Recording Maladies and Remedies: Isabelo de los Reyes and Folk Medicine in Late Nineteenth Century Philippines

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Renowned as the pioneering figure of Philippine folklore studies, Isabelo de los Reyes exhaustively documented and wrote about the Filipino people's customs and ways of life, including popular knowledge about health and medicine. Considerably his magnum opus, Isabelo's *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889–90) houses an abundance of folkloric notes relating to Philippine medicine, exhibiting the wide-ranging varieties of folk medical knowledge from the natural to the supernatural. Despite this, numerous scholarly engagements with Isabelo's intellectual endeavors have yet to carefully delve into the many mentions of medical knowledge present within his works on folklore. In response, this essay explores *El Folk-Lore Filipino* as an overlooked archive of Philippine folk medicine, covering folk medical knowledge existing by the late nineteenth century. This essay also attempts to locate *El Folk-Lore Filipino* within the rising professional medical community at the time, particularly the reception of Isabelo's work on folk medicine. Against a backdrop of colonial rule, Isabelo's keen attention to medicine in his research not only fulfilled his proposed understanding of folklore, but also contributed to his aspirations toward the development of the Filipino people's conditions at the time.

Keywords: *folk medicine; El Folk-Lore Filipino; Isabelo de los Reyes; folklore; history of medicine*

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1. Introduction

"What is it that we cannot get from Filipino folklore with regard to medicine? The plants of the country are all, without exception, medicinal" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 11).

Isabelo de los Reyes—renowned as the pioneering figure of Philippine folklore (Scott, 1982; Bragado, 2002)—firmly declared his conviction in the value of the then burgeoning field of folklore to the advancement of medicine, along with other disciplines already considered as 'scientific' like botany, languages, and anthropology (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 6–7). As part of his endeavor to establish folklore as a legitimate science in the Philippines, Isabelo exhaustively documented and wrote about the Filipino people's customs and ways of life, including about health and medicine. This was also in response to the gap in the available knowledge regarding the archipelago's precolonial past. In doing so, Isabelo produced what many considered as his magnum opus, the two-volume work *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889–90), in which popular beliefs and practices of the Filipino masses were foregrounded (De los Reyes, 1889/1994; De los Reyes, 1890/2021).[1] While several scholars have already read and delved into *El Folk-Lore* (Scott, 1982; Mojares, 2006; Thomas, 2012; Anderson, 2013), there has yet to be a dedicated inquiry into Isabelo's presencing and valuation of health and medicine in his notes on folklore. For instance, Megan Thomas cites Isabelo's notes on medicine and its manifestations in folk knowledge—such as the "charlatans who practiced as healers and government officials who abused their positions" (Thomas, 2012, p. 129)—to posit how the folklorist utilized his intellectual pursuits as a source for his critiques toward the society he lived in. Similarly, William Henry Scott (1982, p. 257) makes a passing mention of Isabelo's inclusion of these folk narratives about medicinal flora and quack doctors. These examples, however, are but a few mentions related to health and medicine made by Isabelo in *El Folk-Lore*; one only needs to scan through the voluminous book to identify the numerous bits of folk medical knowledge present within its pages.

This essay explores *El Folk-Lore Filipino* as an overlooked archive of

[1] Albeit branded as *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, a majority of Isabelo's work revolves around the folklore of his home region in the Ilocos, which, at times, have garnered criticism from his contemporaries (Thomas, 2012, p. 114).

Philippine folk medicine existing by the late nineteenth century. Despite not being trained in medicine, Isabelo's treatment of health and medicine as significant aspects of the country's folklore affirms his belief in the place of indigenous knowledge within the realm of the scientific. In this paper, the folk medical knowledge documented by Isabelo and his contributors in *El Folk-Lore Filipino* shall be presented in order to surface these for contemporary readers. In particular, this essay heavily relies on the aforementioned *El Folk-Lore* and its compilation of notes about Philippine folk medicine.[2] The two volumes contain not only dedicated sections to medical folklore, but also various health-related observations scattered across the books' different chapters.[3] Moreover, this essay also attempts to locate *El Folk-Lore Filipino* within the colony's rising professional medical community at the time, particularly its reception of Isabelo's observations on folk medicine. This provides a glance at the influence that *El Folk-Lore* possibly had on the understanding of folk medicine by those who are invested in its status.

Against a backdrop of colonial rule, Isabelo's keen attention to medicine in his research not only fulfilled his proposed understanding of folklore, but also contributed to his aspirations toward the development of the people's conditions at the time. Apart from enriching the archipelago's body of medical knowledge, Isabelo's study consequently shaped his perception of the prevailing public health system in the colony. In comparison to his intellectual contemporaries who were mostly trained as physicians such as Jose Rizal and T. H. Pardo de Tavera (Mojares, 2006; Chiba, 2020), Isabelo's unconventional method of scholarship provided him the capacity to understand and communicate his concerns regarding the upliftment of Philippine health and medicine in the late nineteenth century.

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[2] Skimming through Isabelo's other ethnographic and historical works reveal various mentions relating to the ways Filipinos then viewed health and medicine. While not deeply examined in this essay, it should be noted that some of these notes are similar to what has been recorded in *El Folk-Lore* (especially the ones coming from Isabelo's *Historia de Ilocos*) and can be further reviewed in future studies.

[3] I primarily read *El Folk-Lore Filipino* with the aid of the published translations made by Salud C. Dizon and Maria Elinora Peralta-Imson for the first volume (1889/1994), and Jean Auguste Dominique Monsod, Anna Marie Sibayan-Sarmiento, Joaquin Lerma, and Aaron Jordan Sta. Maria for the second volume (1890/2021).

More importantly, the insights present in Isabelo's folklore shed light on the ways in which the peoples of the Philippines made sense of what was considered 'medical' then. Since time immemorial, the pursuit of health and medicine has been a common component across different cultures due to the practical need for survival. The communities consulted by Isabelo and his contributors become valuable informants in comprehending how Philippine societies viewed what was 'medical' in the past. This approach can support studies about indigenous perceptions of health and medicine, especially in consideration of the colonial regime's scant attention to the development of medicine beyond Manila up until the last century of Spanish rule (Planta, 2017; Joven, 2012).

2. Caring for the Colony

Similar to any intellectual work, the production of *El Folk-Lore Filipino* dealt with various historical contingencies that inadvertently shaped how Isabelo organized and presented *El Folk-Lore's* contents. As mentioned earlier, the available literature has intensively examined the historical significance of *El Folk-Lore* as a monumental piece of scholarly work for the nascent nationalistic movement flourishing in the Philippines at the time (Mojares, 2006; Thomas, 2012; Anderson, 2013). However, what is of particular interest to this essay is Isabelo's folklore and its relation to the conditions of Philippine medicine by the time the nineteenth century was coming to a close.

