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INTERVIEW

Social Science Diliman
Conversations with Social Scientists:

Sociologist Maruja Milagros Billones Asis, PhD

Sojourns of a Filipino Migration Scholar

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Humble Beginnings

JOC: I would like to know your early career as a young sociologist. How did you become a sociologist?

MMBA: Actually, the first program I got into was biology at UP Iloilo. My parents wanted me to become a doctor. It was their dream, and I thought that it was a good idea, but then, it was not really for me.

After my second year, I came to UP Diliman to study sociology, and I liked the course. My first sociology professor was Mamoru Tsuda. He was a very young instructor at that time. I still remember one of the reference materials, *Invitation to Sociology* by Peter Berger. I really liked that book and it convinced me that I made the right decision in shifting to sociology. I finished my bachelors in 1979. In my last semester, I had my very first job; I was a research aide for a project of Dr. Armando Bonifacio about Filipino ideology.

In June 1979, I was accepted as a research assistant for a project on the Philippines 2000 at the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies (PCAS), now the Asian Center. I was very lucky to have Dr. Serafin Talisayon as my boss. One of our tasks was to conduct key informant interviews. I remember part of the list was the late Fidel V. Ramos, who later became our President. Since I was already working in PCAS, I thought I might as well pursue Asian Studies (which was in the same

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building). Unfortunately, by July 1979, PCAS folded up.

JOC: So, did you enroll in Asian Studies?

MMBA: I did, but only for one semester. The late Dean Ajit Singh Rye and Prof. Silvino Epistola were my professors. I can still recall Prof. Rye, who talked about the different Asian responses to the coming of Western powers: the Japanese response, the Chinese response, the Indian response.

When PCAS was abolished, my former sociology professor, Prof. Ester Dela Cruz, told me about an opening at the UP Population Institute (UPPI). At UPPI (which was then located in Padre Faura), I did a literature review of the state of fertility research in the Philippines. I clicked immediately with Dely Alcantara, my boss, who had newly arrived from the East-West Center in Hawaii. The project with Dely was just for three months, but an opening for a research assistant for the 1980 Community Outreach Survey came up. I stayed on in UPPI. Dely suggested that I enroll in the Master of Arts in Demography program. It was possible to study because classes were after 5:00 p.m., so I shifted from Asian Studies to Demography.

JOC: Where were you assigned?

MMBA: I supervised the fieldwork in Cebu, Antique, and Cotabato. Before the fieldwork, I assisted in training the fieldworkers, with Dely as the primary trainer. The 1980 nationwide survey, which was implemented by Consumer Pulse, was one of the big market research companies back then. The experience was good training in doing fieldwork, especially the conduct of a survey. There was no Google, thus, it was quite a challenge to locate the field sites where the team was doing the interviews. While I received general information on where the team was, I had to figure out details, such as local transportation. Since the field sites were outside the capital city, we normally stayed in the sampled areas. I had many memorable experiences of those times, especially the fieldwork in Mindanao. This was during martial law. In one field site, the military asked what we were doing in the area, and we had to deal with the security concerns of our respondents. Among others, they wondered why we wanted to know about the members of the household and their personal details. I worked in UPPI from 1979 to early 1981.

Thereafter, I got the opportunity to work at the Population Center Foundation (PCF), now called the Philippine Center for Population and Development or PCCD. My boss at PCF was Marissa Camacho. I was assigned to the Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) project. I prepared abstracts of population-related reports and articles, and sent these to subscribers based on their interest or sphere of work in the field of population.

JOC: How was the foundation funded? Through donations?

MMBA: The foundation was headed by First Lady Imelda Marcos. At the time, the population program (specifically the family planning program) was well-funded by international organizations. PCF supported the programs of the Commission on Population (PopCom). Working in PCF allowed me to grow. My work entailed dealing with regional directors and staff of PopCom and other population

stakeholders, informing them about PCF's projects and trying to understand their information needs. I had my first exposure to research dissemination and research utilization workshops at PCF. We were also encouraged to attend research workshops. A very important learning I got from PCF was how to write well. For the SDI project, our abstracts were reviewed by a team of editors. Our editors were tough, but I certainly learned about the writing process. Initially though, the tough comments were discouraging. We had main assignments, but we also got involved with other projects. PCF produced many knowledge products, which included magazines, training materials, videos, and the like. Our division was in charge of producing the yearly population quiz show. We would help write and review the questions and answers for the quiz show.

JOC: Wow, was this shown on TV?

MMBA: It was shown on Channel 7, I think. I can still recall having a young Sharon Cuneta as a guest in the quiz show. During my time in PCF, we provided staff support to the 1981 international conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) that was held in Manila because the president of the organization then was Dr. Mercedes Concepcion, the dean of the UPPI. My experiences in PCF helped me to grow.

