces of Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Miguel de Unamuno, Antonio Machado, and Federico Garcia Lorca; and later on to that of the Spanish Americas, such as the writings of Gabriela Mistral, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, Isabel Allende, Jorge Luis Borges, and Mario Vargas Llosa. He performed

well in his academics even as he got too involved with a leftist student organization due to the influence of Francis, his very special friend. He was certain that it was in this campus where he discovered his real self.

While he was relishing the unusually tasty pork-*bagoong* and *pinakbet*, Jerome, the senior political science student, asked him a rather personal question. “Everybody here knows that you are an alumnus of a highly respected university. But I’m very sure, Sir Peter, not all students from your school ended up as nationalistic as you are. *Medyo po naiintriga kami sa ‘yo*. Were there some special circumstances that occurred while you were in your campus that could help us understand better your political advocacies?”

“I must agree with your observation, Jerome. Do you remember, guys, that cabinet secretary who was fond of basking in front of television cameras, and who, with his cadaverous countenance, would spew out inanities and other un-reflected remarks that he thought, in his convoluted mind, would make him appear like a legal and political luminary? I think you can still recall that day when he blurted out that our prime state university deserves to be closed for the reason that it is insidiously preoccupied with the propagation of anti-government activists and critics. Well, there is a gem of wisdom even at the summit of his folly, for he indeed has a point. Maybe the government should actually consider closing our university, but for the reverse reason. Yes, my university is commonly thought to be the breeding ground of the country’s fire-breathing street radicals, but paradoxically it is also the training camp of the country’s most obstinate and corrupt political overlords. *Kung isasara man ito, hindi dahil sa aming mga radikal, kung hindi dahil sa mas nakararaming traditional politicians at mga professionals na walang ibang minimithi kung hindi mangurakot at pumunta sa ibang bansa.*”

“That is exactly what I mean, Sir. There is no guarantee that once a student steps on its much revered grounds he would come back to our society a very politicized and nationalistic citizen. *Ano po ba talaga ang naranasan n’yo doon at ganito kayo ngayon?*”

“Jerome, to tell you very honestly, I believe that my decision to pursue my college degree in that university had been crucial to the formation of my outlook in life; because in our country at that time, it was only there where the subject matter of my undergraduate thesis was discussed seriously and unrelentlessly among the various disciplinary experts.”

“*Hub, ano po ‘yon?* What was that thesis all about?”

“Well, it had something to do with the question on the transformation of the critical theory as conceptualized by the German Karl Marx to its appropriation and elaboration by a group of German Jewish thinkers who were based at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, and who are collectively known as the Frankfurt School, after their city of Frankfurt by the river Main. Believe me, at that time, in as far as our country was concerned, it was only in my university where it was conceivable, meaningful, and possible to work on such a topic. Are you familiar with Marx, *hijo?*”

“Yeah, as a political science student, I know a little of Marx. *Abh*, he was a very enigmatic figure, a young and brilliant doctor of philosophy, incisive

writer, and tenacious seeker of knowledge, but who unfortunately was too radical and unconventional to be employed as a university professor. *At saka*, a number of European states similarly found his thoughts and activities too threatening, consequently expelled him from their territories, and eventually drove him into a life of exile in London. *Kaya, 'yon*, he ended up as a freelance journalist, suffering from extreme poverty and subsisting on the dole outs from his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels, a fellow German intellectual who happened to be managing a family-owned cotton factory in the same city. *Sa totoo lang, Sir, hangang-banga po ako sa pagkatao ni Marx.*"

"Excellent! *Ako rin, hangang-banga din sa kanya.* But let me tell you something more about his thoughts, for the benefit also of our other friends here who might not be that knowledgeable about this great thinker."

"During my long hours of research, at the cavernous central library of my university, I often imagined Marx sitting beside me, a burly old man with a tousled mane of gray hair and beard, wearing his threadbare shirt, trembling from cold for his only jacket had been pawned a day earlier. I could almost sense the fetid smell exuding from the festering boils that chronically maligned his malnourished and overworked body. *Alam ko, ganoon ka kamawa si Marx.* Sometimes I visualized him rummaging through files of dusty manuscripts, sometimes framing his thoughts in deep reveries, sometimes preparing his incendiary public speeches, but oftentimes he was just seated, silently mourning over the death of a son, or daughter, or wife, snatched from him too soon by lack of nourishment or medicine. But I'm telling you, guys, this unhappy soul exerted so much influence on the socio-political and economic history of the 19th and 20th centuries."

"As early as the second semester of my freshman year, I already grasped the thrust of his social theory. This I encapsulated in my own mental picture of him as an Old Testament prophet. With his already ruffled gray hair and beard, all he needed was some windswept robes, and a hill overlooking an industrial society to stand upon. *Pasensya na kayo, medyo masyado akong imaginative.* From that vantage point, I pictured the imposing prophetic figure with a voice of thunder denouncing the capitalists for exploiting and oppressing the wretched workers, in effect goading the wage-earners to rise in arms; and predicting the self-destruction of the capitalist order through an inevitable and bloody revolution. I scribbled this personally constructed mnemonic device on my leather-bound journal that I am still keeping with me up to these days."

"But, to the dismay of his followers, several decades after the great doctor's death, the foretold self-destruction and massive revolution did not occur. On the contrary, capitalism rooted itself more firmly and become more widespread, and the supposedly miserable workers were happily embracing the exploitative and oppressive social order."

"During the first semester of my sophomore year, in my introduction to literary criticism class, I came across the new wave of Marxism being expounded by the Frankfurt School thinkers. Do you know where the city of Frankfurt by the River Main is located?"

“It is in the state of Hesse, at the central part of Germany,” snapped Ivy, the education student. “You are very right, young lady. And this group of intellectuals from this lovely city was so different from Marx. They were mostly university professors coming from rich Jewish families, and their theories did not scare any state authority. In my mind, I saw them as a bunch of gentlemen in dark expensive suits, with neat haircuts and trimmed beards, some were chomping on Cuban cigars, their offices lined with dark wooden shelves filled with leather-bound volumes, and their classrooms packed with adoring and good mannered students.”