There is a need to revisit the seminal work of Jose Bantug (1953), as it delves into the state of Philippine medicine under the Spanish regime. Bantug divides this period into the primitive and modern epochs, ostensibly to separate the two streams of development—despite this development often occurring simultaneously—in Philippine medicine. The primitive epoch deals with the popular and folk sectors of health and medicine. Bantug further categorizes this epoch into periods: first, the mythical (Filipinos first believed in animist gods and goddesses that influenced their health); next, the superstitious (supernatural and magical beings tormented their victims with illnesses); and third, the empiric (medicinal plants in the archipelago were widely utilized and deeply studied by Spanish missionaries who concerned themselves with the natives' wellbeing). Meanwhile, Bantug straightforwardly relates the modern epoch with the colonial regime's establishment of institutions involved in today's professional public health systems (i.e., hospitals, laboratories, vaccination efforts). Through this view, a teleological view of the country's history of medicine is endorsed, only

showcasing the primitive/indigenous epoch as a path toward the modern/Western-oriented epoch that was ushered in by the Spanish regime. From this, it is understandable that recent scholarship has attempted to provide more nuance on this interpretation. For one, Planta (2017) covers a lot of historical ground regarding the development of traditional medicine and pharmacopeia in the Philippines from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In the early centuries of Spanish colonization, foreigners arriving in the Philippines "simply described Filipino traditional medical practices as fascinating and exotic" (Planta, 2017, p. 19). As a result, the Spanish's superficial appreciation of the ways in which the Filipinos originally valued health and medicine led to the colonial regime's concentration of medical services to be around the imperial center of Manila and other urban centers across the archipelago. Concomitantly, the colony's supply of medicine was too reliant on the shipment coming from either the Galleon Trade or the inter-Asian trade network (Joven, 2012; Bantug, 1953).

It also did not help that the health status of Filipinos deteriorated throughout the Spanish colonization of the islands, as evidenced by natives' experience of the violent realities of military conquests and the introduction of Old World diseases like syphilis—both brought about by the arrival of European explorers (Newson, 2009; Labidon, 2012). Moreso, the archipelago constantly faced famines as well as epidemics under Spanish control. The late nineteenth century, in particular, witnessed infectious diseases like smallpox and cholera ravage across Philippine communities, even compelling medical personnel such as Spanish medico José Gomez to say that these diseases can take "a million souls" a day (De Bevoise, 1995, p. 6). Under these conditions, the colonial regime only managed to provide healthcare for the few who were within the vicinity of their medical institutions. For the majority of Filipinos, folk medicine was still the most available option of attending to their health-related problems, largely through the *curanderos* (native faith-healers) and *herbolarios* (herbalists).

It must be noted that the Spanish experienced resistance to their colonial project, with the preaching missionaries—rather than the might of the military—proving more effective in subjugating the native population. In doing so, these missionaries had to respond not only to the spiritual but also to the corporeal demands of the natives, including their health-related needs. This context stands as the reason as to why the Spanish priests became the primary representatives of the colonial regime toward the pursuit of folk medicine. These "spiritual ministers," "and not lay or secular-trained scientists or medical practitioners," were forced to adapt, learn, and master the locals' traditional

medicine (Joven, 2012, p. 172). This development, moreover, eventually coincided with the Spanish empire's realization of the economic value in Philippine plants, thus prodding the Spanish to implant more resources and personnel to the colony for the systematic study of its flora (Planta, 2017; Bankoff, 2011). It is not surprising then, starting from the seventeenth century onwards, that the Spanish priests became the foremost figures for the documentation of Philippine traditional medical knowledge,[4] featuring the likes of Manuel Blanco's *Flora de Filipinas*, Fernando de Sta. Maria's *Medicinas caseras para consuelo de los pobres Indios en las provincias y pueblos donde no hay médicos ni botica* (which was translated to Tagalog in 1883), Gregorio Sanz's *Embrologia Sagrada*, and Pablo Clain's *Remedios Fáciles para Diferentes Infermedades por el P. Pablo Clain de la Compania de Jesus para el alivio, y Socorro de las PP. Ministros Evangelicos de las Doctrinas de los Naturales* (Joven, 2012, p. 178)—interestingly, all four priests were recognized by Isabelo, while discussing medical folklore in his book, for their valuable work (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 10–11, 408–9).

Considering these meager foundations, the nineteenth century ushered in developments that would significantly reshape how the Spanish colonial regime approached the matter of public health in the Philippines. As mentioned above, scholars have regarded the multiple occurrences of cholera and smallpox epidemics in the archipelago as one of the primary motivations for the Spanish to introduce improvements to the colony's health interventions (De Bevoise, 1995; Planta, 2017; Costelo, 2021). To explain why the colonial regime became more mindful of epidemics and its devastating effects in the nineteenth century, the period's socioeconomic transformations, particularly encapsulated by the termination of the Galleon Trade followed by the opening of the Philippines to global trade, not only cut off the Philippines' dependency to Acapulco for its medical supply, but also provided the ripe conditions for virulent contagions to easily spread among a growing population (Joven, 2012, p. 183; Planta, 2017, pp. 57–65). With these challenges posed by a rapidly globalizing world, the Spanish empire then had to swiftly patch up its colonies' public health mechanisms, especially when considering the peninsula's firsthand experience with epidemics in the early eighteenth century that resulted in the creation of the

[4] See, as well, Anderson (2007, pp. 289–93) for a discussion of the Spanish missionaries' direct engagement in the production of scientific knowledge in Spanish-colonial Philippines.

Junta Suprema de Sanidad (Costelo, 2021). Additionally, Costelo delves into the establishment of the "first sanitation institution" in the Philippines at the turn of the nineteenth century as one solution[5] to the epidemic problem:

> By the nineteenth century, organizations like the Junta de Sanidad/ Junta Superior de Sanidad and the Subdelegación de Medicina y Cirugía and the Subdelegación de Farmacia played important role in the advancement of public health discourse and the articulation of the unique environmental realities of the Philippines. In the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, these institutions were composed by military doctors and health professionals. The incorporation of civil health professionals would only begin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Facultad de Medicina y Cirugía of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila started to produce its first medical graduates after the faculty´s establishment in 1871 (Costelo, 2021, pp. 113–14).

As the Spanish invested more into health and medicine, this wave of professionalization served as a catalyst for the colonial regime's deeper influence on the practice of medicine in the Philippines. From these efforts of institutionalization, the nineteenth century saw the creation of posts tailored for medical personnel within the colonial bureaucracy who facilitated its appointments. Moreso, this provided the state the capability to sponsor scientific projects geared toward the betterment of the archipelago's health conditions, with one prominent example being *Topografia medica de las islas Filipinas* (1857) by Antonio Codorniu, a Spanish medical inspector and military doctor employed in the Philippines. Aside from having "enduring appeal" that "would influence a range of medical literature that included advice manuals or *cartillas* on hygiene and even doctoral dissertations on medical geography written in the late 1890s" within Spanish and French universities, Codorniu's work was representative of the "environmentalist" disease causation theory prevailing amongst the circles of European imperial scientists since the eighteenth century (Reyes, 2014, p. 559). This environmentalist perspective was evident in *Topografia medica* through:

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[5] It is also worth mentioning that another solution employed by the Spanish empire was the Royal Marine Vaccine Expedition—also known as the Balmis Expedition—that pursued to inoculate the peoples of the Spanish colonies with the smallpox vaccine in the first decade of the 1800s (Planta, 2017).