I continued my MA in Demography while I was in PCF. It was hard to juggle work and studies. Back then, the MA program at UPPI required passing a comprehensive exam and thesis writing. I took a leave for two weeks to prepare for the comprehensive exam, and luckily, I passed. I decided to resign (my employment was project-based) and work on my thesis. Thinking long-term, I thought I would have more options if I finished my MA. For my thesis, I examined husband-wife differences in perceptions and views on fertility using data from the Community Outreach Survey. I finished my thesis in 1984, just before I left for the US to study for my PhD.

Studying Sociology Abroad

JOC: How did you get to the PhD program in the USA?

MMBA: One of my colleagues at UPPI had gone to Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Ohio a year before me. In 1983, it was difficult to get US dollars to pay for TOEFL, GRE and admission fees; my colleague took care of the payments in the US. I applied for the PhD program at Bowling Green and got accepted with an assistantship. A friend and a cousin lent me money to cover airfare and initial living expenses, and that is how I got to the US in August 1984.

JOC: Your life then was heavily linked to migration!

MMBA: Yes, indeed. My parents and I were pleasantly surprised by how things worked out. When I left, I was not yet awarded an MA degree; I had to submit revisions to my thesis. I was in the MA program for a year before formally entering the PhD program in 1985

JOC: Yes, tell us about your time in Bowling Green.

MMBA: I had a very good experience studying at Bowling Green. They had a newly established Center for Family and Demographic Studies. The Sociology Department had a core group of demographers, which included Dr. Edward Stockwell, who authored the condensed edition of two-volume *Methods and Materials on Demography*. Our professors are very supportive. I was happy studying there, where I took core courses on population studies and social change.

JOC: How would you describe the profile of students, were there many Asian students at the time?

MMBA: There were a few Asian students when I arrived in 1984. By the time I left Bowling Green in 1989, there were more Asian students, boosted by the arrival of many students from China. Bowling Green was a very good environment; aside from the academic training, I valued the friendships I formed there, which continue to this day. We were able to attend conferences with support from the department. I attended the Population Association of America conferences in Boston and Chicago, which broadened my horizons. It was exciting to meet scholars and people I read about. I think it was in Boston where I met Rafael Salas, who was the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at the time. I struck a conversation with him. He was gracious. It's great to encounter people who have achieved so much, yet are very down-to-earth.

JOC: Did you attend the American Sociological Association Conference (ASA)?

MMBA: No, I never attended ASA, but I attended the North Central Sociological Association, which covered the Midwest area of the US. I attended the conference in Des Moines (Iowa) and the neighboring city of Toledo. I joined sociological conferences and presented papers. I was daunted by submitting presentation proposals to the Population Association of America. In the population conferences, the presenters were big names, such as Rodolfo Bulatao, Karen Mason, the East-West Center researchers like John Caldwell and Ronald Lee.

JOC: How did you decide on your dissertation topic, could you tell us what it was about?

MMBA: On my second year, I found a call for applications for the East-West Center Summer Seminar in Population scheduled in June 1986. One of the workshops of the summer seminar was on migration. When I saw the call, it was perfect timing because I just wrote a paper about labor migration to the Middle East for a theory class. At the time, there were already books published about labor migration to the Middle East, and I remember coming across the work of authors such as Nazli Choucri. Aside from the paper for that theory class, I had some first-hand knowledge about labor migration because in the mid-1970s, our neighbors in Roxas City were already heading for work opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

JOC: So, you're saying in the 1980s, "migration" was not a buzzword yet?

MMBA: There were already scholars writing about labor migration, but I did not know much about their work because I was initially interested in fertility studies.

Coming to the [East-West] Center and attending the summer seminar in migration was a defining moment in introducing me to migration.

JOC: How was this pivotal to your migration studies career?

MMBA: Our guest speakers were top-notch migration researchers. The migration workshop was co-organized by James Fawcett, Bob Gardner, and Fred Arnold, and I already knew about their work even when I was still in the Philippines. I had read Jim Fawcett's research on the value of children and its links to fertility decisions and preferences. One of the conveners, Fred Arnold, co-edited with Nasra Shah the volume, *Asian Labor Migration: Pipeline to the Middle East* (1986). Most of my fellow participants were also already working in the field of migration. In our batch, I think I was the only graduate student. I met Stella Go at the seminar. By that time, Stella, along with Leticia Postrado and Pilar Jimenez, was among the Filipino scholars who examined the impact of labor migration on Filipino families way back in the 1980s. The summer seminar was divided into three weeks of lectures and discussions, while the fourth week was an immersion to population issues in an Asian country; in 1986, it was in Seoul. [US-based participants did not participate in the Seoul program.] It was a short period, but it provided me with an overview of migration issues that excited me and made me want to learn more.

