

EDITOR'S PREFACE



A reading optic that might be useful in discerning the multi-layered strands of the various elements within this issue of *Alon* is one that puts into focus the activity of going against the grain in its most compelling form. When we read about daring ideas that argue against tradition or appreciate an art piece that boldly takes a stand in contradiction to certain conventions, we somehow enter a space in which many principles we hold dear are suddenly suspended, questioned, or off balanced. It is quite a peculiar but exciting moment, feeling not so sure about whether to turn away or veer left, but otherwise provoked by a sensation that can be quite unsettling. I'm describing here what I myself felt when reading for the first time this issue's essay submissions and Forum pieces, and especially when I caught a glimpse of Marigold Santos' majestic and fearful *asuang*, our cover art figure and Leese Street Studio's feature subject. I was taken into a liminal disconcerting moment in time-space, brought about by a rush of these unexpected and uncertain provocations that were indeed enabled and produced through the labors of going against the grain. I would like you to experience that moment as well.

Consider more closely, then, our three main essays. In the first one, entitled, "In Defense of the X: Centering Queer, Trans, and Non-Binary Pilipina/x/os, Queer Vernacular, and the Politics of Naming," authors Kay Ulanday Barrett, Karen Buenavista Hanna, and Anang Palomar tackle head-on an urgent call to action against the violences produced and reproduced by the seemingly banal ways in which we name those who are different from the usual. Here, they insist on arguing for self-determination in naming, something that has caught the ire of group name patrols, guardians of semantic conventions, and members of language police forces, so to speak. So gripped by their courageous insistence is their turn to historical and ethnographic evidence to support their claims about the significance of a "queer vernacular" in empowering those who are similarly situated. This are why, with pride and utmost recognition, we are placing their brave and solidly grounded politics as foremost on our list of anti-normative advocacies in our communities, a tactical nod to the centrality of struggle and resistance, and grain brushing, in the lives of many Filipinxs, variously defined, everywhere.

We continue this thematic thread with an essay on boxing, both as a spectator sport as well as a site of social destabilization, according to Bernard James Remollino's study, "Scrapping Into a Knot: Pinoy Boxers, Transpacific Fans, and the Troubling of Interwar California's Racial Regimes." Indeed, boxing itself elicits images of ring fights, sweat-ridden bodies, and punch throwing rounds. But in Remollino's reading of select boxing matches held in California in the 1920s and 1930s, Filipino fighters and fans not only participated in pugilism as a pleasurable and physically demanding sport; they also seized upon boxing's "conditions of possibility" to, well, assert and re-present themselves in contradistinction to racist discourses and in opposition to anti-Brown practices of the time. In effect, we get to notice here, in its most intense ways, the nuanced power plays of a combat sport set amidst two overlapping backdrops: the height of severe anti-Filipino open racism and, quite ironically, a most significant era of glorious Pinoy boxing in the U.S. This is a kind of historical reading that itself displays a method of critical multi-layered analysis well beyond the usual.

Finally, we feature a rumination of a celebrated Filipino writer who himself "dueled" against a prevailing set of social crossroads as he, and by extension, the subjects he wrote about, were caught in a whirlwind of two epochal periods in Philippine history. Courtesy of Juan Carlos Fermin, "What Emerges from a Ruined World: The Dueling Philippine Humanisms of Nick Joaquin," takes us to a visceral evocation of a postcolonial moment in which the generational anxieties of nation-building were quite palpably a scrubbing against a crossroad. We read here of an artist arduously grappling with the contradictory legacies left by both Spanish and American imperialisms and searching for paths strewn with the ruptures of wars and their accompanying indeterminacies. What is to be done? Or better, what else is left to be done? The choices may well surprise you.

In Leese Street Studio, Santos's art is, in many ways, a set of encounters with mythology, constituting detailed and broad strokes that re-distill the powers of what is usually perceived as a menacing figure, the *asuang*, into a rich amalgam of identities in process and geographies in motion. It is her own way of brushing against the grain of childhood and homeland memory from the vantage of what she calls a fragmented, mobile, and hybrid subjectivity, a description so strikingly palpable in the works she is presenting to us.

Our Reviews section features a book on U.S. empire in relationship to articulations of statehood in Hawai'i, another on the lives of Filipina migrants and their transnational families, and a collection of essays on Filipino studies. And then, we offer a rather alternative appraisal of Ruby Ibarra's *Circa91* album, written as both a dialogue between a father and his daughter, as well as an engagement with their larger worlds of history, popular culture, and collective identity, themselves the forms and contents of Ibarra's own hip hop poetry.

We welcome three esteemed contributors to our Forums section that, for this *Alon* issue, is titled, *Pinagsulti*, a Cebuano word

that means “conversation.” First, with great honor, we highlight excerpts of Luis H. Francia’s latest full-length play, *Black Henry*, virtually premiered only last April, and already making waves as an exploration of the onset and early consequences of Spanish colonization, with Magellan’s interlocutor, Enrique, figuring prominently as its title character. Relatedly, we have an eloquently moving piece entitled, “Mutiny,” from the renowned Chamoru poet and scholar, Craig Santos Perez. And finally, we are profoundly privileged to feature three stunning works by the multi-awarded, Baguio-born, and current poet laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Luisa A. Igloria.

Going against the grain is something we like to celebrate, especially when it is unexpected, hard-won, and odds-defying. We get inspired by the courage of those who speak out loudly against unjust naming and stereotyping, by the dexterity of those boxers and their fans who were able to turn ring victories into positive social change, and by the foresightedness of those literary figures such as Nick Joaquin who tried to offer viable choices for what seemed to be bleak futures for a nation on the verge of a social revolution. We get to marvel at the ingenious and eloquent ways in which art is deployed to re-imagine artifacts and folklore from our pasts and presents. And we are illuminated by the manners in which we are able to rework pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial histories so that they continue to be complex, contradictory, and without complete certainty. There are so many other stories out there of brushing up against convention while encountering risk and precarity on the path of potential change and immanent fissure, some of them victorious, others not quite. For this issue of *Alon*, we salute both those who have been named and those who remain unnamed in our quests for social transformation, including especially those whose quotidian, underground, and oftentimes silent or hidden battles in standing up against what is wrong or unjust constitute a most honorable expression of lives very well lived.

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