

The Roux: Bottling her heritage, history and identity!

COMBINING equal parts of flour and butter, forming a blend of buttery brown colors and smooth, gooey, sticky textures, like the roux used in a gumbo, these textures defined my introduction to Carina Monica Montoya. As Carina shares her journey in finding meaning as a second generation Filipino-American, a hybrid of Western and Eastern influences, her search for her identity became her books, written of her community's history, memorializing the stories of her ancestors, as if packaging these time periods in a bottle, her own brand of roux. No longer hidden in the treasure chests of some dark places in a house's basement, her writings about living in Historic Filipinotown comes alive, as vibrant and tasty as the cooking of gumbo with roux. Growing up there made her search for more depth by going into basements and attics of homes where buried photo collections were kept, disturbing the spider webs keeping them company. Now, they have gained a solid ally in Carina.

"Only the New Orleans brand, and it has a specific red label, for without the roux, there is no gumbo. Are you going to pick it up? Do you have time? If not, I have to order it by mail from New Orleans!" Carina declares in successive emails to me.

Roux, according to Wikipedia (2009), is often made with fat or clarified butter, which is heated in, melting it if necessary. Then the flour is added, stirring it in the mixture until it is incorporated and then cooked and until desired color has been reached. The final results can range from the nearly white to the nearly black, depending on the length of time it is over the heat, and its intended use. The end result is a thickening and flavoring agent".

I thought I was specific enough when it comes to cooking, as I keep precise tabs on what makes a good gumbo: crab claws, jumbo shrimps, fresh fish cubes, andouille sausage and okra. Carina beats me, for she knows the precise companion to her gumbo, a garlic spread made specifically for this meal by her lifelong partner since childhood, Steve: crushed garlic with parmesan cheese made into a paste and then spread on ficelle, roasted for a few minutes, but only the best ones found at La Maison du Pain in Pico and Ridgeley.

The rest is history, "it was the best gumbo ever!" and we clamored for an encore. And the last time we had it, not one, but probably three servings of gumbo was Nov. 2008, the Saturday right after the successful election of President Obama. Even the

broth queued for take – home, aspiring to duplicate what Carina created. Well, that remains to be an aspiration! Certain things you just have to defer to the experts.

Deferring gumbo cooking to the expert became my precise introduction to Carina Monica Montoya, the author of *Filipinos in Hollywood*, and this month, Arcadia Publishing Co. introduces us to her second history book, *Filipinos in Los Angeles' Historic Filipinotown*, with comprehensive stories of communities as they were formed. To rigorous academicians, they might regard Arcadia books as pictorial albums with extensive captions. They have since evolved to include essays. And more books about Filipinos are being published: *Filipinos in Vallejo, Chicago, East Bay, Stockton, Los Angeles, Hollywood and Los Angeles' Historic Filipinotown*.

History is written from two perspectives: those who participated, and those who made them happen. The first book Carina wrote was from the perspective of Filipinos who participated in history, who lived, and who worked in Hollywood. Her second book was written from the perspective of those who organized and coordinated community events—a wedding, a book launching, a bike marathon, 100 year historical exhibit of Filipino-Am experiences in the United States courtesy of the Smithsonian, including volunteering activities at many non-profits in Historic Filipinotown—Filipino American Library, Filipino American Service Group Inc. and Search to Involve Filipino Americans.

The contemporary events' relevance, and their familiarity are the second book's strength. It allows one to gain an appreciation of the breadth and depth of community building activities by Filipino immigrants and Fil-Ams within Los Angeles mainstream communities.

Just like what a roux does for gumbo, giving a certain finish, giving its sheen, giving its satiny feel to the tongue, a richness to one's palate. This is what her second book feels to me, a richness from the photos she compiled from many sources, including those who worked and engaged in these communities. Growing up in Historic Filipinotown, Carina presents the communities as they emerged, patiently finding those photos that tell a story of their beginnings, their bitter end in some cases, but also an audacious rebirth.

With the first book, *Filipinos in Hollywood*, we were introduced to a trove of vintage photos, never



Author Carina Montoya

before seen by the readers, except by the families who kept them as treasures. Carina's second book, *Filipinos in Los Angeles' Historic Filipinotown*, was embraced by many Fil-Am community members who shared their photos to flesh out a story of a community formed through hard work, formed from seeking a respite from hostile acts of overt discrimination, and socializing to gain a sense of belonging in a distant country, some 2000 miles away from the Philippines, where the pioneering Filipinos were born.

Later, these communities were challenged by gentrification, moves of families displaced community centers, unraveling lives, yet managed to retain their safety nets, through various associations who generously shared resources with families as they relocated west and south, from Bunker Hill to Temple and Beaudry to now Temple/Beverly Corridor. Now these communities are perhaps boldly memorialized by Carina's second book and by a sign "Historic Filipinotown," and perhaps, the "historical" part of the designation would be dropped as irrelevant, as a more vibrant, multiethnic, integrated community blooms.

