

Fashioning History into His Story: Antonio R. Enriquez's *Samboangan: The Cult of War*

Kornellie L. Raquitico

Philippine Science High School – Main Campus

Abstract. This critique centers on Antonio R. Enriquez's *Samboangan: The Cult of War*. It explores how the writer retells his hometown's early colonial history using his Chavacano voice and how he writes back to voice out such an unfamiliar Philippine historical event. This paper also discusses how Enriquez's historiographic metafiction works on improvisation to refashion such a history, including the extent of such reinterpretation while looking at his narrative style. It is found that, despite Enriquez's improvising, the fashioning was to a considerable extent. Enriquez interestingly lauded in "his story" the Philippine culture's exceptionality using a syncretic narrative. He also exalted the Filipinos—be they Tagalogs, Visayans, or Muslims—who naturally embodied extraordinary force as a people amidst the adversities at the hands of their colonizers. Enriquez writes back against the hegemonic historical accounts by providing a balanced perspective of the Christians' and Moros' involvement in the wars—exposing their strengths and weaknesses, victories and failures.

Keywords. Historiographic metafiction, fashioning, improvisation.

Self-fashioning is about re-inventing an identity through a manipulable, artistic process. A go-to reference is Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1984), which reveals how scholars from the Renaissance Period desired to increase people's awareness about such a process. Self-fashioning describes the New Historicism's disregard for literature and social life delineation, including its desire to cross boundaries, shape one's identity, be manipulated by uncontrollable social forces, and fashion others. An interesting feature of Greenblatt's work is his unique mode of representation and interpretation called "improvisation," which allows any writer to benefit from unimagined events and consents them to transform and suit material to one's context. This way, a material, such as a literary text, can be experimented with and transformed, providing an opportunity to voice truths. It should be underscored, however, that it still depends on the author's/critic's intention, ability to transform oneself, and willingness to disguise—affirming that the interpretation and writing processes cannot only be dominated by a privileged few, namely Western colonizers, for example. Thus, the marginalized peoples, including the colonized ones, can voice out and/or write their version and interpretation of what occurred in the past without the master narrative's control over their historical understanding.

Writing historiographic metafiction and any other outcomes of marginalized nations' productive and creative forces—be it employing counter-memory or writing alternative histories—can effectively oppose and obliterate imperialist dominance that deprives one's historical process. Such a process would eventually help regain the "historical personality" (Cabral, 2004, as cited in Wolfers, 1979, p. 129). As fashioning and improvisation can be used to challenge the hegemonic message of mainstream history, this paper intends to examine how Antonio R. Enriquez applies them in *Samboangan: The Cult of War*.

His Story of *Samboangan*

Enriquez employs a linear, chronological way of retelling the History of *Samboangan* (now known as Zamboanga). It focuses on the beginnings of Spanish colonization in the 17th century, with minimal twists to the actual events. While he specifies dates for this historical event, as though one is reading a navigation history, he modifies the exact dates and the names of the locations to, in a way, serve its parodic use as a counter-memory (Foucault, 1977)—creating his version of the truth and the past, not necessarily destroying the authenticity of the historical facts but expressing his people's individuality and cultural identity. The details of the remarkable events—the battle between the Christian forces (a collaboration of the *Samboanga* Voluntarios and the Spanish Army) led by Governor Torres (Governor Sebastian Hurtado Corcuera in Zamboanga history) and the Moros led by two

legendary sultans—are some of the most notable changes. It is a surprise that most of the historical events in this reinterpretation occurred more or less than 30 years earlier than the ones documented in Philippine history books. In Enriquez's reinterpretation, the first battle with the invincible Pirate Jainal (the younger brother of Sultan Matingka) is the counterpart of the battle led by Sgt. Major. Nicolas Gonzales, in pursuit and defeat of Tagal, Sultan Kudarat's admiral, off Punta Flechas in 1636, where over 100 Christian captives were released, and 300 Moros captured. Secondly, in 1637, the punishment of the elusive Sultan Kudarat under Governor Corcuera in Ilihan, where Orancaya Sofocan and Francisco Ugbu, the former's chief confidants and aides, betrayed him, is the equivalent of the defeat of Sultan Matingka in 1602, after the betrayal of Orancaya Nasofo and Datu Ugbu (only a slight change in the names) in the novel.