JOC: Did your stay at the East-West Center help you develop your dissertation proposal?

MMBA: The summer seminar was pivotal in igniting my interest in migration. Also, during the seminar, I met Dr. Jim Fawcett, who shared their longitudinal research on the material adaptation of Filipino and Korean migrants in the US. He and his colleagues at the Population Institute (Bob Gardner and Fred Arnold) were cooperating with Dr. Benjamin Cariño of UP's School of Urban and Regional Planning (who also happened to be my professor in an elective subject that I took up for my MA) and Dr. Insook Han of Hanyang University. The research examined the different pathways of adaptation of Filipinos and Koreans: paid employment for Filipinos and entrepreneurship for Koreans. They had already conducted a survey on both immigrant populations prior to their departure for the US, and the team was preparing for the follow-up study on the immigrant experiences two years and five years after their arrival in the US. The project needed research assistants. I applied as a research intern under the joint doctoral research internship (JDRI) program. The JDRI would allow me to work on my dissertation while also gaining research experience.

To backtrack, after the summer seminar, I returned to Bowling Green to complete my coursework, prepared the materials for the JDRI application, took the comprehensive exams, and defended the dissertation proposal. I decided to focus on women in migration, particularly their expected occupational changes with their imminent departure for the US. Incidentally, the journal, *International Migration Review* (IMR), had a special issue on women on migration. Mirjana Morokvasic's article, "Birds of Passage are also Women" was an inspiring read. I read the whole

special issue and other special issues, including the one on migration theories. IMR was the only journal on migration at the time. Do you know that IMR is published by the Center for Migration Studies, run by the Scalabrinian missionaries? [JOC: I didn't know.]

I got accepted as a joint doctoral intern and returned to the East-West Center in September 1987 and stayed there until January 1989. For my dissertation, I worked with two advisers, Dr. Ed Stockwell in BGSU, and I was supervised by Dr. Jim Fawcett at the East-West Center. Both advisers left a mark on me. I was fortunate to have both as mentors—they were not only brilliant; they were both kind and supportive.

My work as a research intern entailed providing research support to the preparation of the follow-up study, i.e., the research exploring the immigrants' experiences in the US after two years. I appreciated learning the intricacies of longitudinal research approach through the project. One of my assignments was to send out Christmas cards to get in touch with the respondents, to know their whereabouts. I also helped in developing the instruments and translating the questionnaire from English to Tagalog.

At the 1986 summer seminar in migration, I came across the *International Migration Review* (IMR) and the *Asian Migrant* (a periodical on Asian migration which was part of the collection at the Population Institute library) while working on the research project on Korean and Filipino migration with migration scholars. And being in Hawaii, a site of migration, "taught" me about many aspects and facets of migration. Hawaii has a big population of Asians who arrived in different waves of migration. Filipinos are a big part of the population. When I was there, the Marcoses were exiled in Honolulu.

JOC: So, Filipinos in Hawaii ventured in chain migration.

MMBA: Yes. Many of them at the time were from the Ilocos region. In Honolulu, you get immersed in different Asian-American communities. In my daily life, I encountered different Asian cultures. I frequented a Vietnamese restaurant whose owners were refugees from Vietnam. They spent some time at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center in Bataan, where they prepared for their immigration to the US. I also liked Korean food. Before I returned home, the restaurant owners were among those I said goodbye to.

JOC: Your dissertation was on Filipino and Korean migration to the US. Did you use the data based on the study of Fawcett and his team?

MMBA: Yes, I used the pre-migration dataset for my dissertation. What I found was that even in terms of intentions or expectations, Filipino women already expected to enter paid employment, whereas Korean women mentioned going into self-employment or entrepreneurship. Remember, Korea in 1984 was not yet a developed country, and Koreans then were among the top five national groups immigrating to the US. At the time, there were several explanations why Koreans tended to go into self-employment—maybe they had a knack for business;

maybe they had more financial resources to start a business; or maybe because of discrimination in the US labor market, because of language, among others. In comparison, Filipinos could more easily enter paid employment because of their facility in the English language.

Since my dissertation was a comparative analysis of the occupational expectations of Filipino and Korean women, I had to familiarize myself with the literature about Korea. I enjoyed reading about Korean history and how it shaped Korean migration. There were similarities between Koreans and Filipinos that tie them to the US. Both states have US military bases. They shared experience of dictatorship (under Park Chun-Hee in Korea and under Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines). We were ahead of launching People Power; Korea also had its version of People Power, which ushered in the presidency of Kim Dae-Jung and the emergence of civil society organizations.

I returned to Bowling Green in the winter of 1989, finished writing the dissertation, defended it and graduated in May 1989. I returned to the East-West Center after graduation. While there, I worked very briefly as the summer seminar population coordinator, before obtaining a one-year post-doctoral fellowship to work on a project on urbanization. In June 1990, it was time to return home.

