

## editors' note



One hundred forty years have passed since a young Ilocano journalist wrote an open letter through a Manila newspaper that “called on people to send to him and newspapers in Manila manuscripts, documents, and all kinds of verbal or non-verbal materials relating to local folklore.” Isabelo de los Reyes (1864 – 1938) was barely twenty-years old when his call, which “went largely unnoticed,” appeared in *El Comercio* on 15 March 1885. Matching the youthful potential of this “young science,” his interest in folklore occurred as early as 1884, through the help of José Felipe del Pan, and was further encouraged by Spanish folklorists, Antonio Machado y Álvarez and Alejandro Guichot y Sierra. In 1889, his labors led to the birth of what can be considered as the earliest Filipino work on folklore, *El Folk-Lore Filipino*.<sup>1</sup>

This special issue celebrates—and conversely responds to— Isabelo’s long forgotten call. We see the issue as a humble contribution to the appreciative and critical scholarship on Isabelo de los Reyes and Philippine folklore. It presents papers that engage, explore, and expand his ideas and approaches, therefore invoking a range of subject matters: from the conventional historical, literary, and cultural analyses to the emergent interdisciplinary studies on medical science, disasters, law and customs, and play.

But this issue, we believe, is by no means definitive. Rather, it finds parallels with *El Folk-Lore Filipino*: “a raw, inchoate archive.”<sup>2</sup> Like the European readers of *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, the life and works of the Ilocano folklorist have caught the attention of foreign scholars. The earliest would be William Henry Scott, whose essay, “Isabelo de los Reyes, Father of Philippine Folklore,” appeared as a chapter in the monumental *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain and Other Essays in Philippine History* (1982). It later served as the basis for other scholarly essays on Isabelo’s folklore. In *Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism* (2016), Megan C. Thomas devoted a chapter on Isabelo’s *El Folk-Lore Filipino* and a section on his ethnological arguments,



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<sup>1</sup> Quotations are from Resil B. Mojares, *Isabelo’s Archive*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mojares, *Isabelo’s Archive*, p. 20.

thus situating him within the Filipino knowledge production and activism in the late nineteenth century. Benedict Anderson weaved Isabelo into the larger loom of emergent transnational thought and ideologies in his *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2006), specifically in its prologue which first appeared as an article in the *New Left Review* in 2000. A more focused eye on Isabelo appears in his translation and annotation of *Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila*, along with Ramon Guillermo and Carlos Sardiña Galache (2014).

Quite notably, just like the *provinciano* Isabelo, Filipino attention to his life and works also tended to come from the non-center. The books of Resil B. Mojares, *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge* (2006) and *Isabelo's Archive* (2013), followed Isabelo patiently, as he went through the country's—and his own—turns of time. A National Artist for Literature, Mojares is a well-admired journalist, writer, and historian from Cebu and just like Isabelo, he enriched Filipino scholarship beyond the confines of Manila and the Tagalog-speaking regions. Other Filipino scholars have shown the same interest and similar positionalities, to mention a few: Lars Raymund C. Ubaldo, an Ilocano-Tagalog historian, wrote on Isabelo's *Historia de Ilocos* as well as Ifugao blade-making; the Kapampangan-speaking Tarlakenyo historian Lino L. Dizon wrote on Isabelo's contributions to early Philippine studies, more so on Felipe del Pan and the publishing firm, Imprenta de Ramírez y Giraudier; and historian Raymundo D. Rovillos, born in Itogon, Benguet and raised in Baguio City, wrote on Isabelo's ideas of nation and ethnic identity, which jives meaningfully with his works on the history of Cordilleras and Philippine indigenous culture. Moreover, the works of Ubaldo and Rovillos, written in Filipino, can be coupled with the writings of Leslie Anne L. Liwanag—whose dissertation examined Isabelo's discourses on Philippine studies— and her co-authors.

We are grateful to National Artist Resil B. Mojares and to Anvil Publishing, Inc. and its managing editor, Mr. R. Jordan Santos, for allowing us to republish the important essay, *Isabelo's Archive*. It first appeared in the book with the same title, *Isabelo's Archive*, published in 2013 by Anvil, and can be bought at its online stores and select National Book Store branches. The essay brings us to the origins and journey of Isabelo's Philippine folklore project, which he carried out “almost singlehandedly.” What is striking here is Mojares' emphasis of the term “archive”—associating Isabelo's project with the French *bibliothèque*, almost akin to the philosophes' *Encyclopédie*, yet not completely devoid of the colonial politics of collecting, interpreting, and presenting local knowledges.