I am writing not just about gumbo, but of Carina's search for her roux, and in the process, proudly co-authors with world renowned artist/muralist Eliseo Art Silva, a series of children's cook books targeting ages between 8-12 to be published later this year. The intent is to keep Filipino culture alive by passing on our native food recipes to current and future Fil-Am generations, in the spirit of preserving Filipino heritage and culture.

There is nothing like smelling a home-cooked gumbo made by our master chef and sitting down after the combined smell of garlic, seafood, fish, crabs and roux make for a coming-home moment for all seated at the dining table. The feelings of affection and family bonding through cooking meals and family dinners are identifying traits amongst Filipinos. Further, Filipino palates are discriminating filters of what they consider world-class food tastes. Just check out the bloggers and their blogs on Los Angeles' favorite food spots, and majority are Fil-Ams, though some are French as well. Even the biggest fan club of Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations* featured in Travel Channel are predominantly Filipinos and Fil-Ams.

And in Carina's search for her roux, she too joins her other *kababayans* in describing her passion for

food but also her own and her community's story. She and her brother were raised by grandparents they adopted—an elderly retired couple from New Orleans that lived next door—while her mother worked, and they taught her the Creole way of cooking. Carina learned not just gumbo, but also jambalaya and how to make corn bread from scratch.

While other kids learned sports, soccer or baseball, Carina learned to be a chef of Creole foods. And her dabbling in food led her to dabble in writing. She wrote articles for *The Lighthouse*, a weekly newspaper of Naval Base Ventura County, Port Hueneme. She also learned the craft of screenwriting at Learning Tree University, as well as reading and editing film and television scripts of professional screenwriters, and eventually developing her own screenplays—one having been once seriously considered by HBO—under the teaching and guidance of a friend to Jack Nicholson, John Herman Shaner, whose last creative work-product was *The Last Married Couple in America*.

Carina's childhood was not easy. Her father became ill when she was just an infant, leaving her mom to fend for her and her brother. Carina recalls one bus ride to her piano lessons. She was just 9 years old. And not knowing where she was, she managed a phone call to her mother, and her only landmark was the Western Exterminator's pest control sign. Of course, she was found, thanks to the help from folks in the neighborhood who allowed her to make a phone call, and thanks to a mother who struggled to balance work and family. But important to her family's survival was the generous help from Fil-Am associations of which they belonged that helped its members in time of need, such as, when her father's illness resulted in his death and the Filipino associations assisted in funeral expenses. Just as our ancestors broke out of the society's imposed box of isolation, Carina and her family too found their safety net in the Filipino churches and organizations that were part of the community.

Just as these Filipino organizations represented blood lines, camaraderie, security, Carina's book on Los Angeles' Historic Filipinotown animates the vibrancy of these areas while she grew up there, raised by her mom and the community of Filipinos and other ethnic groups who made it a safe home for all!

Prosya Abarquez-Delacruz, J.D. was appointed by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to LA City's Convention Center and Civil Service Commission, and served 2005-2008. She is now retired, following a 27-year public service with California's Department of Public Health, and now blissfully works as a features writer for Los Angeles Asian Journal. Her writings have taken her far and wide in meeting folks and appreciating their innate traits.

Tagalog slang

THIS morning, I had *thinapay* for breakfast, the term meaning very thin bread, a sign of difficult economic times.

Thinapay is one of the entries in *Pinoy Dyok-syo-nar-yo: The Complete Edition* by Ferdinand Aguas, with illustrations by Ace Cada. While eating the *thinapay*, I realized it's been a long time since I did a column on language and I thought I should feature this different kind of dictionary.

The compilation is obviously meant to be mainly for entertainment but it gives some interesting insights into Filipino culture. For starters, the palm-sized book reminds us how dynamic languages are. What we call "Filipino"—a mix mainly of Tagalog words but with many influences from outside, as well as other Philippine languages—continues to evolve, perhaps at a much faster rate than ever before.

The last time there was a good compilation of colloquial Tagalog was in 1993, when De La Salle University published *Tagalog Slang Dictionary* (compiled by David Zorc and Rachel San Miguel and edited by Annabelle Sarra and Patricia Afable). *Tagalog Slang Dictionary* is extensive, with hundreds of entries, and it includes the etymology or origins of the words. As slang goes, many of the words are no longer in use now (e.g., *baguio* to mean talented, successful, competent, and even sexy) but others have persisted, even becoming part of mainstream Tagalog and *Pilipino* (e.g. *t.y.* for thank you or to mean something that is free).