“Although they professed that they were followers of Marx, they did not buy their master’s ideas on capitalism’s self-destruction and the inevitable revolution. They noted that the communist movement and the labor unions, instead of weakening the capitalist order, had made it stronger by making the capitalists aware of the looming threat of revolution and evaded it by patronizing the workers with better wages and more benefits. The communist movement and the labor unions, instead of strengthening the workers, had made them weaker by pampering them with the illusions that they are no longer being exploited and oppressed. Thus, the Frankfurt School thinkers were certain that capitalism would not self-destroy, and the widespread workers’ revolution would never occur.”

“*Sir, akala ko po ang mga Marxista ay nakatuon sa pagbabago ng lipunan?* But these Frankfurt School thinkers look like people who have already given up the struggle.” Niña, the student from the college of commerce, clarified. “My dear Niña, these folks did not give up the struggle. On the contrary they continued to dream and work for a better social order. The difference is that, such change would not happen through a bloody revolution, but through a constant analysis, critique, and consequent correction of the present imperfections of a given society. The continuous cycle of analysis, critique, and correction would pull the social order towards higher levels of being humane and just.”

“I see you point, Sir. The Frankfurt School theorists are advocating change through non-violent struggle. *Tama po ba ako?*”

“*Tama ka, Niña. At alam n’yo, I was overwhelmed with that idea and I cursed at the sight of how our local activists and anti-government critics were immediately branded as anarchists and troublemakers, when in fact they are necessary for a democratic society to grow more mature. Guys, without them our democracy would simply deteriorate into a dictatorship of some few elite and powerful individuals.*”

“But do these Frankfurt School theorists have a more specific plan of action in order to achieve social change? *Baka naman po kasi puro salita at salitang walang katupusan lang ang kaya nilang ganin.*”

“Young lady, if Marx counted on the poor workers to initiate social change, the Frankfurt School thinkers had been disillusioned by the potential of this group, for these workers had already happily embraced the myth that they were sharers of the wealth and prosperity generated by capitalism and that they were no longer exploited and oppressed by the capitalists. So, these

thinkers counted on the society's middle class intellectuals to band together and educate the rest of the population on how to make the society more humane and just. And do you know what their ultimate weapon is?"

"*Hmm*, I don't think so. What is it, Sir?"

"It is the propagation of radical and critical education. An education that would open the eyes of the people and let them see the present evils and injustices, make their mouths speak honestly of what they witness, and ignite their whole beings to work for the eradication of such evils and injustices."

"I think I was able to follow their line of thinking, Sir. When everybody could agree to critically collaborate and work together to build a better, a more humane and a more just society, then a bloody revolution would be totally unnecessary to change the present social order."

"Bull's eye! You got it very right!"

Jerome, sensing that the other students seemed to be lost in the very Western discussion that they were having, attempted to locally contextualize everything: "*Pakiramdam ko po ay mas maa-appreciate natin sina Marx at ang mga Frankfurt School theorists kung ibabambing natin sila sa dalawang grupo ng mga aktivista sa ating sariling kasaysayan*. Do you think, Sir Peter, the differences and similarities between Marx and the Frankfurt School theorists are parallel to those of the National Democrats and the Social Democrats during the Marcos regime?"

"I think you have a couple of very helpful analogues, Jerome. *Oo*, the National Democrats, with Jose Maria Sison as its most visible proponent, are radical activists who advocate revolution. On the other hand, the Social Democrats, with Fr. Romeo Intengan as their founding leader, are moderate activists who wanted to change the society through reason and dialogue. *Pwede nating sabihin na* the National Democrats are the hardcore Marxists, while the Social Democrats are politically aligned with the Frankfurt School theorists' project of social change."

"*At 'yong mga hardcore Marxists, 'yong mga National Democrats, ang tinutugis ng pulis at military noong panahon ni Mavoy*. *Kaya*, I guess, most of the radical students and professors were already gone, or had already mellowed down, when I arrived in my university in the mid-1980's. *Kung sakali napaaga ako ng dating sa pamantasan namin, hindi natin masasabi, pero baka National Democrat din ang pananampalataya ko at nasa kabundokan ang operations ko*. But still the Frankfurt School thinkers' suggestion that it was possible to change a defective social order without resorting to bloody revolution intrigued me so much."

"So, for the record, Sir, you don't believe in revolution?" Ivy cornered him with the discomfiting question. "Honestly, guys, I myself am not very comfortable with the idea of an uprising that would most probably wipe out a quarter of the population and physically or psychologically maim half of those who would survive. Although during those couple of years after the assassination of the former senator, Benigno Aquino, Jr., when the corruption and abuses of the dying regime had peaked, there were a number of intellectuals and students who talked about its necessity for purging and

cleansing the desolate republic. But, to tell you frankly, even in my left-leaning student organization, not everybody was convinced about staging an actual revolution.”

Jerome wrapped up the whole discussion: “So, *alam na namin ngayon*, it was the Frankfurt School thinkers’ proposal that social change could be achieved through the propagation of radical and critical education that inspired you to dedicate your life both to the academe and street activism.”

“*Tama ka d’yan*, and this is my way of contributing what I can to the intellectual and cultural transformation of our country.”