> Codorniu's discussion of the characteristic features of a tropical climate; social customs and diet, and differences in physiology, temperament, and even the mental capacity of races and ethnic groups of the Philippine archipelago would, in certain respects, foreshadow much later work written by Europeans on the illnesses of hot countries . . . Codorniu's key point—that environment shaped a people's character, physiology, and adaptability—placed at center stage the dynamics of geography and culture. His related point—that bodies themselves responded differently according to their constitutions, temperament, and geographic locale—introduced an important dimension of racial politics that was imperial in thrust and scope (Reyes, 2014, p. 560).

Apart from these developments, the colonial regime at the time employed Spanish medical professionals and, eventually, trained Filipino students to become licensed white-collar workers (vaccinators, midwives, and physicians) in service of the colony's public health systems (Joven, 2012, p. 183; Planta, 2017, pp. 65–68; Chiba, 2020, pp. 8–17). These changes, nonetheless, were arguably still outweighed by the colonial regime's failure to penetrate the grassroots, with most natives who were residing beyond the colony's urbanized centers still choosing to rely on the *curanderos*, *herbolarios*, *hilots* (traditional midwives), and other practitioners of folk medicine (Planta, 2017, pp. 65–74; Camagay, 1995, pp. 81–98).

The Spanish, however, were aware of this difficulty in reaching out to the natives. Akin to the earlier works of the missionaries on traditional medicine, medical writers in the last two decades of the nineteenth century began publishing *cartillas de higienicas* in the Philippines that acted "as a sort of everyman's medical instruction booklet, a practical and straightforward aid in the recognition and treatment of illnesses" (Reyes, 2014, p. 564). Catering to readers coming from both the health sector and the general public, these *cartillas* followed the environmentalist thinking of disease causation emanating from Europe. It is not surprising, then, that most of these medical manuals were created by Spanish authors. A notable exception was Pardo de Tavera's *Arte de cuidar de enfermos* (1895) that tackled concerns regarding personal hygiene, albeit it was still written in the Spanish language (Reyes, 2014). While these *cartillas* still generally subscribed to the dominant environmentalist view in pathology, their ideas were not monolithically accepted anymore by the burgeoning class of native physicians and pharmacists at the time. After being educated locally at the

University of Santo Tomas and abroad in European medical institutions, Filipino scientists conducted their own experiments to validate the other theories of disease causation emanating from Western science by then, particularly the germ theories of disease from Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch. This ultimately paved the way for Filipinos to begin challenging the hegemonic environmentalist approach of the Spanish toward comprehending and treating diseases by the turn of the century (Reyes, 2014).

These insights, altogether, paint the general conditions of Philippine medicine in the centuries leading up to Isabelo's creation of *El Folk-Lore*. Evidently, Spanish rule left its indelible mark on the production, practice, and dissemination of Philippine medical knowledge since 1565. Under this context, Isabelo and other folklorists were racing to record and preserve the still untainted "traditions, customs, legends, [and] superstitions," "so that later, the scholars could compare them" with the newly-arising practices of folk and professional medicine (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 9). This outlook of Isabelo served as the anchor of his envisioned usage of his folkloric research. Ultimately, he hoped that readers see the merit in the "novelty of the popular customs and beliefs" presented in *El Folk-Lore*, "which are rarely found in books about the Philippines" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 19).

3. Foregrounding Medical Folklore

Writing *El Folk-Lore* took considerable effort from Isabelo to produce the two-volume collection altogether.[6] With tasks ranging from reading the relevant works within the field of folklore to tediously gathering all kinds of folkloric data available to them through archival and field work, the early Filipino folklorists worked with rigor and diligence in order to ensure their data's "faithfulness and sincerity in description" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 19).

Additionally, the pursuit of folklore during these times offered a unique

[6] Credit must also be given to Miguel Zaragoza, Mariano Ponce, Pedro Serrano Laktaw, and Pio Mondragon for their respective article contributions in *El Folk-Lore*. Additionally, Felipe del Pan was crucial not only for encouraging Isabelo to study folklore early on, but also for compiling and submitting his various articles to the 1887 Madrid *Exposición General de las Islas Filipinas*. In the exposition, a silver medal was awarded to Isabelo due to his writings on Philippine folklore (De los Reyes, 1890/2021; Mojares, 2006; Thomas, 2012; De los Reyes, 1886/2014).

opportunity for Isabelo and his cohorts, as the discipline of folklore has only existed in Europe for a few years before the first call for contributors to a "Folk-Lore de Filipinas" was published in *La Oceania Española* on March 25, 1884 (Thomas, 2012; De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 10–11).[7] Being the premier Filipino folklorist then, Isabelo was able to directly address and enter discussions regarding the scholarly nature of folklore. On one hand, it was regarded as a science that studied 'primitive' societies and was closely related to anthropology; while on the other, it was merely a method of archiving traditions and customs that were slowly fading away from societies' collective memories (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 20–23). In response to this dichotomy, Isabelo proposed his own understanding of folklore: "It is that particular task of the folklorist to gather popular data about the illiterate and simple people, which are still unknown" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 25). To illustrate such an approach toward folklore, Isabelo conjures up a hypothetical situation in which an indefatigable folklorist encounters medicine amidst his research:

> Let us suppose that a savage man from the forests of Abra discovers an antidote for the cholera virus, more effective than the anticholera virus of Dr. Ferran [Jaime Ferrán y Clúa]. As folklorist, you would not hesitate to write it down in your folklorist's memo book, would you? Otherwise, folklore would lose a precious gem, since its etymological significance does not exclude the knowledge of the people that may not be traditional. And here you see that folkloric medicine is not always magic as claimed by Mr. Wake [Charles Staniland Wake] (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 25).

Through this example, Isabelo's view on folklore is elucidated as not necessarily being limited to the people's traditional forms of knowledge. Instead, Isabelo also underscored the necessity of documenting folklore originating from contemporary times, as long as it arises from the folk's knowledge and practices (Thomas, 2012, pp. 129–38). This consideration becomes important in examining Isabelo's notes on health and medicine, since his work showcases Philippine folk medicine not only in its traditional but also syncretic forms brought about by three centuries of Spanish colonization. In brief, all kinds of undocumented engagements the people had toward medicine were deemed by

[7] See Megan Thomas's (2012, pp. 101–12) discussion on folklore in the Philippines and in Spain during the nineteenth century.

Isabelo as necessary for recording. Due to health being a significant aspect of people's daily lives, folkloric notes on medicine are scattered across *El Folk-Lore*.

