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## Relocating the Ilokano Women Writers of Nueva Vizcaya

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### Abstract

The study attempts to empower ordinary women writers from the region who are considered to be in the peripheries. The bibliographic building of the foremost *Ilokano* women writers of Nueva Vizcaya who remain unaccounted and missing in Philippine literature will promote the woman presence in the nation and their place in Philippine literature, while the criticism of their retrieved and collected published short stories written in the vernacular, *Iluko*, will intensify the relevance of *Iluko* as a regional literature and as a language. Consequently, the study will contribute to the growing body of feminist studies and literary criticism in the Philippines today. Results of the study showed that these four Ilokano women writers who are unknown and neglected in the region and in Philippine literature have significant sociocultural impact and contributed to the refinement, enrichment, and general development of their language and literature; literature being the grandeur of language and language the carrier of culture. The short stories of the Ilokano women writers present the unique Ilokano ways, traditions and cultures and the concepts of Ilokano woman and womanhood imbedded with their traditional images and representations but also claim the idea of equality between man and woman. It might be construed that Ilokano women and the women writers were not fully contaminated at all with the patriarchal ideology and don't adhere and have bent and even dismantled patriarchy, or even the attempt to overcome and change this ideology. The Ilokano women writers showed through their short stories, that they have sustained their unique cultural identity despite the impact of colonization. The general awareness and recognition of these regional women writers and their literary pieces would bring a ripple effect to the younger women of the region who would continue to change and overcome the tainted image of the third world regional women writer and women in general, and bringing them no longer to the peripheries but to the center.

Keywords: Feminism, Ilokano Language and Literature, Regional Women Writers

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## Introduction

“ I shall speak about women’s writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement.” --Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*

Being a natural born Ilokano and a daughter of Nueva Vizcaya, I attempt to introduce the Ilokano women writers in our province and their masterpieces, to empower the regional women writers of our country by making them known through their life stories and their literary works written in their vernacular.

New waves of feminist writers in the country continue to effort and to write in different genre of literature in both Filipino and English languages in the Philippine context to establish a new thought on feminism. As a result, a number of women writers in the country already had published their literary works in books to their names but majority still had to see their works in book form, thus, it is noticeable that there is lack of women’s anthology. Moreover, only those literatures written in Filipino and English were noticeably anthologized and published which is an unjustified circumstance to the vernacular or regional literatures of the country. Consequently, most researches and studies in literature today and in the last decades are focused on the well-known women authors in the country whose literary works are written either in English or in the Filipino language, an explicit picture of who and what are at the center against those in the peripheries.

The Ilokano literature, on the other hand, has produced a plethora of Ilokano writings which had been anthologized in GUMIL<sup>1</sup> and several books. The anthologies were authored by Ilokano men, and of which, the writers were predominantly male. It has been surveyed too, that majority of Ilokano writers are male and only a handful are women writers. It was also plotted that most Ilokano writers apparently came from Region 1 or the Ilocos region, and only a few are writers from Region 2, in which Nueva Vizcaya is one of its provinces. From the small number of writers from Region 2, only very few are women writers. These conditions characterized the Ilokano literature in general as an all-male territory.

These aforementioned scenarios are damages brought by colonialism and imperialism in our country. We, Filipinos are still striving to search for our roots and for our Filipino cultural identity which we can call our own; we are still in the process of retrieving what is left of our racial identity and ethnic heritage which are not adulterated by foreign culture and, with the hope to preserve and to develop these Filipino identity despite globalization and neocolonialism in the present time. Dehumanization is one of the ruthless results of colonization. It brought not only physical but moral annihilation. Being a woman in the Philippines is a multiple misfortune. First, because she lives in a third world country; second, her country was colonized many times by powerful nations; third, she is subjugated by patriarchal domination not only by the foreign colonizers but also of her fellow Filipino in the society and even at her safest haven called home, and, subsequently, she is not to speak; fourth, she is marginalized if she is from the periphery of the country or the region, and, if she speaks her vernacular.

What is left with the Filipino women? What is now the value of a Filipino woman and women from the regions? What is their identity now after having been tainted long enough by the hegemony of patriarchy? Do they still have place and influence in the family, in the community, in the region, in the nation? Do they have the facility to help build the nation in its pursuit of continuous search, preservation, and development of Filipino cultural heritage and identity?

## Objectives

With these problems that beleaguered our national security, cultural heritage, and the identity and individuality of women, it is necessary to continue to search for solutions that could be of answer to these threatening conditions. Thus, this study generally aims to empower regional women writers. It specifically aims to introduce the foremost Ilokano women writers of Nueva Vizcaya; to collect and to retrieve their Ilokano short stories written in Ilokano, and to analyze the short stories as regards to the subject, theme and the image and representation of women characters. The analysis of the short stories will define the arts and aesthetics that will intensify the enduring human qualities, virtues, values, identity, and the culture and traditions of the region and the Ilokano women

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<sup>1</sup> Association of Ilokano Writers.meaning, Gunglo ti Mannurat nga Ilokano.

constitutive of the nation, as they seem to counter the threatened extinction of our national, cultural, ethnic, and individual identity.