The cafeteria personnel were already cleaning the aftermath of their university’s lunch break; reminding them that their rather extended lunch had to end. Peter gathered his notes and books, bade his students a good day, and walked towards the direction of the faculty room, where he intends to go over the essays of his students on the comparison between Edgardo Reyes’ *Maynila sa Kuku ng Liwanag* and Lino Brocka’s filmic rendition of the same novel. *I wonder why it is so difficult to get VCD or DVD copies of films that are now considered classics in Philippine cinema. The local titles that are displayed at the video and music stores are mostly trash. Maybe I should write the officers of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, or the National Commission for Culture and Arts, to ask them to promote the country’s cinematic heritage.* But along the corridor he was waylaid to the Department of Languages and Humanities by his immediate boss, the chairperson of the said department. “*Saglit lang, Professor Mirano, may mahalaga akong sasabihin sa ‘yo.*”

In a small, but neat and air-conditioned room that served as their departmental office, his boss recounted to him in an exaggerated hushed voice how the university president and the dean of their College of Arts and Letters were both bothered by his now well-known teaching style of mixing literature and politics. “Professor Mirano, as your immediate superior, I think I have the burden of telling you this. The university president, in particular, is concerned about the television appearances of some of your students. They were there on the streets in our fairly distinctive school uniform, participating in rallies and giving interviews to media anchormen. I must admit, I admire how eloquently they expressed their sharp opinions on the current political issues. But our university president is apprehensive that some of his good friends who happened to be the subjects of the student protests might get slighted. *Alam mo na kung papaano dumedeskarde ang mga malalaking taong ito.* Our university president is anxious that his friends might turn away from that network of connections and goodwill that he had carefully cultivated since his election to our university’s highest office. *Nanghibinayang s’ya, kung бага.*”

“The dean, on the other hand, is uneasy with the suspicion that you might be using your classes to recruit more and more university students to your left-leaning party-list. She explained to me that she does not want to expose the young students to the dangers that normally hound all left-leaning organizations in this country.” Then the chairperson shifted his rhetoric into something like that of a neutral and disinterested diplomat. “I am fully aware of your academic freedom as a tenured assistant professor, and I have no intentions of curtailing that freedom. In fact, I want you to know that I value

your presence here in our department. You are giving so much prestige to our department. But let me caution you, Professor, it is very possible the university president and the dean might concoct some trouble for you. Please, be extra careful with whatever thing you are up to from this point on. *Nagkakaintidihan ba tayo, Professor Mirano?*”

Peter’s spirits were crushed by the complacent attitude of these three university officials: the president, the dean and his department chairperson. For them it was always better to be safe and secure than to wager even the most calculated risk in exchange for the hope of a better tomorrow. *These officials, and many others like them, as the Philippine academe is teeming with their kind, are the reason why Filipino students and the young professionals could not stand up to vocally assert their rights or denounce the abuses and injustices perpetuated by the country’s powerful elites. By educating the Filipino youth to become submissive and tolerant citizens these cowardly academicians are in fact collaborating with the politicians in making this graft-ridden culture the permanent social order, and with the capitalists and imperialists in wringing out the last drop of sweat and blood from the wretched Filipino workers. Mga puñeta silang labat!*

He found it pointless to argue with his immediate boss about the inseparability of literature and society and politics, for it would not really matter to this fainthearted person whether his teaching style is appropriate or not. The fact was his chairperson was comfortable with the myth of safety and security that he thought he was currently enjoying, and there could be no explanation in the world that would make him wager anything for a vision of a better world. After an awkward silence, the department chairperson attempted to steer the conversation towards a more comfortable zone: “*Hmm, Peter. May I call you Peter? How are you doing, by the way, in your doctoral studies?*” Peter was sure that his boss knew fairly well its status; nonetheless, he civilly answered him that he was currently on leave due to financial difficulties and that he intended to resume his academics a year after. Following a few more polite and tepid questions, and respectful but curt replies, Peter glanced at his watch and excused himself. “*Sir, I am very sorry. I have an appointment with some students over an assigned report on South American magical realism. I will bear in mind the things that you shared with me. Thank you very much and good afternoon!*”

That very short conversation left a bitter taste in his mouth. As he slowly resumed his trip to the faculty room, he remembered his very special friend, Francis. In his mind he would always remain in his youthful beauty. For him mainly, and for his students secondarily, Peter promised himself that he would not falter and lose heart. While arranging and rearranging the items on his desk, just to divert himself from the thoughts of what just happened at the departmental office and from the rush of poignant memories of Francis, his cell phone vibrated. He got a text message from Charles: “*We are already waiting for you at Ongpin Street. What is taking you so long?*”

Since Peter was not very comfortable eating at any of the American fast food chains that had mushroomed in the metropolis and in the countryside, as well as at any of the American-inspired Filipino establishments

that were only whetting the Filipino taste buds for the real American thing, he, Fred, Charles and Juliana had become frequent patrons of a small tea house near the southern end of Ongpin Street. This famous old street cuts through a huge section of Manila's Chinatown. Its southern tip starts in front of Santa Cruz church while its northern tip winds up just beside the Binondo church. In between these two Spanish colonial landmarks is a string of Chinese jewelry shops, drugstores, restaurants, pastry shops, hardware and electronic supply stores, groceries, fruit and delicacy vendors, banks, and tea houses.

After a number of frustrating visits to this Chinese strip, whose traffic is unremittably knotted with motorists, horse drawn carriages, pushcarts, and pedestrians, they had learned that the best and most efficient way of going there was by taking a jeepney ride along Recto Street, going down at Tomas Mapua Street, and finally having a short brisk walk to Ongpin Street. On their first trek along Tomas Mapua Street, Peter explained to his younger friends: "*Alam nyo*, guys? This bustling thoroughfare is the same Misericordia Street that was immortalized in the fictive world of Reyes and Brocka's *Maynila sa Kuku ng Livanag*. Reyes was probably captivated by this place because of an urban legend that identified it as the site of Chinese brothels, making this lane a powerful symbol of the silent sufferings of thousands of Filipinas who were lured into the lairs of Chinese white slavery. Coincidentally, *misericordia* is the Spanish word for mercy, and in this hellish place, feminine souls indeed cried out for mercy." When the street was renamed after one of the early *pensionados* under the American regime, the first registered Filipino architect, and founder of the Mapua Institute of Technology, everybody thought that it acquired a new identity with the brothels becoming things of the past. But Peter was cynical about it and claimed that he could still smell a few brothels lurking along that street of misery.