Aside from changing the historical dates and places, he also improvised some notable historical figures in Zamboanga history. First, Governor Sebastian Torres' character was a mixed parody of two prominent captains who helped establish the fort in *Samboangan*: Captain Juan de Chavez and Governor Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera. Like Governor Torres, Captain Chavez arrived in *Samboangan* with an estimated number of 300 peninsulares and 1,000 Visayan infantry regulars, aside from two priests—one who would be the rector of the Jesuit Residencia (Father Pedro Gutierrez, counterpart of Father Salvador in the novel) and the other who is the architect-engineer of the construction of fort (Father Melchor de Vera, counterpart of Father Charoy Molina). They also had similar slogans as a battle cry against the Moros: "All-out war outside, and peace within the range of artillery" and a similar assignment: demolishing nearby villages and transferring them to New *Samboangan* (Lim, 1993, p. 9). Governor Torres likewise mimics Governor Corcuera's characteristics, accomplishments, and failures. They both brought victories to Spain and won many Moro converts, proving their exceptional courage and adeptness in warfare. However, both characters also "stepped on too many friar toes" (Lim, 1993, p. 27) to the extent of exiling the holy Archbishop of Manila, taking their office very seriously as the vice-regal patron of the Patronato Real. Enriquez, however, gave additional characteristics to Torres that were not mentioned in any historical accounts about Governor Corcuera. He was portrayed as an extraordinarily authoritative leader who could drive his subordinates into fear and action with the stamp of his foot. He was also described as proud and ambitious, as he is pressured to succeed so that the Royal Audiencia will not criticize him. He was also portrayed as a very cunning leader when he thought of deceptive ways to lure natives and to stage a false drama of displaying a Moro's carrion wearing the Virgin Mary's blue robe and Jesus Christ's icon to boost the morale of his weakening soldiers. Despite his despotic reputation, parts of the novel reveal his soft side, most notably for his relatives, whom he employed in his army and even promoted instead of other, more qualified soldiers. The death of his favorite cousin at the hands of the juramentados to save him from an attack made him miserable for a while but later drove him to become more vengeful against the Moros. What is ambivalent about his character is his real motivation for saving the Indios from the Moros—whether it is out of personal glory or in the name of Spain and the Church.

Sultan Matingka's character was patterned after Sultan Kudarat (Cachil Corralat of Maguindanao). Enriquez included more of their differences than their similarities—thus his improvisation of the character of the first sultan that Governor Torres fought against. In Lim's accounts (1993), Sultan Kudarat survived the battle of Ilihan against Governor Corcuera in 1637. He managed to redeem himself, reorganized his army, then allied himself with the Sultanate of Mindanao and the chiefs of the Ilanuns. However, despite evidence of his reluctant attitude towards the Spaniards' abuse of the Filipinos, as gleaned from his documented 1639 speech to the Maranaos, Sultan Kudarat is known to be more of the diplomatic type who hoped that the Spaniards would turn Zamboanga over to him once they had left the place, while the Sultan of Sulu wanted nothing more than to retake Zamboanga, which was part of the Sulu kingdom until the Spaniards built the fort. It seemed that the Sulu royalty was distrustful of Kudarat because of the latter's uncommon tolerance of Spanish attacks and abuses in Sibuguey and the vicinity of his kingdom (Bautista, as cited in Orendain II, 1984, p. 85).

Contrary to Sultan Kudarat's compromising attitude towards Spanish colonization, Sultan Cachil Matingka is a vengeful and ruthless leader and warrior. He avenged his favorite brother, Jainal's death (the counterpart of Sultan Kudarat's admiral, Tagal), by launching a massive campaign of killing Christians and looting churches and villages in most parts of the peninsula to feed his insatiable desire for revenge. He is also an impulsive and short-tempered person who, in his frustration at the impending defeat of his army, brutally fires on the fleeing villagers because of their cowardice. However, there is one exceptional strength of Sultan Matingka. He showed his flexibility and alertness when learning about Orancaya Nasofo's betrayal (by attacking the backdoor of the Gornlic public stronghold), and he reversed his plan to fight Governor Torres' men more effectively (p. 162). Though they were defeated in the end, he gave the Christian forces a hard fight, making them realize that the Moros were not just savage warriors.

Enriquez's inspiration in improvising Sultan Saliganya Hasim of Lobon's character (also named Allili Sitwa I) is Rajah Bungsu of Sulu. In 1610, Rajah Bungsu assumed the sultanate of Sulu as Muwallil Wasit Bungsu, while Sultan Hasim was the sultan of the fictional Lobon. Both had concubines who "sucked their brains dry" and influenced their military decisions—Soriada, the Witch for Sultan Hasim, and Tuam Baloca for Rajah Bungsu. Both had sons from their Subanon wife who betrayed him, became Christian converts, and fought with Christian forces—the fiercest swordsman in the land. Lastly, Sultan Hasim's preference for diplomacy (which Sultan Matingka hated about him) rather than war to save his people from danger and destruction can somehow relate to what eventually happened to Rajah Bungsu after fighting many years with the Spaniards. He was the first among Sultans to write a formal peace treaty with the Spaniards. He is known as "the conciliator," who, upon negotiating with the Spaniards, was given the lower half of Zamboanga, which he eventually bequeathed to his two Zamboangueno sons.