Frankly, Isabelo stated his reason regarding the organization and presentation of *El Folk-Lore Filipino*: "But since I am alone in the preparation of this book, I will adopt a simple division organized according to my opinion and the material at my disposal" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 26). Isabelo stayed true to his words.[8] In both volumes, *El Folk-Lore* followed an outline based on geographical location. The first tome showcased the majority of Isabelo's work on the folklore of areas including the Ilocos region, Zambales, Malabon, and even Pandacan. The second volume featured the contributions of Ponce, Serrano Laktaw, and Mondragon on Bulaqueño, Pampango, and Tayabeño folklore, respectively. Delving more into this kind of geographical folklore, Isabelo—along with his contributors that generally followed this arrangement—organized his numerous notes around the themes of: 1) "religion, mythology, and psychology"; and, 2) "types, customs, and practices" (Mojares, 2006, p. 308). Whenever these folkloric notes went beyond these themes, Isabelo placed them into appendices or miscellaneous sections. Finally, Isabelo allotted special spaces for aspects he deemed were too distinct from the abovementioned themes, such as the particular chapter of Ilocano folklore dedicated to the literary works of Isabelo's mother, Doña Leona Florentino, and another chapter entitled "Administrative Folklore" that told the fictional story of Isio and his experience of working within the colonial government (De los Reyes, 1889/1994; Thomas, 2012, pp. 132–38). Zaragoza's article "about a corpse" during a wake also falls under this distinction, yet Isabelo—believing that "in folklore there should be nothing imaginary"—did not classify Zaragoza's contribution as folklore due to its "more fantastic" portrayal of Visayan customs "to entertain the readers" (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 31–33). Still, Isabelo recognized that what Zaragoza depicted did "exist" (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, p. 31).

Sifting through all these sections reveals an abundance of notes regarding folk medicine in *El Folk-Lore*. In one such obvious case, the appendix to Ilocano folklore contains a whole section on medicinal flora. In the section, Isabelo—

[8] Additionally, Scott (1982, pp. 252–63) and Mojares (2006, pp. 308–13) also provided their own overviews of Isabelo's organization of El Folk-Lore's contents. Mojares (2006, p. 308) observes that Isabelo dreamt "of a total archive" in "the contents of *Folk-Lore Filipino*," yet what turned out was an "eclectic" organization "system he does not quite sustain."

lamenting the lack of time for "such a delicate task"—actually planned to create a whole chapter on *Leechcraft* or "folklore materials on popular medicine" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 407–9). However, Isabelo did not devote an entire large chapter on "medical folklore," despite the many obscure notes about folk medicine present throughout the two volumes. For example, the very first topic of the book's first chapter (Ilocano folklore) is about the *mangmangkik*, which had an ability to "inflict grave illness" as an anito or spirit (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 34–35). Instead of compiling these instances altogether into one chapter, Isabelo followed the organizing pattern set by the Spanish folklorists who mentored him (Thomas, 2012, pp. 105–6). While not framed as the primary subject, health and medicine still contributed a lot to the various chapters on literary stories, superstitions, and customs within the works of Isabelo and the Spanish folklorists (De los Reyes, 1889/1994; Machado, 1884). Due to folk medicine's nearly ubiquitous presence in *El Folk-Lore*, examining its notes surfaces not only what were the primary health-related concerns of the public, but also how Filipinos made sense of and dealt with their illnesses.

3.1. Illness Causation

A central idea to any understanding of medicine is the explanation of what causes such diseases that people attempt to cure across different societies, considering that medicine is "not just a random collection of exotic beliefs and practices but are systems of knowledge" (Tan, 2008, p. 5). Similar to Tan's ethnographic approach on comprehending illness causation in contemporary Philippines, Isabelo's folkloric notes also highlight the folk's explanation of disease contraction during the Spanish colonial era. While Tan's proposed illness causation theories[9] can be observed in *El Folk-Lore*, it is, at best, a guiding framework for those interested in tracing back the persisting practices of folk medicine in present-day communities of the country. Nevertheless, Isabelo's accounts on folk medicine that explain illnesses still tell a lot about the health-seeking behaviors of and the construction of what was 'medical' for Filipinos then.

[9] According to Tan (2008, pp. 29, 55, 76), the medical cultures of Filipinos tend to explain illness causation through three types: (1) mystical theories of illness that have "impersonal" causes; (2) personalistic theories of illness that can be traced back to a "causative agent"; (3) naturalistic theories of illness that are not "supernatural" yet derived from "natural forces.

Across *El Folk-Lore*, it is easy to identify the many mentions of illnesses being caused by both supernatural and natural sources. For one, folk beliefs toward religion reveal how intertwined medicine is with the Filipinos' view and worship of higher beings, especially with practices originating from precolonial times. As mentioned earlier, the tree spirit *mangmangkik*—Isabelo believed it to be an old *anito* (animist gods of the natives)—possessed the power to "inflict grave illness" on those who fail to pay respect to the forest's primary inhabitants (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 33–35). Similarly, those hailing from Ilocos Norte[10] also believed in another *anito*, the *sangkabagi*, that can "[inflict] evil" if its expectations are not properly appeased. In comparison to the *mangmangkik*, the *sangkabagi* is more vengeful toward "those who scorn and reject them," due to its acts ranging from dragging their victims on the floor, snatching their livers, or even commanding termites (*anay*) to destroy their targets' food and belongings (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 39). At the same time, those who befriend the *sangkabagi* are rewarded favorably, such as the *sangkabagi*'s supplying of special roots that can "cure any sickness" to their friends. Seeing how these supernatural beings can quickly and gravely affect one's health, folk medicine then becomes concerned not only with the care for one's corporeal state, but also with the intangible aspects of everyday life.

Beyond Ilocos, other instances representing this notion can also be mined from *El Folk-Lore*.[11] Based on the stories of an elderly man, Pedro Serrano's account of Mt. Sinukuan of Arayat, Pampanga and its capability of bringing death and disease to those who attempt to enter and disrupt the mountain's possessions without the "favor" of its residing god Sukú is a prominent example. According to Pedro Serrano's story, young men—who picked fruits from Mt. Sinukuan without reciting a prayer for permission—began to shriek in pain induced by throat inflammations before being "horribly disfigured" for their lack

[10]In Ilocos Sur, the Ilocanos residing there believe instead in the *katatao-an*, an *anito* that travels on a flying boat (*barañgay*) in search for corpses. As a result, "Ilocanos watch over their dead before burying them" to avoid the *katatao-an* (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 37).

[11] Other examples include a mystical forest in Camarines Sur that functioned similarly to Mt. Sinukuan in Arayat, Pampanga and the presence of an *anayo* (nymph) in Tayabas that disciplines people who fail to pay respect to spirits—especially those who go to seldomly visited rivers (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 277, 273). On another note, even animals, like owls and other birds, are treated as sources of mystically-occurring illnesses (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 103).

of respect (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 173–79). Interestingly, Isabelo vividly recalled his experience from 1880 in which the passengers of a boat going to Manila "were asked to kneel down and pray in front of a rock" near Zambales; noncompliance would result in sickness once they dock (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 59). In spite of the temporal gap between these two events, the persistence of this belief in the potency of supernatural beings and mystical forces to bring about illness signify its continuation across generations of natives. Amidst the backdrop of three centuries of Spanish rule, this prevalence of folk explanations to illnesses—largely grounded from the relationship between the body and its environment—shows how the colonial enterprise of engendering "a significant re-inscription of the [native's] body through a reformatting of physical geography" was not a singular experience throughout the archipelago (Bautista & Planta, 2009, p. 150). Moreso, even the Spanish—particularly its missionaries—were not always quick to understand the value of the environment in the natives' folk knowledge regarding their bodies and their health. To make sense of what they deemed were 'primitive' beliefs and customs, these missionaries relied on their own superstitions, like introducing the idea of the "Devil" and its ability to possess pagan bodies as an explanation to natives who appeared to be severely ill (De los Reyes, 1886/2014).