### Methodology

The search for Ilokano women writers was done through snowball effect, in which a collection of names was gathered from one significant person to another. The Ilokano short stories collected were published from 1970's to present in the weekly magazine *Bannawag*, the Ilokano magazine of the Ilokanos and published books. The short stories will be analyzed through the feminist approach of Patricia Maguirre (1999) who proposed that there is no standard methodology in the feminist criticism but the researcher has the freedom to analyze the story based on the objectives of the study while its viewpoint is about the invisibility of women in the different disciplines and studies.

### Results And Discussion

#### *The Ilokano Women Writers of Nueva Vizcaya : Their Life, Their Stories*

*Ruperta Vega Ramos Asuncion* (March 31, 1944- February 3, 2010). A native of Solano, Nueva Vizcaya but her roots is in Vintar, Ilocos Norte, the original place of the Ilokanos. She was an educator and taught at Solano South Central School Nueva Vizcaya where she founded the *Lumabang*, Solano II District Teachers Quarterly Publication and served as its first editor and the *Diamond*, the pupil's school organ. She decided to transfer to the University of the Philippines Los Baños and became an assistant professor of English at the Department of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences and was chosen Outstanding Teacher Awardee 1990 for Social Sciences and the Humanities. She was once a member of the Nueva Vizcaya Press and Radio Club and a member of the GUMIL Filipinas. She was a textbook writer, poet, dramatist, and a researcher. One very peculiar story about her is her fondness of chicken so that she even tutored one and called the chicken "*Maha*". Her real name is Monica Ezperanza, but because she grew up so sickly, she was given another name through an Ilokano tradition called "*buniag iti sirok ti latok* " or baptism under a plate in order to counter her ill conditions. Since then, she was called Ruperta in honor of her late auntie. Some of her short stories were published in *Bannawag*, *Umuna a Bitek* (First Love) (1999) *Ti Family Planning ni Lakay* ( My Husband's Family Planning) (1971) *Saan a Mapetpetan ti Kinapudno* (The Truth can Never be Concealed).

Love, family, and marriage are the subjects of her short stories and its themes revolve around power and social class: between a city girl against a girl-from- the province; between the poor and the rich. The girl from the province (who is described to be an Ilokana from her province) and the poor lady student are given the stereotype roles and images of a woman- modest, mature, and persevering despite hardship in life, respectful, responsible and industrious as against the liberated city girl. The stories also show the danger and immorality of the city and the evil effects of wealth. In marriage, the wife is represented to be submissive but assertive of her right as a wife and as a woman; caring and loving despite all forms of abused from the husband but she is literally a fighter if she is push to her limits.

*Cristina Gervacio Gallato* (May 30, 1956). Born in Nangalisan, Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya, she obtained her Bachelor of Science in Commerce major in Accounting at St. Mary's College, graduating as Cum Laude in 1976. She rose from the ranks, from being the Chief Accountant, Head-Accounting Office, Assistant Treasurer, Dean of the School of Business/OIC Dean of the School of Accountancy, of same school. She was also a professor for two years at Universiti Utara Malaysia. At present, she is the Dean, College of Accountancy and professor of COA and Graduate School at University of the Cordilleras in Baguio City. She is married to Engineer Ireneo S. Gallato of Sinamar Sur, San Mateo Isabela and they have three children. She is one of the gifted Ilocana fictionists of her generation. Her award-winning stories were published in *Bannawag*: *Duoy Ni Tatang* ( Father is Indolent) (1976), which won the first prize in short story writing contest sponsored by a group called Marinero 1189; *Fr. Mike: Komptroler* (1986), won the first prize in the annual short story contest sponsored by the Economy Tours and Travel, Inc.(ETTE), and *Ket Madi Daytan Baket* ( That is not good my Wife) (1977).

The short stories of Cristina are crafted with humor. The subjects are about family and the workplace while its theme are about the follies of man as a husband, a father, and a colleague.

The wife is represented in the traditional way: family oriented, a helpmate to the husband, caring and loving mother to the children, enduring to the hardship of life, responsible, flexible, and industrious. However, she is

assertive of what she thinks is right and good for her and her family; she fights, punishes, and harm her husband for his ill manners and wrong-doings and leads him to be better.