Agglutination
Rereading *Tagalog Slang Dictionary* reminded me of the tendency, in the 1970s, to create new



PINOY KASI Michael Tan

words by inverting syllables. Thus, *yosi* came from playing around with the first and last syllables of *sigarilyo*. *Erap* was actually derived from an inverted *pare*. It was quite a feat for young Filipinos to conduct a conversation with these transposed syllables and I remember friends who could convert every word in a sentence into their inverted slang equivalents. The inversion seemed almost natural for the 1970s, a period of youthful rebellion, a linguistic counter-culture that literally turned

languages on their head. The 300 entries in *Pinoy Dyoksyonaryo* reflect a less daring form of language transformation: agglutination. There are many languages in the world that use agglutination, which means combining two or more "morphemes" or language units that have meanings. German is an example, with their kilometeric agglutinated words (a short example is "kindergarten," combining "kinder," or children, and "garten," or garden). Filipino languages are full of agglutinative words (the persistent summer rains bring to my mind *bahaghari*, a rainbow described as a king's G-string).

Agglutination seems to have picked up locally, producing many amazing and amusing new words. Thus: *yosi* from the 1970s has since given rise to *yosiga* to refer to a *sig*a (a person with a swagger) who is always smoking; *yosipit* for a cigarette that one sticks over the ear (*ipit*); and *yostik*, which is a safety device made by tying a lit cigarette to a stick and using this to light a firecracker!

Since there are so many terms in *Dyoksyonaryo*, I thought I'd focus on terms related to the body. There were quite a few, which show an almost

obsessive interest in anatomy and physiology.

For example, *puhok* refers to the short hair (*buhok*) around a whorl (*puyo*). You can see there's more than agglutination involved as we coin new words. Filipinos love punning or playing on the sounds in words so it shouldn't be surprising that *buhok* produced *puhok*. Or that we would come up with *newnal* to refer to a new mole. Talking about moles, a *nunalong* is a mole (*nunal*) on the nose (*ilong*), while a *himulmole* refers to the hair on a mole, derived from *himul* (lint) and the English "mole." See how agglutination can produce mestizo terms, a combination of English and Tagalog?

Terms like *puhok* and *himulmole* suggest a compulsion with body hair. *Bagote* for example means a new (*bago*) mustache (*bigote*). Some years ago I was surprised to learn from my students that there was a term *burnik*, which refers to anal hair. No one seems to be able to explain how the term came about, unlike "karug," which refers to the hair between the umbilicus and the pubic area. My informants explain that it means *karugtong ng bulbul*.

Skins and scents
Modern technologies give us new terms like *thumbteks*, the thumb used to text messages, and *spawis*, the perspiration (*pawis*) you get in a spa.

A number of slang terms reflect our vulnerabilities to, and fear of skin infections and afflictions. Who would have thought we would come up with *pidimpol* to refer to a pimple on a dimple? *Bigsa* is a big boil, smaller compared to a *kurikingkong*, a large (as in King Kong) *kurikong*. And if someone has the skin sores called *galis*, he should make sure it doesn't worsen to the point where they become *galisgis* or *galis* that resembles fish scales (*kaliskis*).

Filipinos scrutinize bodies. *Bikinini* refers to bikini marks. Careful, too, Filipinos have noticed, and coined a term, *dumidorant*, to refer to deodorant residues left on the armpit.

We are also very conscious about *tinga* or food

residues on the teeth. *Ngitinga* is a smile that exposes all your *tinga* and *dungisngis* is to laugh (*ngisngis*) showing a dirty (*dungis*) mouth. No wonder we have the slang terms *tingador* (a fork or *tinidor* used to remove the *tinga*), *tingadoro* (a person who is always cleaning his teeth) and a *tingago* (to remove *tinga* secretly or *patago*).

We also have very specific terms for some body movements, including *kendilaro* to play (*laro*) with candy in your mouth. *Kabayog* refers to the movements (*yugyog*) while on a horse (*kabayo*), which I can imagine might take on more sensual meanings in the future.

We have generated all kinds of terms for physiological functions and body sensations. *Pinoy Dyoksyonaryo* now has *hilikopter*, which is to snore like a helicopter. *Kilitirik* refers to the way we roll our eyes upwards (*tirik*) when we are tickled (*kiliti*). *Kilig*, a kind of titillated feeling, has always been an intriguing word and it has now spawned a new term, *kilipag*, to refer to the *kilig* feeling they get after they make *pagpag*. (This is a family newspaper so foreigners will have to ask their Filipino friends to explain or demonstrate.)

The slang terms tell us we're quite comfortable with our bodies, what with our lavish and terribly graphic descriptions. Consider *cutetot*, referring to a gentle (cute) passing of wind (*utot*), but beware, the term is meant to be an understatement because the *cutetot* is said to be deadly.