While the flesh was indeed a focal point for the colonizers, it was difficult for them to not also pay attention to the 'spirit' of the native. The advent of Spanish rule found an important avenue for its proselytizing efforts in the indigenous population's belief in the soul, since missionaries had at their disposal an idea that was already familiar to both sides. According to Isabelo, "Ilocanos knew the existence of a kind of soul because up to now they believe that an incorporeal thing called *karkarma* is innate in man"; later on, he also declared that "the soul of the Catholic is called *karkarma* in Ilocano," thus directly comparing the two conceptualizations of the body's spirit (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 71–73). Regarding their similarities, the two belief systems both view the immaterial soul as apart from the physical body, but not completely unaffected by the experiences of its counterpart. To illustrate, Christian doctrine teaches its followers that the body is the vessel of the soul, and one must take care of the former to nourish the latter. Meanwhile, Ilocanos believed that "when one becomes crazy or deeply pensive," that person's *karkarma* "was lost somewhere." Despite these alignments, Isabelo highlighted a different view on the soul by the Ilocanos, with Ilocanos believing that the dead's spirit—called *a-alia/araria/anio-as*—was able to go to around the material world "from the third to the ninth day of his death" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 71). In contrast to Christianity's idea of the purgatory for

the postmortem soul, the perpetuation of the *a-alia/araria/anio-as* up to the nineteenth century serves as a reminder for the complex terrain that the religious conversion of Filipinos took place on, as exemplified by varying degrees of reception, co-optation, and resistance across different aspects of society (Rafael, 1988).[12]

3.2. Medicinal Flora

Jumping off from the ideas of Mr. Blak (William George Black, author of *Folk-Medicine: A Chapter in the History of Culture* published in 1883),[13] Isabelo advocated for folklore to not only simply learn about the past of folk medicine, but also to "enrich" it (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 423). For the Ilocano folklorist, this translated to a need for the documentation of Philippine plants, their scientific and local names, and their medicinal uses, with Isabelo already planning to go over sources that were left untapped by Blanco and other missionaries who wrote on medicine. This was what Isabelo desired for his unaccomplished *Leechcraft* project. Despite *Leechcraft* never coming to fruition, *El Folk-Lore* still featured data on locally utilized medicinal plants across its two volumes, indicating again these plants' value for natives who lived far away from the colonial state's medical institutions.[14]

Why was Isabelo so convinced in the capacity of plants and trees to see that there is a need to complement its scientific understanding? Folklore's method of gathering data from people's firsthand experiences allowed Isabelo to directly observe how medicinal flora improved the health conditions of his fellow countrymen. In one case, Isabelo recalls two women he personally knew that were

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[12] On the other hand, the Catholic view of the soul was also very much entrenched into the medical culture of Filipinos then, such as the missionaries' introduction of the troublesome *duende*, *tianak*, and *tikbalang* as spawning from the soul of an aborted fetus or the spread of the practice of praying over and recommending the soul of a dying person to God and his saints (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 127, 245).

[13] William George Black's book was translated into Spanish by Antonio Machado, one of Isabelo's folklorist mentors from Spain. This translated version was published in 1889 as *Medicina popular, un capitulo en la historia de la cultura*. It is possible that Isabelo learned about Black's work from the materials that Machado likely gave to him (Thomas, 2012, p. 110).

[14] See Isabelo's section on "medicine and flora" under Ilocano Folk-Lore for a concentrated example of how these folklorists recorded folk practices relating to medicinal plants (De los Reyes, 1899/1994, pp. 422–25).

healed by Ilocano herbalists only "after the doctors had given up" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 423).[15] This example becomes more remarkable as the herbalists were still taken to court despite their help, all because one of the treated women was the wife of a Spaniard. Isabelo does not mention the outcome of the herbalists' court trials anymore, but his point stands: in light of the forces that aim to discredit it, medicinal flora is essential to further develop medical science. This makes more sense for Isabelo to believe in it, after personally seeing the ineffectiveness of some roots, given to him by his Tinguian friend, that were promised to make anyone fall in love when applied to that person (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 81).[16] With different plants producing different results, the need for a systematic review of the indigenous population's understanding of these medicinal plants was present in Isabelo's folklore. Additionally, some mentions of medicinal plants in *El Folk-Lore* included the plants' scientific names due to the rise of Linnaean taxonomy in the 18th century.

And so *El Folk-Lore* attempted to record and preserve prominent specimens of medicinal flora and its application across different towns of the Philippines. Isabelo saw that the Spanish colonial state was not completely willing to recognize the merits of Philippine folk medicine. Thus, *El Folk-Lore*'s accounts of medicinal plants serves as a legitimization of the value of indigenous knowledge as a form of science, especially in the face of the hegemonic science of Western medicine espoused by the Spanish in the colony. As Planta (2017, p. 74) has argued, the native *herbolario* also provided the basic medical demands of the archipelago's population—usually apart from the ambit of the state. And in their arsenal, these herbalists relied on plants and trees to cure their patients, such as the duhat/lomboy (*Syzygium cumini*) which cures stomach aches and the ligas (*Semecarpus anacardium*[17]) which treats the *baklay*, a strain of measles (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 423; 1890/2021, p. 329). Up until today, these plants are

[15] See also Ma. Mercedes Planta's (2017, pp. 69–74) discussion on Filipino *herbolarios* in the nineteenth century.

[16] Additionally, there are other mentions of "love grass" (gayuma in Tagalog and *tagiroot* in Ilocano) in the second volume (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 95, 277).

[17] While *El Folk-Lore* identifies the ligas tree as *Semecarpus anacardium*, modern taxonomy regards it as a different species, namely as *Semecarpus cuneiformis.*

documented to have healing properties through ethnopharmacology.[18] Another notable example mentioned in *El Folk-Lore* is the betel plant (*Piper betle*). According to Isabelo, one use of the betel plant was by healers that tried to relieve a child of its high fever. Moreover, "sorcerers" also made betel nut leaves jump around in the pot, after also including lemon and cloves, for its curative brew (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 213; 1890/2021, p. 315). Regardless how discordant these accounts were in portraying the *herbolario*, the betel plant remains relevant to Filipinos today.[19] From then until now, *El Folk-Lore* has contributed to the better understanding of Philippine medicinal flora and, to an extent, the upliftment of living conditions in the archipelago.