When he arrived at their favorite tea house, Fred and Charles were already heartily filling themselves with some *dimsum* of their choice and washing them down with the free flowing cups of house tea. At one side of their table there were already a number of empty bamboo steaming trays and a handful of *machang* leaf wrappings. Juliana was not with them, but Peter anticipated this as she had become less and less available during that last semester of her nursing studies and training. Among his already countless students, former students, and comrades from the streets, Fred, Charles and Juliana were especially close to him. These three university belt students might be all good looking and able bodied, but what made Peter seek their company was that outlook in life and passion that the four of them shared in common. With these young students he ceased to be a teacher, or a preacher, or a demagogue, but a person of flesh and blood with much to learn and share at the same time. With them he felt that his spirit was at home with its kindred. Although on their part, Fred, Charles, and Juliana, even in their closeness, quite understandably, could not easily deal away with the fact that he was Sir Peter, their political guru, brilliant, articulate, and tireless teacher, activist, friend, and comrade.

“Freddie, Charlie, I am very sorry for being tardy. To be honest, I almost forgot this tea party. My spineless boss, the chairman of the department of languages and humanities, disrupted my day.” Peter apologized. Upon seeing him, the waiter immediately set a teacup in front of him and refilled their pot with fragrant tea. Although he did not feel hungry yet, after his protracted lunch, he felt obliged to order *mami* noodle soup, for in that place where drinks are free, food is relatively cheap, and patrons are always waiting for seats and table, one really had to take something. Fred and Charles signaled for the *dimsum* cart, as the dip that they have concocted from chili and garlic sauce, soy sauce, and kalamansi, made it difficult for them to say enough to the steaming array of assorted Chinese chunks of food. Peter recounted the details of his experience but tried to brush away his frustrations by poking fun at his chairperson’s rhetoric, and by highlighting the fact that the university officials were making a big deal out of the students’ political awakening and involvement, which only suggested that they were beginning to feel the impact of his academic activism. “I think I should be flattered with their attention, *di ba*, Charlie, Freddie?”

Behind his witty remarks, Fred could still see how Peter was bothered by the incident. He attempted to cheer him a little by asking about how his lecture on the figure of the mystical political-religious leader had fared. Peter’s eyes brightened with his answer. “*Oh*, my students almost did not let me go with their comments and further insights.” Fred and Charles were already too familiar with the topic, Peter had brought it up with them the last time they had *dimsum* and tea at exactly the same spot, and for the following days they had explored the implications of the leadership models of the *datu*, *bagani*, *panday* and *babailan* to the widespread leadership crisis in Philippine politics. Peter was amazed at the keenness, restlessness, and creativity of their young minds.

Fred elaborated: “Although these four leaders were technically eradicated by the Spanish regime, these left behind an imprint of models of leadership and organization in the Filipinos’ minds, the most prominent of which is that of the *datu* and his *sakop*, or constituents and followers. Hence, even in the present political setting, we unconsciously act out this most prominent model of leadership and organization that had been etched in our minds, by playing the roles of either the *datu* or his *sakop*. It is this leadership and organizational model that makes a Filipino politician behave like a *datu*, and expect to be treated like a *datu* in his community; and makes a Filipino commoner behave like a *sakop*, and expect to be treated like a *sakop*.”

“I never thought of that. You, guys, are really brilliant!” Peter exclaimed. But before he can make any further comment, Charles deepened Fred’s initial presentation. “It is unfortunate that the leadership and organizational model of the *datu/sakop* happens to be incongruent with the type of leadership and organization demanded by the present democratic political structure imposed on the Filipinos by the Americans. This democratic political structure needs a bureaucratic leader, someone who can manage the community and its resources and at the same time be accountable

to his superior, which is the community itself. The same political structure needs a constituency that can critically collaborate with the leader and vocally demand from him good governance and transparency.”

Charles emphasized that the incongruence between the Filipinos’ cultural model of *datu/sakop* and the model of bureaucrat/citizen demanded by the present democratic political structure could explain all the dysfunctions of Philippine politics: from the people’s legendary tolerance towards the politicians’ abuses and incompetence to their uncritical silence and submissiveness; from the acceptance of political dynasties as matters of fact to the prevalence of private armies; as well as from the notorious patronage politics to the pervasiveness of graft and corruption. Peter was impressed by the learned and sharp political diagnosis of these two very young persons. He holds the opinion that if only this unhappy country could even have just a hundred-thousand of youthful citizens like Fred and Charles, its political, economic, and cultural salvation would no longer be very far away. But just to challenge them to articulate and elaborate their thoughts further, he baited them with a question: “So, Charlie, Freddie, what exactly is the point of your analysis?”

“Sir, although the Americans gave us a democratic government; they forgot to re-structure the cultural model of leadership and organization in our minds, thereby dooming us from the very start to make a mockery out of the supposedly noblest form of government.” Fred immediately recapitulated their explanation, and Charles added: “this situation would just be similar to telling someone who knows only the game and rules of volleyball to instantaneously and expertly play the game of basketball! *Talagang hindi pupumede yun, di ba?*”

But a sudden flash of inspiration struck Charles. “You know what, Sir Peter, Freddie? I think I am going to work out this analysis into a full blown thesis for my undergraduate paper. *Oh*, let me think. I am going to entitle it *The Implications of the Cultural Model of Datu/Sakop to the Current Crisis in Philippine Political Leadership!*” Charles was a senior philosophy student in an elitist school at the Malacañang side of Recto Street. “I am very sure that Dr. Pietro Nilo, our student research moderator and a known aficionado for anything that sounds nationalist and smells Filipino, will pounce on the idea, and that Prof. Mar Varoza, our resident expert on political philosophy and organizational behavior, will willingly take me under his mentorship.”

“Of course, you can easily do that paper, Charlie boy. I can even volunteer as your unofficial consultant. What do you say?” Peter encouraged the young philosophy student. Fred peeked at his watch and dolefully expressed his regrets: “*Oh*, I have to leave ahead of you, guys. I need to fetch Juliana at the hospital where she is having her OJT. I really don’t want to spoil this great conversation.” She was on a daytime duty that month, and Fred was trying to make most of their remaining time together. “You may go, Freddie. Sir Peter and I will just finish this food. I don’t think we are going to stay here any longer either. *Ingat ka, pare!*” Charles replied.