Talking about deadly smells, I did notice that *Pinoy Dyoksyonaryo* is quite sparse with olfactory terms, perhaps because we already have so many. But give it to the Filipino to agglutinate two of the more terrible terms to produce, hold on to your seats, *panghit*.

Have more new Tagalog slang terms to share? Write Ferdinand Aguas at pinoydyoksyonaryo@gmail.com. And can others begin to compile slang terms in Cebuano, Ilokano and other Philippine languages? (*Inquirer.net*)

Rizal's reading list

NEXT to the National Library of the Philippines, the library with a significant number of manuscripts by or to Jose Rizal is the Lopez Memorial Museum. Aside from the magnificent Filipiniana collection that grew out of a core of rare books assembled by Eugenio Lopez Sr. from dealers in Europe and the United States, the Lopez Museum has art galleries, a modest conservation laboratory and newspaper files where one can reconstruct Philippine history before martial law in 1972.

Most people assume that I spend a lot of research time in National Library director, and the room dedicated to Rizal in

the Lopez Museum. Some people think I request for obscure books kept in a walk-in vault. But my past few visits to the Lopez Memorial Museum have been explorations into pre-war magazines, digging up interviews and articles on the personalities who shaped our history in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Pre-war magazines and newspapers provide hours of fun for me, and I'm glad that there are other research centers where I can seek refuge from the summer heat and find material for this column. There is the Ortigas Foundation Library whose strength lies in materials on World War II. There is the Filipinas Heritage Library (in the basement of the old Nielsen Tower in the Ayala Triangle) that not only has Spanish-era Filipiniana but a collection of photographs collected when the late Carlos Quirino (former later National Artist for Histori-

cal Literature) envisioned an iconographic archive.

Rising on the Ateneo de Manila University campus is the new Rizal Library, which serves the students' reference needs aside from housing significant collections like: the Ateneo Library of Women's Writings, an archive of manuscripts, memorabilia and other materials by Filipina authors and achievers; the American Historical Collection (that was once housed in the US Embassy on Roxas Boulevard); the Pardo de Tavera Room that houses a mixed bag of historical material that I really should take time to visit soon.

So much to do, so little time. The problem with research is that it takes a lot of time not just to locate an item but to read it and digest the material so that it can be presented in a classroom or lecture hall. It takes time to weave little pieces of data into three pages for

this column. When I go abroad for research, I spend eight hours in a library or an archive because there are no distractions, no phone calls, appointments, other things to do. If only I could find focused time in the libraries above this summer. Research time is the first New Year's resolution I break each year.

The one thing that continues to fascinate me in the Lopez Museum is a handful of bibliographic cards that Rizal made for books he owned or read. We all know he grew up in a house in Calamba town with books that then, as now, were quite rare in the Philippines. Rarer still is finding dedicated readers in a house with books. Rizal was the seventh of 11 children, and we don't know whether the Rizal sisters were fond of reading too. Paciano Rizal, according to his grandchildren, tried to make up for lost time after 1900 by reading the multi-volume Encyclopedia Britannica cover to cover during his retirement.

Rizal's bibliographic cards

reveal a very systematic way to read and acquire books. I read a lot but I don't list down my books. I once hired a librarian to catalogue my books, only to realize that she needed to re-shelve the volumes in a systematic way and remove the dust jackets from the books that made it next to impossible for me to find books using my own filing system.

Rizal's 1884 diaries are very detailed regarding expenses and can be quite boring to a non-specialist. But here we see what books he is buying, when, and how much they cost. It is significant that Rizal's recurring and most consistent expense was for books and reading materials, while food was not given the same attention. To spend on books, he scrimped on bathing, once even bragging to his sisters that he had not taken a bath in weeks!

Some time in the past, Esteban de Ocampo listed 252 bibliographic cards that were formerly displayed in Fort Santiago. We do not know where these went. It is fortunate that the Lopez Museum has 99 cards

that are not included in the famous monograph *Rizal as Bibliophile* by Esteban de Ocampo. These "cards" are just slips of paper with bibliographic information, no price of the book, no date or place of acquisition indicated. On the surface, these cards are just personal notes, trivial to many people. But from these bibliographic references, we can see what books he read, and more importantly, what books he did not read.

Rizal listed over 2,000 books he either owned, borrowed, read, or consulted. These books form the furniture inside his mind. One could paraphrase the saying, "Show me who your friends are and I will know who you are," and turn it to "Show me the books you read and I will know who you are."

Summer is a time for reading and I hope to locate and read some of the books our heroes read to understand why they became the way they were and, more importantly, to put into context the way in which they shaped our history and our present. (*Inquirer.net*)



LOOKING BACK Ambeth Ocampo