

## NOTE FROM THE ISSUE EDITOR

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### THE FIRSTS

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The world is now witnessing the etching of Asia in the world of communication and media: Korea's trending music, Korean dramas, Japan's anime and manga series, to the penetration of India's Bollywood in the global movie industry. Alongside Asia's development in producing varied types of communication and media, that is now renowned worldwide, is the continent's assertion to become a major influencer in the global economics, political and social regimes. But that is Asia—and, we are not from Korea, Japan or India. We belong to the sub-region of Asia, and among the 11 countries, whose mark in the global world has yet to be established economically, politically and socio-culturally. We, as part of the 11 countries of the sub-region of Asia, have always been hiding behind the greater countries of the Asian region. We, as part of the sub-region of Asia have always been historically interpreted by others.

This first issue of the Southeast Asia Media Studies journal become origins of re-reading the history of the 11 countries from the sub-region of Asia within the purview of media studies. As the first issue, there are several firsts. This is the first issue on Southeast Asian Media Studies journal that focuses on the 11 countries examined by Southeast Asians. This too, is the first issue on Southeast Asian media studies that is borne out of the striving of young and seemingly unnoticed Southeast Asian media scholars and practitioners whose fate has always been at the mercy of the Western and large Asian countries, and, whose scholarly work has been the yardstick for measuring the studies produced in the Southeast Asia.

This first issue is a way to attempt at resisting the traditional lens and philosophy on media by examining it from our own historical contexts. Focusing on studies from Singapore and Philippines, media is examined from the traces of colonization. Kelvin Ke Jinde's "Country/City/Space: Dystopia in the Singaporean Heartland Film Genre" looks into the representation and reproduction of Singapore and Singaporean stories. Fernan Talamayan's "Americanization of the Filipino Food and Kitchen: Promoting Refrigeration and Ice Cream in the 1920s," narrates on the publicity process and system of embedding American taste in food among Filipinos. While "Reporting on LGBTs in Community Newspapers in

the Northern Philippines” by Leia Fidelis Gisela Castro-Margate’s article analyzes gender identity reportage and ways to mitigate gender subjugation in journalism.

This issue defies the reading of media from a sanitized and schooled perspective. Instead, it walks away from the usual questions of how media should be. This issue takes to light the emergence of nuanced narratives of Singapore and the Philippines which have been concealed or forgotten. Three main tropes become of this issue: 1) representation and reproduction of media narratives, 2) systematizing logic of media thinking to formulate knowledge and practice among audience, and 3) positing a democratic policy on reportage. These tropes take on a conscious subject-position to raise pertinent inquiries on media in the context of Southeast Asia as a sub-region.

### **Media as a Re-presentation and Re-production of Historical Narratives**

Kelvin Ke Jinde’s article “Country/City/Space Dystopia in the Singaporean Heartland Film Genre” examines the imaginings of a dystopian space in films. Presenting a reading of a fictional space of discord and emphasizing totalitarianism, Jinde writes that the Singaporean Heartland Film genre is an “attempt to destabilize official narratives regarding society, culture, and community by depicting stories of deviance and dysfunction in the heartlands.” Homi Bhabha supports such media representations to further “explore those social pathologies...‘loss of meaning, conditions of anomie’” (1994, p. 246) but cautions that it should not be for developing an inclination to idealize the historical past because such grip of the past may emerge as another point of cultural differences.

Examining the interventions made through Singaporean Heartland films, Jinde also raises that such films contain underlying tones of reproduction of cultural differences by “romanticize[ing] a nostalgic past, to eschew social and cultural diversity, and to reinforce narratives of repression and angst in the nation.” Singapore, a country that has hosted several cultures and has harmoniously emerged as a hybrid, should be celebratory in itself. Thus, it is not a question of what epoch to revert to or choose to become, but more of a celebrating the “conflictual yet productive space in which the arbitrariness of the sign of cultural signification emerges within the regulated boundaries of social discourse” (Bhabha, 1994). Media, specifically, film as an instrument to read and examine, may open pertinent inquiries on what kinds of space, place and reality Southeast Asians want and imagine which may be a concept of “indeterminism” – where neither past or present is not the choice but a future which is yet to be recognized.

### **Media as a Tool for Formulating Knowledge**

Mediatizing food goes beyond the construction of media tools to convey key information about eating. In Fernan Talamayan’s “Filipino Food and Kitchen: Promoting Refrigeration and Ice Cream in the 1920s,” advertising, through portraying the “American style” of eating and consumption, becomes an instrument for embedding a knowledge and social consciousness of food choice among Fili-

pinos. In his article, Talamayan examines food as mediatized in print and education and schooling, as a way to create and institutionalize the hegemony of eating and consumption. He begins his narration with the “selling” of refrigerators in the 1920’s to establish the need for food preservation in the Philippines.