After Fred discreetly handed to Charles his share of their food bill and dashed to the direction of the San Lazaro Hospital, Peter made a remark.

“That rush is totally understandable; after all, our friend is out to meet not only a delicately lovely lady, but a smart, passionate, rare and exuberant person. *Sino ba namang hindi mapapatakbo sa ganda ni Juliana?* But, you know, Charlie, the thought that she is actually leaving the country as soon as she finishes her nursing studies also makes my heart ache for her and for Fred. *Ay naku*, maybe I am just incurably romantic! But I do believe that love is struggling hand in hand against this spiteful life, and that its success is measured rather absurdly by how lovers have grown old together. Thus, love languishes the moment such lovers are placed in a distance from each other. Although love gives us both happiness and pain, I am still convinced that without it the world will just be a desolate wasteland, and the future overcast with gloom. *Para akong gago, ano?*”

Peter’s short foray into the mystery of love made Charles bolder to ensnare him with a seemingly innocuous question: “*Matanong nga kita*, Sir. I hope you would not mind, but why is it that despite your lady-killer looks and at your age you seem to be unable to establish a serious relationship with a woman?” Even without some bottles of beer, the mood of their conversation had already loosened the professor’s defensive walls. He found it too late to retreat deep into his innermost ramparts. Anyway, he felt he was intimate enough with Charles to talk about his real self. So, he swept the young student with his memories and took him to his adolescent days back in Zamboanga City.

“*Nakakahiya man sabihin, pero atin-atin lang ito*, Charlie. I realized that I practically went through high school without thinking about girls, and without even making an issue out of that otherwise extraordinary disposition. I had been constantly at the top of my class, and maybe even the other people around me thought it was perfectly normal that girls are not the priority yet for the gifted students of my kind. Furthermore, the culture of the province is a little bit different from that of the metropolis. There, the girls are too shy to initiate friendship with the still timid boys, and the kids are expected to go straight home after school hours to assist their parents with the chores. You know what I mean. But circumstances changed once I stepped into the prime state university. There, closer and more mature interaction between the genders was something that cannot be avoided.”

“During my first few days in college, I came to know Angelica San Diego. Although I was in comparative literature and she was in art studies, as we both belong to the same College of Arts and Letters, we had many subjects in common. She was beautiful, smart, and shared my passions for books and the current political economy of the nation.”

“*Talaga? May picture ba kayo ni Angelica sa cell phone n’yo?*”

“*Syempre, wala. Pagers pa lang noon ang uso. Ano, ka ba?* In many ways she resembled Juliana, only richer, more fashion conscious, and perhaps a little too liberated in her outlook and somewhat spoiled by her parents. Nowadays, she would be somebody you would probably call *kikay* and *bitchy*. Soon enough, our classmates noticed that we were always together in the cafeteria, library, group studies, student organization meetings, and even in our budding

militant involvements. I became very comfortable with her company and she started to pamper me with things her hefty allowance can afford. It was pretty obvious: the lovely Angelica was falling for me. I was too naïve then even to get scared.”

“*Napakaswerte n’yo pala, Sir!*”

“Well, *oo at hindi.*”

“*Paano namang maging hindi sa takbong ‘yan?’*”

“*Ganito ang nangyayari.* One late balmy night, during a sensuous and emotional poetry reading, where the campus’ leading wordsmiths offered their masterpieces at the small courtyard of the College of Arts and Letters, Angelica pressed her body closer to me. The smell of her definitively expensive perfume, the heart rending and uplifting reverberations of Tagalog poems, and the otherworldly ambiance created by the warm flickering glow of surrounding torches are just some of the few things that I will never forget. *Nakakaibang karanasan ‘yon. Akala mo nasa ibang dimension ka.* While we were having coffee and pastries with the other participants, she softly whispered to my ears if we could just take a slow walk back to our dormitories.”

“Upon nearing the wooded grove at the center of our expansive campus, she begged further that we stay for a while and bask in the coolness of that late starry evening. My heart started to pound faster for I was aware that we were being drawn into the enchanted premises of the university garden. Are you familiar with that garden, Charlie?”

“I’ve heard some stories about it. But, I think they are just urban legends.”

“I don’t think so. For its identity is reputed to change with the time of the day. In the morning, the grove is just a network of joggers’ trails; during the day, a cool shade where students study, meditate, or chat, and workers eat their packed lunch; but when darkness falls, it transforms into a lovers’ haunt.”

“*Abh, kaya pala sinasabi nila na sa hardin na ‘yan ang mga halaman ay minsan-minsan namumulaklak ng gamit na condom!*”

“Well, Angelica led me to a stone bench secluded by some thick growth of bushes, and started to hug and kiss me. I clumsily enclosed my muscular arms around her delicate body and run my pursed lips around her soft cheeks in a pathetic attempt to smother her with halfhearted kisses. She guided my hands to lift the high hemline of her designer skirt and succeeded in lowering down my denim jeans. To her dismay and to my great embarrassment, even after a few minutes of waiting, it became obvious that I cannot deliver what she desired. We sadly came out of the lovers’ garden, resumed our walk to our dormitories. She wrapped her arms around my waist and reassured me that nothing was wrong with me, and that maybe I was just too nervous at that moment.”

“The humiliating incident was repeated a few months later, after an out of campus Christmas party of the faculty and students of our college. It was one of the coolest revelries I had ever been to. The place, somewhere in the Malate area, the drinks, the finger foods, and the music were simply fabulous. Some of the richer kids even brought around a little of their stashed

weeds and other party drugs. It was as if we were commemorating the birth of some pagan gods for unrestrained pleasure, such as Dionysius, and not of the ascetic Jesus of Nazareth. Angelica had too much of the rather strongly spiked fruit punch and I had two bottles of San Miguel beer more than my usual tolerance limit. A couple of hours before midnight, she complained of a slight headache and asked me if we can go back to our dormitories ahead of the still festive pack.”