3.3. Folk Healers

Needless to say, any discussion of folk medicine abounds with folk healers as one of its primary actors. In the case of *El Folk-Lore*, Megan Thomas (2012, pp. 129–30) has already elucidated upon the topic of folk healers in relation to the contemporary nature of Isabelo's folklore, pointing out that "De los Reyes decried charlatans who practiced as healers . . . [by pretending] to have healing skills or powers but in fact simply duped the common people for their own benefit." This sentiment was not entirely unique to Isabelo's time, with an 1859 article in the periodical *Ilustracion Filipina* already casting a bad light onto the *mediquillo*[20] for their deceptive healing practices not founded on Western medical science—even describing the *mediquillo* as "one of the plagues with which God wanted to afflict the miserable mortals, in the blessed Philippine land, besides the vagaries, thunders and tremors" ("El Tio Nadie," 1859, p. 121). The folk healer's exploitative quality for Isabelo, going back to Thomas, was "quite

[18] With its search engine, the Philippine Traditional Knowledge Digital Library on Health (PTKDLH), jointly operated by the Department of Science and Technology - Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (DOST-PCHRD), Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (PITAHC), and University of the Philippines Manila (UPM), possesses records on the contemporary usages of the duhat/lomboy and ligas trees as medicinal flora (PTKDLH, 2016a; PTKDLH, 2016b).

[19] Similarly, the betel plant is also richly documented for its medical usage by contemporary Filipinos (PTKDLH, 2016c).

[20] A local folk healer usually identified as a quack doctor by Spanish officials (Joven, 2012, p. 183).

unlike the ancient *babailan* and *katalonan* (healers, priests or priestesses, or shamans) who were authentic figures of the ancient religion." Thomas's arguments, however, are only valid up to a point, if we are to consider other insights. On one hand, the existence of quack healers does not entail the nonexistence of folk healers who were actually trusted by the people for their capabilities in providing medical care, especially if we expand our understanding of a folk healer not only resembling a "doctor" (in the modern sense of the word). *Hilots* in the late nineteenth century were still preferred by native women over the *matronas titulares* (licensed midwives), largely because these *hilots* were already known to the community that the patient was a part of. Additionally, these hilots "administered post-partum care to the mother and even helped in the household chores until such time that the mother regained her strength" (Camagay, 1995, pp. 93–94). On the other hand, Thomas's interpretation of Isabelo's appreciation of the *babailan/katalonan* seems to be too simplistic. While Isabelo clearly traced the historical roots of nineteenth century-era folk healers to these ancient Filipino shamans (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 41, 67, 83, 281, 461), the Ilocano folklorist also showed the nonlinear reception of the *babailan/katalonan* who were "not well-liked" and only "remembered when some great disaster occurred" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 461). And comparing them to their male counterparts, these healer-priestesses possessed similar qualities to that of a charlatan, only overpowering the males with the "surprising verbosity of said women" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 281). While still serving as an important pillar of precolonial society, the babailan/katalonan was not immune to the disdain of certain Filipinos then—an experience that is not completely afar from what was experienced by folk healers during Isabelo's time.

It is not surprising, then, that the conversion efforts of Spanish missionaries were mostly effective in displacing the ancient healer-priestess from her place as the community's primary figure for health and medicine. Some assimilated into the colonial order through co-optation of newly introduced beliefs, while others rejected and revolted against the Spanish. Still, there are some *babailan/katalonan* who were able to maintain their precolonial status and ways because of the colonizers' failure to reach their communities (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 459–63; Salazar, 1996). Given this tripartite trajectory of the *babailan/katalonan*, the stage was set for a dynamic folk medicine scene under Spanish rule, especially with the entry of novel actors like Spanish missionaries who dabbled in the study of Philippine folk medicine (Planta, 2017; Joven, 2012). Beyond these consecrated men, this religious conversion imparted another set of actors that deeply seeped into the health-seeking behaviors of the Filipino people then: the

holy figures of Christianity. Primarily, the holy family of Jesus Christ, Mary, and Joseph figured heavily in practices relating to folk medicine, particularly in times when a person nears death; beyond these three, Filipinos also worshiped saints to avoid or heal from specific illnesses. According to Isabelo, people prayed to St. Vincent Ferrer for their sick children, while epidemics were dealt with by parading the image of St. Roque in a procession (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 109, 167, 177; 1890/2021, pp. 247, 279). Despite these new personalities entering Philippine folk medicine, the practice of attributing health to supernatural persons or forces has already been prevalent among precolonial Filipinos. Ultimately, this new, syncretic form of folk medicine was undeniably shaped by the interacting desires of (1) the Spanish missionary to efficiently convert the local population, (2) the folk healer to stay relevant amidst the changing society, and (3) the native patient to simply remain healthy.

Beyond these undeniably important matters of the folk healers' charlatanism and evolution across centuries of Spanish rule, *El Folk-Lore* also provides a few sketches of the daily life of folk healers and how they carry on with their work during Isabelo's time. In Pio Mondragon's "Folk-Lore Tayabeño," a dedicated section on medicine features a lengthy conversation between a *mediquillo* and his patients during a house call.[21] Through the dialogue, the section showcases some of the routinary acts performed by the folk healer in his work, such as checking the patient's body and pulses, providing an instantaneous diagnosis and prescription, and even grandly declaring their certainty in the patient's recovery thanks to the will of God (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 330–37). This last act has a slight variation in *Ilustracion Filipina's mediquillo* story. Instead of crediting God, the folk doctor simply announces "it is nothing" in ensuring the sick's recuperation ("El Tio Nadie," 1859, p. 122).

Aside from these customs, Mondragon's account also exhibits an important skill of the *mediquillo*—his observative nature. Prior to the consultation, the *mediquillo* tells the patients that he cannot enter the house immediately, for he might spread a disease that he could have contracted outside. As to how this idea came to him, it was from his experience of seeing a sickly man vomiting before going home to his otherwise healthy son, who suddenly started vomiting as well thirty minutes upon the *mediquillo's* arrival. The encounter only occurred a day

[21] Another version of a "house call" that folk healers did then was the act of accompanying their patients to places they have visited in order to find their lost *karkarma*/soul (De los Reyes, 1899/1994, pp. 70–71).

prior to the folk doctor's house visit, yet he was able to quickly incorporate it into his medical practice. Meanwhile, *Ilustracion Filipina* depicts a *mediquillo's* keen attention to his surroundings in a manner that keeps in line with its scathing critique of the folk healer. In the story, the *mediquillo* keeps his ears open to ideas coming from the murmurs of the crowd overwatching his patient, especially when these people mention their past encounters with prescriptions from other folk doctors. As such, this mixed reception to the *mediquillo*—despite having general traits—points toward a spectrum of health-seeking experiences for the Filipinos in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This range requires further nuance when considering the contingencies when encountering different folk healers such as the *hilots*, the *tauak/tawak* (those who can heal snake bites),[22] the *sohi/suhi* (those who can remove fish bones stuck in one's throat), among others (De los Reyes, 1890/2021, pp. 113–21, 286–87, 308–309). Through *El Folk-Lore*, a slight glimpse into the complex realities of Philippine folk medicine and its primary actors is provided, further showcasing what were considered as part of the "medical" by Filipinos in their daily lives then.

FIG 1. *A sketch depicting a Philippine mediquillo by the latter half of the nineteenth century (Andrews, 1859, p. 122). Accessed through Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica.*

[22] See Emmanuel Jayson Bolata's (2022, pp. 409–54) study of the tawak as a cure for venomous bites, along with its other meanings.