Lastly, the Virtual Sultana, Soriada (counterpart of Tuam Baloca in Zamboanga history), was given a modified characterization in contrast with history's limited documentation of the critical role she played as the first woman to lead a delegation to negotiate with a head of the town in a colonial or republic in the Philippines. The Sultana's character was given more texture and drama, which further emphasized the superiority of this woman against all the male characters, Spanish and Moro alike. Because of her youthful sensuality, quick tongue, cleverness, and ambitiousness, the Spaniards became very wary of her influence on Sultan Hasim. Her most glorious moment was when she parleyed with Governor Torres after the defeat of the Lobos. She only used her elegance, exotic beauty, and sensuality to soften the heart of the very stern governor. She persuaded him to accept her enslaved women as hostages until she surrendered the sultan and all his data. The datus could escape under the noses of the gullible Spaniards—all through her brilliant trickery.

Learning and Unlearning His Privilege

In a usual battle, the winner emerges and gains more power and wealth over the others. However, in *Samboangan*, there is a hanging question: Who is the battle's winner? On the surface, the Spanish can be considered the winners over the Moros because the latter's strategy was eventually used against them. They lost many lives and most of their properties after the war. Their leaders were not also able to redeem themselves. However, they only thought of an escape from the enemies, compared to the sacrificial juramentados, who risked everything in the name of Allah. However, on second thought, one cannot instantly recognize an absolute victory for the Spaniards because Governor Torres, after the war, was imprisoned despite bringing success to Spain. It could not also be said that the Spaniards triumphed because the novel ended with the escape of Sultan Hasim, Soriada, and the rest of the datus. In short, the conquest is an incomplete and open-ended one. Readers might wonder if the Christian forces should be commended and rewarded for this victory. After all, they won because they created a desperate fabrication about the Virgin Mary's blue robes and Jesus Christ's icon desecration. After the fighting, they were duped by a mere Sultana and her enslaved women in their escape scheme—shameful for the proud and arrogant Spaniards.

Aside from the distortions in Zamboanga history and the characters' improvisation in the novel, its syncretic narrative style is a striking feature of this reinterpretation. Though the novel follows a linear, closed plot, it remarkably juxtaposes Western and native literary styles. Enriquez used interior monologue, a Western narration style, which was injected and written in italics, portraying the main characters' private, most sinister thoughts. The narrative also imitates the repetitive nature of oral tradition. In different parts of the novel, the reader is reminded over and over of the details of the rift between Governor Torres and Bishop Salvador and of Sultan Hasim's marriage and estrangement from Princess Sigbe. The narrator, who tells the story in Chavacano, shifts point-of-view from time to time—from third person (when talking about historical details) to first person (when momentarily injecting his personal bias or reaction about a particular event)—which also highlights how the novel somehow imitates oral tradition, as though the narrator is telling a story to the people in the village. The narrator occasionally reminds the audience to "heed" and "listen" (a word repetitively uttered by the narrator) intently to his narrative, which s/he just heard from chants, myths, and stories s/he heard from other natives within or outside his community. All these and between are Enriquez's ways of writing back, alluding to the compelling work of Ashcroft and colleagues in 1989.

Lastly, the novel demonstrates its metafiction element when, in some parts, the narrator consciously informs the readers that the historical occurrences were based on local myths and chants, mainly from the Indio Datu Drupe Libot's diary history of the Christian war against Sultan Hasim. This alone already tells the readers that this novel is written through Chavacano's eyes and relies on Chavacano's memory and version of history.

Enriquez's Zamboanga History has no grand and dramatic distortions, even if he employs fashioning and improvisation. He, rather interestingly, celebrated in "his story" the Philippine culture's exceptionality with his use of

a syncretic narrative style as well as the Filipinos' (be they Tagalogs, Visayans, or Muslims) extraordinary force as a people despite the adversities they experienced at the hands of their colonizers. He provides a balanced perspective of the Christians' (Spaniards and Filipinos) and the Moros' involvement in the wars—exposing their strengths and weaknesses, victories and failures. Through these, he becomes successful in learning and “unlearning” his privilege (Spivak, 1988) to use his voice in writing about his people's history.

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Kornellie L. Raquitico has been teaching various English courses for learners of different ages, cultures, and interests. She finished her BSED (Major in English) and MAED (Specialization in Literature) degrees at the Philippine Normal University. She taught grade school and high school English subjects in Assumption Antipolo and college English and Literature courses at Ateneo de Manila University and Miriam College. She co-revised the Phoenix Learning Package Skill Builders for Efficient Reading 7 and 8 (3rd Edition) and co-wrote Converge: 21st Century Literatures from the Philippines and the World (Phoenix Publishing House). Currently, she teaches Junior and Senior High English courses at the Philippine Science High School - Main Campus. She is currently the President of the Literature Educators Association of the Philippines Incorporated (LEAP, Inc.).