Anna Melinda Testa - de Ocampo's *Humor and Satire in Isabelo de los Reyes's El Diablo en Filipinas* seems to run against Father John N. Schumacher's remark that Isabelo reveals data in a "somewhat more dispassionate fashion."<sup>3</sup> Testa - de Ocampo convincingly deconstructs the seemingly objective and neutral citations of Isabelo in his fictional dialogue, *El Diablo en Filipinas*. These citations, it appears, "elicits awareness and laughter," and at the same time, indicates a shared community— a community identified, or even formed, through laughter. Appended to Isabelo's folklore project, it reveals not only Isabelo's reading of the historical works produced by the Spanish clergy, especially for the purpose of finding folklore, but also his witty strategies of poking fun at friars in the guise of being scientific.

Emmanuel Jayson V. Bolata's *Authoring the Folk* looks into the relationship between authorship, a concept commonly associated with Western individualism and positivism, and folk literature, which most of the time disregards the authority of the author. This relationship is examined through the poems of Isabelo's mother, Leona Florentino, in *El Folk-Lore Filipino*. The paper is threefold: it shows how Leona was partly acquainted with the Western idea of authorship; it delves into how Isabelo conceptualized the ideas of "folk" and "folk literature" through his presentation of samples of Philippine and Ilocano poetics; and it compares Leona's poems with the Ilocano epic *Lam-ang* through a Python-based corpus analysis which leads to insights on Ilocano/Philippine poetic form.

The following three papers are re-readings and reinterpretations of *El Folk-Lore Filipino*. While scholars must also exercise restraint in the various directions in which they "stretch" this text, i.e., extracting readings and interpretations from the original words and intentions of Don Belong, these re-readings and reinterpretations are valuable in that they weave connections among writings and sources contemporaneous with *El Folk-Lore Filipino* and the experiences of the communities who now are experiencing and confronting modernity from *El Folk-Lore Filipino*'s nineteenth-century context.

The re-reading that Athena Charanne R. Presto and Emmanuel Reed Horton B. Viceral offer harnesses their positionalities as insiders/from-within observers of Ilocandia. They approach the seminal text as a codification of narratives deemed exotic yet familiar to them as Ilokanos. They argue that their folktales, deftly

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<sup>3</sup> John N. Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution*, p. 226.



retold by De los Reyes, have the potential to serve as antidotes to misguided, essentialist, and still-colonial views of Ilokano identity, more particularly, and Filipino identity, more generally.

Joseph Adrian D. Afundar's article goes beyond Don Belong's usual (yet warranted) framing as a pioneer in anthropology and folklore studies in the Philippine context. The paper examined *El Folk-Lore Filipino* as a document of health practices and medical knowledge; casting De los Reyes also as a proficient documenter and scholar of health and health-seeking behaviors. The paper argues for a more nuanced reading of the often dismissed "traditional" healing practices and theories of illness causation and how they interacted with the Western scientific medical paradigm.

The paper by Kerby C. Alvarez, meanwhile, is an analysis of the portions of *El Folk-Lore Filipino* tackling nature and various environmental phenomena such as meteorological patterns and the movement of celestial bodies. While traditional European perspectives would readily cast some of this wisdom as mere "superstition," Alvarez demonstrates how the belief systems and narratives documented by Don Belong are grounded in centuries of community wisdom and that the reason these have persisted is because they help these people live in harmony with their environments.

The final two papers of this volume gesture toward further connections of Don Belong's oeuvre and the adventurous spirit of his multifaceted life.

Lorenz Timothy Barco Ranera's article contributes to the corpus of writings on legal history in the Philippines by examining how two famous proverbs (*salawikain*), with equivalents attested in several Philippine languages, have been transformed as provisions in the 1949 Civil Code of the Philippines. The paper highlights Jorge C. Bocobo's deep fascination with Philippine folklore and how this interest makes him Don Belong's "kindred spirit" despite their chronological separation.

Finally, we have Micah Jeiel R. Perez's article which poses the intriguing question "Is *sungka* a wargame?". The paper traced the various iterations and versions of the shell game, connected to the *mancala* of Africa, played across the Philippines, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Perez concludes that while *sungka* cannot be considered a wargame in the strictest sense—it does not directly serve as training for an elite warrior class in strategy and tactics—it is fruitful to view *sungka* as a cultural artifact deeply embedded in the communities and societies that have

captured the imagination of Don Belong. These are communities and societies which developed distinct forms of warfare shaped by the archipelagic and maritime setting of the Philippines.

Given these papers, we hope to provide a well-rounded view of the Ilocano/Filipino folklorist's early career. We also hope that readers would be encouraged to revisit his writings—and speaking of this, we have to recognize the value of the English translation of *El Folk-Lore Filipino* by Salud C. Dizon and Maria Elinora Peralta-Imson, published by the University of the Philippines Press in 1994. Despite its limitations, it bridged (and has been bridging) Don Belong to generations of scholars, especially those who do not have access to the Spanish original or cannot read Spanish.

Isabelo is a man of many faces and phases, and as we have remarked that this is a humble celebration of Isabelo's legacy to Philippine scholarship, this could further be followed by future iterations— which is, for us, very Isabelo-like. Isabelo's folklore may give birth to Isabelo's diablitos, Isabelo's epics, and so on and so forth...

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