4. Beyond El Folk-Lore Filipino

Considering the abundance of Isabelo's notes on Philippine folk medicine, one may wonder about the reception of *El Folk-Lore* amongst individuals or groups who may be interested in the subject matter during that period, such as the rising class of Filipino healthcare professionals in the late nineteenth century (Chiba, 2020). On this matter, interestingly, the introductory pages of *El Folk-Lore*'s first volume provide an insight on how Isabelo's endeavors for folklore was perceived by none other than a medical doctor. A few months after the March 1885 press release of Isabelo's call for contributors that were willing to conduct their own folkloric research, there was only a limited response to the call which prompted Dr. Jose La Calle y Sanchez (writing under the nom de guerre *Astoll*)—a professor at the Facultad de Medicina y Cirugía at the University of Santo Tomas who published in 1886 an ethnographic book entitled *Tierras y Razas del Archipiélago Filipino*[23]—to react somewhat ambivalently:

> A learned son of the country wrote about the usefulness of undertaking (folkloric) studies and did not hesitate to go on courageously with all his efforts. Only the press helped the good purposes of the founder, but the steps it took met with the same success like those taken by others before in the name of culture. That is why Filipino folklore cannot be established. Neglect and indifference together with everybody's indolence hamper this endeavor (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 13).

Dr. La Calle, in correspondence with Isabelo through the press, later on declared that he will "contribute what I know to the study of folklore which you are undertaking with great care" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 13). For *Astoll*, a medical physician serving in the Philippines' only faculty of medicine at the time, to view folklore as an "institution [that is] destined to serve as the *museum where scholars can study in the future* the past of these peoples [emphasis in original]" (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, p. 15), it is probable that other members of the medical community—be it Dr. La Calle's university colleagues or other

[23] La Calle's book formed a part of a larger project focused on the medical geography of the Philippines, which was never fully finished. Interestingly, *Tierras y Razas* was also recognized—along with Isabelo—in the 1887 Madrid *Exposición General de las Islas Filipinas* as a book that was worth reading (*Exposición General de las Islas Filipinas: Guía*, 1887, p. 50).

professionals—also became interested in Isabelo's work and, to a more specific extent, its coverage on folk medicine.

While Dr. La Calle's exact thoughts on *El Folk-Lore's* notes on folk medicine may never be known, it was not completely rare for Filipino medical doctors in the late nineteenth century to take notice of and appraise the practice of folk medicine, with Pardo de Tavera and Rizal being prime examples (Mojares, 2006). In Pardo de Tavera's case, Resil Mojares finds a commonality between the views of the renowned doctor and Isabelo, claiming that Pardo de Tavera "staunchly advocated the regulation and professionalization of medicine yet was cognizant of the value of "pre-scientific" knowledge and practices." Furthermore, Pardo de Tavera "distinguished between folk knowledge and popular quackery, blaming some of the latter on Spanish authors of popular medicine (as did Isabelo de los Reyes in his work on Philippine superstitions)" (Mojares, 2006, p. 213). Unfortunately (and similarly to Dr. La Calle), Pardo de Tavera did not translate these particular thoughts of his into much writing, with him writing medical treatises instead like the aforementioned *Arte de cuidar de enfermos.*

There is, however, *Plantas medicinales de Filipinas* (1892)—Pardo de Tavera's monumental contribution to the comprehension of an essential aspect of Philippine folk medicine which was published only a few years after *El Folk-Lore*. Planta (2023, p. 74) contends that Pardo de Tavera's *Plantas medicinales de Filipinas* stands third in line of the significant works studying Philippine traditional medicinal plants, following the contributions of Francisco Ignacio Alcína's chapter on medicinal plants in his *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* and Blanco's *Flora de Filipinas* released in 1668 and 1837, respectively. Additionally, Planta (2023, p. 74) also remarks that Pardo de Tavera's is "a remarkable work, notable for being both financed and meticulously crafted by a Filipino with an exceptional educational background who also happened to be a colonial subject." Comparing Pardo de Tavera's *Plantas medicinales de Filipinas* to Isabelo's work, it is quite clear that financial support was one key factor in determining the production of intellectual works back then. Isabelo did not receive funding for his folkloric research on medicinal flora, thus the nonfulfillment of his envisioned *Leechcraft* project. Moreover, it is lamentable that there is a lack of documented collaboration between Isabelo and Pardo de Tavera on the subject of plants and trees. The two make no mention of each other in their respective works on folk medicine. In comparison, the two scholars have dabbled intellectually with one another in the fields of linguistics and history, while also sharing a few interactions surrounding their personal and political lives—with Pardo de Tavera publicly voicing out his "low regard for Isabelo's

intellectual abilities" during the advent of the American colonial period (Mojares, 2006, p. 342).[24] Moreover, *El Folk-Lore* did not mention Pardo de Tavera's earlier work "La médecine à l'île de Luçon [Medicine on the island of Luzon]" that was published in 1886 (Chamberlain, 1903, p. 119). Nevertheless, it is worth noting the similarities between *El Folk-Lore Filipino* and *Plantas medicinales de Filipinas*: both were published by the last decade of the nineteenth century; both were influenced and supported by Western science and institutions; and despite this hegemonic background, both managed not only to assert the value of Philippine folk medicine (Anderson, 2000; Planta, 2023), but also planted the seeds for botany as a science that future Filipinos can meaningfully contribute to, as exemplified by Eduardo Quisumbing later on (Gutierrez, 2018; Menzies, 2021).

In a similar fashion, Rizal was another physician that paid attention to folk medicine, yet he never took notice of Isabelo's notes on folk medicine. There have been interactions between the two intellectuals as they appraised one another's works, with the most prominent one being published on the October 31, 1890 issue of *La Solidaridad*. In the issue, Rizal responded to Isabelo's comments on his annotations of the chronicles of Antonio de Morga, ultimately encapsulating Rizal's lowly view on Isabelo's lacking scholarship and "excessive Ilocanism" (Mojares, 2006, p. 342). Additionally, through Rizal, we get to know that Ferdinand Blumentritt was also aware of Isabelo and his works, even translating some of them into German for their publication in the European journals *Ausland* and *Globus* (Mojares, 2006, pp. 343–44; Thomas, 2012, p. 102). Nevertheless, the closest we get to the intersection of the works of Rizal and Isabelo in the medical field lies in Rizal's 1895 medical treatise entitled *La Curacion de los Hechizados*. *Apuntes hechos para el estudio de la Medicina Filipina*.[25] A psychiatric article in nature, Rizal discusses "the psychodynamics and treatment of mentally ill patients, then believed to be possessed by a witch" in this piece, upon the request of the Spanish medical officer Benito Francia (Santiago, 1995, p. 64). Although it is a short piece, Rizal's training in the medical arts is evident in *La Curacion*, as he believed that the supposed possessions can be explained through suggestion or auto-suggestion. Fittingly, Rizal also proposed that the solution to this 'illness' is through "counter-suggestion" in order "to displace the suggestion by another suggestion" (Santiago, 1995, p. 70). Whilst an

[24] For these encounters, Mojares (2006) covers a lot of ground: on the intellectual, see pp. 294, 296, 300–302; on the personal and political, see pp. 272, 282, 333, 342, 351. It remains to be seen if Isabelo's personal relationship with Pardo de Tavera was affected by Isabelo's friendship with Juan Luna.

interesting piece on illness causation, Rizal's work was written much later on compared to *El Folk-Lore*. No more exchanges between Rizal and Isabelo would arise in the years prior to Rizal's execution, with Isabelo's eulogy for Rizal published in the April 15, 1899 issue of the Spanish magazine *La Revista Blanca* being the only one existing after.