*Sherma E. Benosa* ( March 25, 1978). From Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya and a daughter of an Ilokano writer. She earned her degree Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics, MA Language Education and on-going MA Linguistics at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She is at present the Communications Officer at the Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment. Sherma has been a freelance writer-editor, translator of various magazines and newsletters and worked as a managing editor and writer at the National Commission for Culture and the Ar. She is the most active Ilokano woman writer of the province today because of her award-winning stories. In fact, her short story, "*Dagiti Pasugnod ni Angelo*" (*Angelo's Pains*) won the First Prize in the 60<sup>th</sup> Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 2010. Her other award-winning stories are *Dagiti Babassit nga Alipugpog*" (*Minute Twisters*), "*Galunggong*" (*Mackarel Scad*), and "*Alona*" which are all published in a book form of Ubod, a competitive publication assistance provided by the NCCA together with the Ateneo de Manila University to unpublished authors.

Told from the perspective of a strong woman, her works delve on socio-political issues which include abortion, diaspora, pedophilia, sexual harassment, and family issues. She represents her woman characters to be resilient, flexible, determined and focus, after a hurtful and unkind experience caused by an irresponsible man, husband, father and a brother.

*Marichel Eugenio Suguitan* (June 9, 1979). The youngest writer of the province hails from Aggub, Solano, Nueva Vizcaya. Her separation from her husband made her a strong solo parent and an enduring mother to her daughter Maria Christina. She was not able to pursue her tertiary education and prefers to work abroad since 1998 to present in which she was opportune to attend the basic computer at YMCA in Hongkong in 2007. She felt the passion to write short stories and even poems in 2011 to vent her feelings and thoughts during the nights that sleep would not visit her. Her award-winning short stories, *Kalding* (Goat) and *Kulibangbang* (Butterfly) are both published recently in Bannawag.

Her stories are about family, love, and parenthood. The themes are about the pains and experiences of a woman from falling in and out love, her struggle from the condemning society, and how she was able to surpass all of these agonizing experiences. Marichel pictured her women characters to be humans with flaw but transformed victorious and conquering after the pain and woe.

## Conclusion

Helen Cixous, a French feminist critic, in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," bravely demands that "the woman writer should write herself" if she wants to "reclaim her voice" and "reclaim her body that was confiscated by patriarchal society." The study is generally a response to the demand of Cixous in order for the woman to retrieve her voice, her body, her works and her life that was stolen by patriarchy. Although these regional women writers are unknown and neglected, they have significant sociocultural impact. They contributed to the refinement, enrichment, and general development of their language and literature; literature being the grandeur of language and language the carrier of culture.

The short stories of the Ilokano women writers present the unique Ilokano ways, traditions and cultures through their language. But most importantly, the stories showed the concepts of Ilokano woman and womanhood imbedded with their traditional images: suitable to the home, kitchen, rearing of children, serving the husband, keeping an orderly household, faithful and sweet, beautiful and caring, intelligent and persevering. However, these women characters are also represented to have unusual physical, emotional, intellectual strength and power and the freedom to speak to counter the erring and inconsiderate man. These women emphasize that domestic work is not for woman alone; that her life is not centered only on her being a mother or a faithful life; that she has control over her husband and her children; that she has the freedom to speak and to do what she likes to. One can discern that these women characters have accepted the idealization of the traditional roles of a mother, a wife, a woman, and a daughter but they also claimed the idea of equality between man and woman. Ilokano women writers have their voices through their stories. Ilokano women always had their voices and body. Their stories show that Ilokano women were not fully contaminated at all with the patriarchal ideology. It might be construed that they don't adhere and have bent and even dismantled patriarchy, or even the attempt to overcome and change this ideology. The Ilokano women writers showed that they have sustained their unique cultural

identity despite the impact of colonization through their short stories. Ilokano women have their voices long before yet, but they were not just recognized and heard because they don't have the opportunity and venue to be acknowledged, to talk, to shout. This elimination leads to women being subordinate to men that they cannot even enjoy their own bodies, literally and figuratively. If only Cixous could read the short stories of Ilokano women writers (Nueva Vizcaya- laced Ilokano, to be specific), she might enjoy intellectual ecstasy in reading them.

### **Recommendation**

Regional women writers and their literature are labeled to be in the peripheries, but in fact, are very rich. It is important that these women writers and their literary craft be given chance and space in order for them to be acknowledged and be given the opportunity to shine in Philippine literature and most importantly, to prove their worth as women writers, to value themselves as women, and to help other women attain freedom and equality in the politics of power, class, and gender.

It is therefore recommended that the same study shall be conducted in literary research today because there is still dearth of regional women writers in Philippine literature and literature in general. I believe, many women out there, in the different regions of the country are still waiting to be recognized, to be heard, and to tell their stories, which would bring forth the unique culture and identity of their region, and their language to survive, thrive, and thrive forever and to be an instruments to the road to cultural democracy, linguistic justice, and gender equality. The recognition and empowerment of regional women writers and their vernacular literature is a way of relocating the peripheries to the center.

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