The refrigerator, in this era, is not the sole product being peddled but is also the symbol for a new Filipino lifestyle for eating. The ice cream, as the new Filipino dessert in the early 1920s, was tightly knit with the presence of refrigerators inside the homes of Filipinos. A two-pronged method for colonization: selling of products: the refrigerator and the ice cream, becomes a way to imbibe the production of an American colonized lifestyle of eating and consumption that is still carried by many Filipinos today. Talamayan notes that “Filipinos attest to the fact that cultural habits and preferences arise out of colonial experience” which echoes the discursive points of Mintz that food choice and eating “is a social, not biological matter” (1985, p. 8). The colonized message and media becomes the instrument is consequential to the “industrialization of food production [and the current Filipino] dietary patterns” (Mintz and Dubois, 2002, p. 104).

## **Media Policy as a Form of Democratization**

In the context of the Third World, the key to democratization is “a more independent press with greater freedoms will make a positive contribution to political change,” thus, there is a need for the press to become catalysts and agents of democracy who are also key decision makers (McCargo, 1999). Journalists and media people are meaning makers, not only by constructing words but in formulating a large set of messages that tend to have an authoritarian tone which shapes public opinion. Leia Fidelis Gisela Castro-Margate’s “Reporting on LGBTs in Community Newspapers in the Northern Philippines” is an article that discusses how the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) individuals are positioned and reported in selected news articles. She explains the assertion of the LGBT group to use and implement the style guide: Outrage Media and Rainbow Rights Project Media Reference Guide to serve as guideposts in discussing LGBT newsworthy issues and proper use of terminologies.

Emphasizing the importance in the care and responsibility in writing the news that features LGBT themes is their group’s assertion to use an LGBT style guide for reportage. Reminded of Chakrabarty’s concept of abstract labor that “combines in itself enlightenment themes of juridical freedoms (rights, citizenship) and the concept of universal human being who is the subject of this freedom (2000, p. 654) entails the raising of these questions: Is the LGBT style guide for reportage a juridical form of freedom of gender identity? Or is this a temporary panacea to mitigate gendered problems in Southeast Asian countries? Gendered and stereotypical terms and labels are merely fragments of a deeply seated patriarchy, of which is only the surface of an underlying social differences. Castro-Margate writes that “beyond politically correct terminology is the respect for diversity of beliefs and practices by individuals or a community of individuals” echoing a general call that gender oppression, especially in the context of Southeast Asian countries, is not only a wound that can be

healed by one or two kinds of medicines but a scar that is carried by one generation of Southeast Asian LGBT to another. The Southeast Asian media scholars and practitioners should acknowledge their pivotal role as the agent of power for socio-cultural and political change. In this acknowledgment is the carrying of responsibility that the media scholars and practitioners should ensure that they should naturally imbibe the spirit of democracy and diversity in themselves in order to report and cover in more equitable and democratic ways.

## **We Will Always Be Found Wanting**

“Shame as an emotion carries a biography of the body  
that is specific to the individual and the cultural context  
from which the individual originates”

- Lindo (2013, quoted by Burman 2019, p. 109)

The three tropes in this issue, by and large, reflect on the shame both Philippines and Singapore carries as their traces of colonization which has found itself in media. Singapore, as a former British colony, and now an amalgam of races, and the Philippines, a heavily colonized country constructed widely by the Spaniards and Americans, now carries the mark of such shame in being represented and reproduced by and for the colonizers—in which, even in our imaginings of reality is still conformal to that of the Western and the universal. It is that shame that both countries recognize that the media has formulated much of the knowledge we know, that even in such mundane habits and practices like eating, is a form of mimicry of our colonizers. The shame too, that we bring, when we think that policies and reportage styles, if uniformed and regulated, will diminish possibilities of gender and social differences. The Southeast Asians are burdened with the shame of questioning these universal imaginings, knowledge and policies because we fear that we might be measured and found wanting.

In putting these articles in the first issue, we open these tropes as points of discourse to examine what was written, conveyed to us by the media, and reflected on by these three Southeast Asian scholars. A series of unfolding discourses on media studies, this issue peels the layers of paint stained by our colonizers. Much of these stains are emanated by the media. If media is a powerful tool in instilling hegemony and reification of our subjectivity, then let media become the instrument of Southeast Asians to examine our history of colonization. In this first issue of the Southeast Asian Media Studies journal is also the admission that we will always be found wanting if we remain located in the position as Southeast Asians in our colonizers' suits. In the reading of this first issue, let it be the first to say that shame becomes naturalized if there is no resistance from our colonized origins. Let us then narrate, read and examine our own media narratives for it is our story to read, write and tell.

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