“But in the cab, she wickedly instructed the driver to steer away from the direction of our campus and towards the city of Caloocan, in a district where the number of lovers’ motels can rival those of Pasay and Sta. Mesa. Inside the fancifully designed but windowless room, we showered together, and she just made me lie down on the bed. But even with all the efforts done by the flawlessly elegant and naked Angelica San Diego, I, Peter Mirano, stayed limp as a one-legged buccaneer. *Putang ina! Hiyang-hiya ako noon, Charlie.*”

“The cab ride back to the campus was covered by a pall of silence. I can feel her frustrations, confusions and self-anger. *Para bang gusto ko na lang na mabangga ‘yong taxi na sinasakyan namin para matapos na ang labat.* We never saw or talked to each other that Christmas break. By January she did all that she could to avoid me in the campus. In the following semester she transferred to our neighboring elitist university at Katipunan Avenue and pursued a business course instead. *Kaya ‘yon, hindi na kami nagkikita uli.* Although I missed her company, the twinge of pain I experienced was nothing like mourning over a lost love. I prayed she will find the man who can give her real happiness in life. Wherever she is now, I continue to wish her success.”

He chuckled when he informed Charles that in his wish list of ten things he should have done before he turned forty, he scribbled there for number five that he’d like to meet Angelica San Diego and be friends with her again. “Now that I know my real self better, I am sure I can more articulately explain those incidents and sincerely apologize to her. Angelica will certainly understand, after all, those things happened more than two decades ago.”

“*Ibig mong sabihin, you are impotent?*” Charles was baffled.

“No, it was something more complicated than that.” Peter answered. “All the while there was Francis, my dormitory buddy, a political science student at the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy in the same university. Like me, Francis never talked about girls. However, he was not naïve for he silently understood that he was different from the other boys. When I confided to him my fiasco with Angelica, he alluded to me that my problem may not be erectile dysfunction but something deeper and could be rooted on the very fiber that constituted my whole being. Just as some people are born with a dislike for certain foods and a craving for others; it could be that I was not intended by the inscrutable destiny to love women.”

“*Ano?* You mean to say you are gay? I could not believe that you are *bakla!*” The surprised Charles interrupted him.

“Sad to say, yes I was, yes I am, and yes I will continue to be even in the afterworld. But going back to my account, it was then that I started to realize that like Francis I too am different from the other boys. With Angelica

gone, I was drawn nearer and nearer to this good looking, although a little frail-bodied, political science student, and before we realized it we had become lovers. We had been dormitory buddies for almost a year, and it was easy for us to keep our affair concealed. Although faint rumors spread among the political science and comparative literature students about our closet relationship, many found them hard to believe for the two of us appear too fiery, too militant, too masculine, and too good-looking to be gay.”

In his confusion, Charles blurted out a question: “Sir, if the reason why you do not have any serious relationship with a woman is that you are gay, then why in the world is it that you are not known to have any relationship with a man either. *Kung kayo ay isang bakla, o bading, o bayot, eh bakit wala ka rin namang lalaki?*”

Peter tried to compose himself, but tears were already welling in his beautiful dark eyes. He revealed to Charles that he had made a vow to the memory of Francis that he would never love anyone again. “You know, Charlie? Francis was the one who initiated me to his left-leaning militant student organization. *Alam mo na*, it was fashionable among the political science students in our university to be steeped in both the theory and practice of critical politics. Francis was the one who helped me discover not only my real self but also my mission and philosophy of life.”

As he unpacked his somber-colored memories, tears fell on his cheeks, and Charles poured him more tea to sooth and calm him a little. “During the summer of our junior year, that was a year after the fall of the Marcos regime, our militant organization sent us members to some carefully selected rural areas in Luzon with a mission to meet, talk, and organize the farmers into pressure groups so as to make the supposedly revolutionary government of Corazon Aquino heed the wailings of the landless agricultural workers. You were not born yet, Charlie, when the president convened a commission to frame up a new constitution for our country. But because we realized that such commission was predominated with feudal, capitalist, and other elitist personalities, our militant organization anticipated that the lingering problem of land reform would be conveniently ignored in the actual process of formulating the new constitution. So, I and Francis were assigned to a far flung barrio in Mindoro.”

“After an exhausting journey by bus, by boat, and by foot, we were sheltered there in the hut of the leader of a local farmers’ group. Everything seemed to be okay. The people were very receptive. But in the middle of the night just after our third day of doing the preliminary spadework, a ragtag paramilitary unit forced its way into our hut, hit the nape of the old farmer with a rifle butt, hogtied the two of us, and dragged us into an old jeep. *Grabe, sobrang takot ko noon!* The commander of that ragtag team, discernible in the way he barked his orders at the others, was attired in a jungle camouflage outfit, worn out leather boots, and a red bandana wrapped on his head. His four minions were practically wearing civilian clothes that were merely embellished with some stray pieces of military artifacts, such as an army cap, an olive green undershirt, a vest of the same color, a pistol belt, and a standard issue back

pack. The way they talked and moved made it plain that they were unschooled, untrained and undisciplined, making them even more dangerous to any civilian around. But their arrogance and belligerence suggested that they may have been backed up by some legitimate but misguided military officers. *Kung бага sa langaw na nakadapo sa likod ng kalabaw, minsan ay nag-aakalang kalabaw din.*"

"The rickety vehicle scuttled toward an even more remote place where the paramilitary unit maintained a shack serving as their headquarters. We were then dumped inside the hovel that exuded a blended smell of urine, some spilled liquor, and fish stewed in vinegar. Fixed to the wall at the farthest end of the almost bare interior is some kind of an altar, illuminated with red vigil lamps, which upon closer scrutiny would reveal a horrifying ghastly collection: a life-size picture of the negative plate of the Shroud of Turin, a huge figurine of a fat Buddha, a statuette of the Santo Niño in red robes, another one in green robes, a portrait of Ferdinand Marcos, an old Philippine flag, a reproduction of a Byzantine icon of the Blessed Virgin ripped off from a religious calendar, an old movie poster of Cecil DeMille's *Ten Commandments*, an illustration of Uncle Sam used in the past as an army recruitment flyer in the United States, an assortment of tarnished brass medallions, and the most intriguing of all are a couple of tattered banners bearing mystical and cultic drawings of triangles, magic eyes, sunbursts, pinnacles and inscribed with meaningless Latin verses and other gibberish. The motley of iconic representations revealed to us how twisted the ideology and theology of our captors were."