Finally, there is also the need to look into the reception of *El Folk-Lore's* discussion on folk medicine during the period of US rule in the Philippines, especially since Isabelo remained active in the colony's political scene in the first decades of the twentieth century. Regrettably, no direct engagement came to Isabelo's folk medicinal notes, with the closest being Alexander Francis Chamberlain's[26] annotated bibliography on Philippine folklore which mentions *El Folk-Lore* "[containing] much interesting information" (Chamberlain, 1903, p. 119). Due to its generalized description, one could only wonder if Chamberlain had noticed the book's content on folk medicine. Within the same publication, Chamberlain lists down other folkloric works that discuss medicine and superstitions, thus hinting at his interest in the popular practices of medicine in the Philippines then. Furthermore, the earlier publication "Filipino Medical Folk-Lore" by Chamberlain (1901) stands as proof again to the anthropologist's curiosity on Philippine folk medicine. Yet, "Filipino Medical Folk-Lore" does not recount Isabelo's work at all, instead focusing solely on Dr. Philip F. Harvey's[27] 1901 article "Native Medical Practice in the Philippines, with Introductory Observations" and its discussion of folk medicinal practices by the Moros and other groups in Mindanao. As shown by these works, there are little to no materials covering folk medicine that attempted to engage with Isabelo's book during the American colonial period in the Philippines. Altogether, there was a relatively minimal reception to the ideas regarding folk medicine present in *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, be it from the medical community or not.

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[25] The article also contained Rizal's drawings that portrayed different scenes in Philippine folk medicine, such as the *hilot* caring over a patient, an individual worrying about superstitions related to head lice, among others (Santiago, 1995, p. 65).

[26] Chamberlain is known for receiving in 1891 the first doctorate degree in anthropology in the United States, being trained under the guidance of Franz Boas, another renowned anthropologist (Gilbertson, 1914, p. 338).

[27] Harvey was the chief surgeon of the Department of Mindanao and Jolo under the US colonial state at the time of his article's publication (Harvey, 1901, p. 203).

5. Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated the richness in the content of Isabelo de los Reyes's *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, leading to *El Folk-Lore* being overlooked for its contributions to the understanding of Philippine folk medicine and for local knowledge to be seen on the same level as the hegemonic science of the Western world. Through scattered mentions across his data, Isabelo—despite not being a part of the burgeoning medical community in late nineteenth century Philippines—left behind significant accounts on Philippine folk medicine that can help recreate how Filipinos in the past understood illness causation and dealt with medicinal flora and folk healers. In light of the available historiography on Isabelo de los Reyes and folk medicine in the Philippines, this rereading of *El Folk-Lore* not only provides new pieces of information hitherto untapped by former researchers, but also attempts to place more nuance on some claims made in past studies. Moreover, *El Folk-Lore's* intellectual contributions to folk medicine presents the case of Isabelo de los Reyes as an interesting Filipino figure who served as another trailblazer in the development of a Philippine botanical science, with Isabelo being unique in his scientific approach through folklore.

However, there is still a need to delve deeper into the minimal reception of *El Folk-Lore's* notes on folk medicine by Isabelo's contemporaries. It could be due to the simple fact that *El Folk-Lore* was not written as part of the medical literature, thus setting him apart from his contemporaries that came from the medical discipline like Rizal and Pardo de Tavera. Moreover, this resulted in readers from or interested in the health sector not paying attention to Isabelo's work at the time. This helps explain why there have been few scholarly works paying attention to the contributions of Isabelo de los Reyes in the field of medicine, with his notes regarding folk medicine only beginning to be surfaced in the twenty-first century by the likes of Thomas and Mojares. Nevertheless, the few interactions that *El Folk-Lore* had with other folk medicinal works released during that time does not diminish the merit of Isabelo's findings regarding the health-seeking traditions and customs of Filipinos then. *El Folk-Lore* finds its merit in two things: first, it served as a platform for Isabelo to air out his critique on the shortcomings of both the colonial state in addressing the healthcare needs of the Filipinos as well as the natives' tendency to take advantage of others through folk medicine; second and more importantly, it provides folkloric material for future researchers, including our generation, to understand the Filipino's past—which would have been lost to time if not for the folklorists' intervention.

For contemporary researchers of Isabelo de los Reyes, folk medicine, or folklore and medicine separately, there is much more to uncover in *El Folk-Lore Filipino* that has not been included or may have been overlooked in this essay. For one, there might be errors in the translated copies of *El Folk-Lore* used for this paper. On the other hand, others have begun taking note of the value of looking for records of medicinal plants and practices in folklore archives (Sile et al., 2020), and this can be done better in the Philippine case by simultaneously digging more into and expanding beyond Isabelo's folkloric work. To illustrate, a prevalent theme of folk medicine in *El Folk-Lore* that should be further investigated is the matter of maternal and child health, with many subsections dedicated to the popular practices relating to pregnancy, child growth, and even spirits interacting with the mother and the child. This theme in *El Folk-Lore* becomes relevant due to its continuation in childbearing practices still present in contemporary times, such as the idea that a newly-born baby's umbilical cord should be cut with wood and not steel nor iron (De los Reyes, 1889/1994, pp. 206–7). Almost a century later, Dr. Juan Flavier (1970, p. 44) relates in *Doctor to the Barrios* his experience in dealing with the barrio people's usage of a piece of bamboo called 'buho' in the cutting of umbilical cords during childbirths, for this leads to neonatal tetanus. Due to his Western-oriented scientific background, Flavier ordered for the stoppage of using the buho and instead replaced them with scissors, thinking that this will solve the tetanus problem. Not only did it fail to stop the problem, but Flavier shares that the buho was still in use by the barrio women. Upon learning more about the barrio's beliefs, the doctor found that:

> The barrio [believes] that when an unnatural instrument, such as a pair of scissors, is used in the delivery of a baby the child will become disloyal to the family. A child must be delivered by something that is indigenous to the barrio. Buho satisfied that requirement since bamboo grows in the barrio.
>
> Eventually, we found that the buho was more readily available and sharper than the scissors. Furthermore, it was free (Flavier, 1970, pp. 44–45).

In light of this newfound knowledge, Flavier's team then suggested that the barrio people should boil the buho first in order to disinfect it before usage—this solved the healthcare problem while also keeping in mind the cultural beliefs of the community. Through this example, one can see the parallels between the practices of the barrio people in Flavier's story and Isabelo's observation on the

usage of wood to cut the umbilical cord during delivery. Perhaps there are more comparisons to be made among Isabelo's folklore and Philippine society's continuing practices in contemporary times. Ultimately, we see that what was considered as 'medical' then for Filipinos—be it in the realm of illness causation, medicinal flora, folk healing, or even maternal and child health—still affects our modern perception of what the 'medical' truly means for our culture.

6. Acknowledgments

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