"We were kept inside a wood and bamboo cage and locked there until the following day. Francis told me what he deciphered the crazy bastards will do: 'they will force us to admit that we are communist rebels, then we will be turned over to the military as proofs of their ragtag team's skills as red hunters, and finally their team will convince the government that their armed existence is necessary in cleansing the countryside from insurgents and other criminal elements.' Before noontime, the following day, the brigands proceeded with their expected interrogation, yanking us both from the cage, freeing us from the knots that had already left deep and painful marks on our wrists and ankles, and tying us both again to some armchairs facing each other. As they approached Francis, I suspected that they were going torture him with physical pain and me with fear and sympathy. Like an ancient liturgy, the commander started reciting questions to the terrified Francis: '*Hoy, totoy!* What specific unit of the New People's Army are you from!' '*Mga taoban ba kayo ni Kumander Lando?*' 'Where is your base camp located, *ba?*' '*Ang kikinis ng mga balat n'yo. Mga puting kadre ba kayo?*'"

"Because there can be no answers to those leading questions, they started to physically break Francis. '*Putang ina mo! Ang tigas ng ulo nito! Magsalita ka, gagol!*' For warming up, they thrashed his bare body with a metal studded whip. At first Francis did not whimper, but when the thugs moved on to searing his back with lighted cigarette and pulling off his finger nails one by one with an old pair of rusty pliers he shrieked and bellowed like a condemned soul in hell, prompting his tormentors to gag him with a soiled sock. When

Francis finally fainted from the pain, the bastards decided to have their lunch which was followed immediately by a drinking spree. I saw them emptying two huge jars of *lambanog*. *Parang mga hayop sila, Charlie.*”

“By dusk, the drunken ragtag team returned to the hovel and decided to entertain themselves with a bizarre floor show. The commander ordered the burliest of his four minions to sodomize the already delirious Francis, while another one was instructed to hold my head to ensure that I could not recoil from that sickening presentation. The rest squatted around cheering and jeering. When the depraved spectacle was done, the commander signaled to the youngest brigand to finish the already battered young man by strangling him with a laundry wire and bashing his head with a boulder. I guess, he was already unconscious and was not able to feel much pain; but I almost fainted from the sight of too much gore and blood. They dumped me back in the cage. I think they were too drunk to remember to hogtie me again. They ate and drank some more, as if nothing happened, until they literally rolled on the ground.”

“I was trembling with fear, rage, and disgust at the hellish things I just saw. With my still numb hand, I felt something hard and metallic in pocket. It was then that I realized that I still have with me my small penknife that I bought from some Badjao traders in Zamboanga back when I was still a junior high school student. *Ito yon o. Pati ngayon daladala ko pa rin sa bulsa ko palagi.* I could not believe that in their stupidity nobody even bothered to frisk us before being hogtied back at the old farmer’s shack. When I was certain that all the gangsters were already deep in their alcohol-induced slumber, I slowly cut some of the lashings of the wood and bamboo cage, silently slipped out of it, knelt on the blood splattered ground beside the lifeless body of Francis to say a little prayer, and cut a lock of his once beautiful curly hair. I sneaked out of the hovel, and dashed towards the main road. Not knowing which direction to take, I just followed the dusty road. I walked and ran for hours, and implored the heavens that the seemingly endless trail will lead me to a safer place.”

“When I saw that I was already approaching a small town I ran faster towards its center. Too familiar with the layout of the Spanish pueblo where the church and the municipal hall are situated at the hub, I hoped that that sleepy town would indeed turn out to be a typical Filipino town with a Catholic church at its heart. An early morning mass was about to start when I collapsed at the backdoor of Saint Isidore parish. Father Thomas Prieto, who happened to be a mass communications graduate from the same university where Francis and I came from, ordered one of his sextons to bring me to a room at the parish rectory, to prepare me a warm bath, and to give me something to eat. After his mass, the priest talked to me, and asked me to rest for a while. *Sa ala-ala ko, para s’yang isang angel.* Before lunch time a modest looking car with heavily tinted windows conveyed me back to the metropolis, crossing the Calapan-Batangas ferry route.”

“Back in our campus, my account of my ordeal, as well as the death of Francis, under the hands of that military-backed and government-legitimized

group created an outrage. As expected the official report of the police and military officers was that the two of us were abducted by communist rebels. Weeks, months, and years passed by, the wrath of the students over his death gradually faded, and Francis became just a name among many other names of Filipinos who offered their lives to the fascist tendencies of our government. If some wild beasts have not scattered his remains, he is still probably resting rather uncomfortably in a shallow and unmarked grave somewhere in those hinterlands. All I have of him is the matted lock of his hair that I pressed in between the pages of my leather bound journal. It was colored crimson then, but it had turned darker and darker through the years. *Napakalungkot at napakasakit ang naging karanasan ko bilang isang estudyante.*"

Peter was already sobbing, Charles poured him some more tea and handed him the tissue paper holder. He too was gripped by the tragic and gruesome love story, and the death of Francis enraged him as well. But as to the confession of the professor's true sexual orientation, he was not even bothered by it, and that would not change his high esteem for their political guru. With his philosophy studies, Charles had too much readings and classroom discussions on gender identity and relations, the fragmentation and reinvention of the postmodern self, and the plight of the gays and the lesbians, to feel uneasy about that revelation. He knew that it was not even politically correct to pity Peter because he was gay. Life might be a little difficult for a closet gay in a Filipino society that was prone to marginalize and stigmatize him, but each individual whoever and wherever he or she is has his or her own burden to carry. He would not even tell Fred about the whole thing, and just let Peter tell their other friend if he wanted to. He suggested to Peter that it was almost time for him to go to his night job in Makati. "Sir, *kinikilabutan ako ng busto sa kwento mo*. I am so sorry for asking those very probing questions. But I sincerely want to assure you that your very sensitive revelation had in no way diminished my greatest respect and esteem for you as our comrade and teacher. But, Sir, it is getting late. We have to go home now."

Somewhere near a dying movie house along Recto Street, the two parted ways. Charles went to his dormitory to freshen up in preparation for his night job and Peter towards the direction of his rented room. A dimly lighted and narrow pathway winded to an old and huge colonial house, where Peter Mirano was renting a room. He had to steer through this alley cautiously and briskly, for even at that early evening it was already laced with the dangers from stray dogs, drunks, drug pushers, glue-sniffing bums, and snatchers.

The house was one of the few remaining structures of its kind in that area, and was clearly in an advanced state of decay. Most probably in less than a decade's time this would be demolished to give way to a modern high rise building. The reason why its architecture was misleadingly called *bahay na bato*, or stone house, was that its ground floor was enclosed with thick limestone walls, that served both as a sturdy foundation for the upper wooden floor, and a cooling system for the storage area which that lower floor is originally intended. After its third or fourth-generation owners left it in favor of a plush subdivision living, if not for a suburban home abroad, it devolved into an

accessoria, a tenement for the less fortunate urban dwellers. A principal tenant rented the whole place from the owners, partitioned it into eight apartment units, and sub-leased them to eight different families. Some of these families, in return, sub-sub-leased a room or two to other individuals. This was how Peter got his room in that old and huge stone house, and this circumstance placed him down into the lower links of this complex university-belt sheltering chain. But he still considered himself lucky for getting a space in the wooden second floor. He observed that the ground floor, although perfectly cool for its originally intended function of grain and root crop storage, was definitely too dim and dank for a living quarter.

The main entrance was an archway wide enough to allow, in the olden days, a horse drawn carriage to pass through and unload its passengers and cargo at the courtyard that was located at the center of the colonial structure. At that time, that once majestic courtyard had deteriorated into a laundry area at one side and an improvised food manufacturing space on the other side for two other sub-tenants who earned their living from vending street ice cream and *tabo*. Peter's twelve-square-meter room was just behind a thick carved door with antique brass wares, beside the grand staircase. Its interior was paneled with dark wood, had a flooring of even darker and wide wooden planks, and ventilated by a huge window with sliding panes, formerly of intricate latticework of translucent *capiç* shells, but at that time patched with some synthetic sheet of bluish green hue. Peter took off his clothes, donned on a dressing robe, picked up his toiletries, and proceeded to a common bath area to take a quick shower. Back in his room, he settled in front of his small study table, adjusted the lamp, and worked on a lecture on Michel Foucault, a French literary and cultural critic.

Peter was captivated both by the life and theories of this very famous postmodern thinker. Foucault was a brilliant historian of ideas who courageously reacted against the tendency of societies to force their members to conform to some arbitrarily constructed standards of what is normal and what is abnormal through the sinister procedures of surveillance and classification. With a clean shaven head, and expensive suits and turtleneck shirts, this professor at the prestigious College de France, lucidly argued that if everyone is pressured to conform to a single normative identity, then the uniqueness of human individuality would be sacrificed. But Foucault was gay, and openly talked and wrote about his transgressive sexual extravagance with different partners, although he lived together with a male lover for over twenty years until his death of AIDS at the age of fifty-eight.

Peter was tempted to compare his own life with this very influential French philosopher. *Although both of us thrive in the academe, are gay, and have dedicated our lives to academic and street activism, I can see more differences than similarities. Foucault started as a Marxist, but eventually became suspicious of Marx, while I remained a believer of the great German doctor. Foucault is a follower of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, while I am uncomfortable with the Nietzschean style of doing cultural criticism.* Peter smiled at the thought that it was actually Marx and Nietzsche

who often polarized his and Charles' lines of thinking, for while he leaned towards Marx his younger friend leaned towards Nietzsche.

Peter knew that being a professor in a European university was tremendously different from being a professor at a run of the mill institution at the university belt area. *Europeans lavish their academicians with high social status and economic rewards that can enable them to lead respectable lives. Samantalang dito sa Pilipinas, haay, people merely expect their teachers to slave it out and receive survival wages in return.* As a European professor, Foucault had the luxury of research time, research fund, and probably a team of research assistants, that enabled him to plumb the secrets of the archives, think, write, publish and travel. Without research time, nor research fund, nor research assistants, it was already a marvel that Peter could publish some scholarly essays every now and then.

For Peter, the greatest difference between them was that the French theorist was able to openly flaunt his sexual orientation, and live happily with his lover; he, on the other hand, had lost his lover and remained hiding in a closet up to that very moment. He was even scared how Charles was taking his confession, whether this young student would tell his buddy Fred about the whole thing, and how Fred would eventually take it. He was likewise tormented by the psychological difficulty of remaining faithful to Francis and being gay at the same time. Creative and power-driven people, like him, were known to be packed with potentially explosive libido that needed to be released in very calculated and controlled manner. Sexual fantasies, closeness to good looking students, and even his hectic schedule were often not enough to smother his instinctive yearnings to indulge in the celestial pleasures of the human flesh. Thus, over and over again he would descend into the underbelly of that microcosm on Recto Street. For the equivalent value of the daily minimum wage to twice its amount he could already engage the services of a handsome young lad, let go of all controls and pretensions, and unleash the deeply concealed reality of his gayness.

But those sojourns to Manila's flesh market should not be construed that he had ceased to love the memory of Francis. The leather bound journal that clasped his bloodied lock of hair was always on his desk not only to accompany him through the long nights of intellectual toil but also to remind him always of his vow never to love anyone again like the way he loved him.

Instead of focusing on his lecture on Foucault, Peter's thoughts wandered back to their sweet days in the serene, beautiful and romantic campus of the country's prime state university. *For leading me towards the life of political and academic activism, and for the joys and pains we shared together, I love you eternally, and for you I will carry on the task that we have initiated hand in hand. Someday, I fervently pray, we will be reunited to pursue that life of happiness that never ends. Salamat, Francis, mahal ko.*

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