Return to Philippines

JOC: Tell me about your return to the Philippines and to UP.

MMBA: While I was still in the US, I learned about an opening at the Sociology Department in UP Diliman. I was recruited as Assistant Professor. I returned to the Philippines in June 1990, about a week before the start of the first semester. I was assigned to teach three classes of Social Science 1 and a graduate course on Statistics. I don't think I did well in handling the course on Statistics.

I remember the first semester as a very tough time. During the semestral break, I was part of a research team (together with colleagues and friends from the Psychology Department) that conducted fieldwork in Cebu City, Legazpi City, and Zamboanga City. The encounters with people, conducting interviews, and experiencing the Philippines beyond Metro Manila did wonders for my soul and spirit. I remember coming back from fieldwork feeling good and encouraged. The challenges I encountered in the first semester—finding a place to stay, getting sick with chicken pox in the first- or second-week classes, health issues, and readjusting to the way of life in the Philippines—made me wonder about my decision to return. When the second semester started, I was ready to embrace life in the Philippines, warts and all. And indeed, during my active years in the university, 1990–1997, I was happy teaching, researching and being part of the UP community.

JOC: At the time, was the sociology department involved in any migration research?

MMBA: Prof. Fe Arcinas led a study ca. 1980s on labor migration from the Philippines to the Middle East. It was a UN University project involving seven migrant-origin countries , including Korea, which were sending labor migrants to the Middle East. Professors Randy David and Cynthia Bautista were part of that project.

During my time in UP, I worked on several research projects on migration. The first was a study on the policy development of the overseas employment program, my first project with the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC). Around 1993–1995, I had a research project funded by the UP Office of Research Coordination. The project was originally headed by Dr. Rogelia Pe-Pua of the Department of Psychology. When she left for Australia, I took over the project. It was a case study of four origin communities of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Batangas (focusing on the pioneers who went to Saudi Arabia), Laguna (in a community of OFWs going to Italy and Spain), Pampanga (also on OFWs who went to Saudi Arabia) and Iloilo (focusing on seafarers). Around 1996, I worked with SMC again on the Philippines-Malaysia migration corridor.

Moving to Scalabrini Migration Center

JOC: How did you end up with SMC?

MMBA: I was tenured after three years in the Sociology Department and was promoted to Associate Professor. I thought that I would be in UP forever, but then, certain things happened. I took a leave without pay in 1997–1999, and I eventually decided to seek a different path in 2000. I will always be thankful for all that was. I really enjoyed teaching, I learned much from my experience in UP, and it was a blessing to have worked with great colleagues.

I did not have anything planned when I took a leave in 1997. I called up Fr. Graziano Battistella, then SMC Director, to explore whether there was something that I can do at the Center. Thus, I became a Visiting Researcher in SMC, and I stayed on when I resigned from UP.

My history with SMC started in the early 1990s. As I mentioned earlier, the first migration study I worked on was with SMC. When I returned to the Philippines in 1990, I found labor migration an issue that I wanted to study further. I met Fr. Graziano Battistella through Stella Go, a fellow participant in the 1986 summer seminar. Fr. Graziano was looking for someone to contribute a chapter on the history and evolution of the overseas employment program. He first approached Stella, but she was busy with other commitments, so, Stella suggested it to me instead.

JOC: So, this was your first project at SMC?

MMBA: Yes. The second one was the study on the Philippines-Malaysia migration corridor—this was around 1995–1996. Fr. Graziano handled the Philippines-West Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) part, I took care of the Philippines-Sabah side. I

collaborated with Prof. Carmen Abubakar from the Asian Center. We did a short fieldwork in Tawi-Tawi —the capital, Bongao, was a staging point for what is known as the "backdoor" to Sabah. The project had no funding to conduct research in Sabah.

In the early 2000s, when I was already with SMC and we had another project on Filipinos in Sabah, this time, the fieldwork was conducted in Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga City, and Sabah. In the second study, aside from Bongao, I was able to reach Sitangkay, known as Little Venice (it was like waterworld—people moved about in the community using *bancas*). In Tawi-Tawi, many of the goods sold in stores are from Sabah. My interviews with key informants in the first and second studies prepared me for the fieldwork in Sabah. For example, I learned that the churches in Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan are where Filipinos congregate.

JOC: What did you learn from doing the labor migration project?

MMBA: Migration to Sabah is unique because of the long history of migration from Mindanao (particularly the one originating from Tawi-Tawi) to Sabah. Until the 1970s, most population movements in this area were traditional movements that preceded the emergence of nation-states and the creation of borders. The burning of Jolo in 1974 brought refugees to Sabah, but later arrivals were considered economic migrants who were not documented. The number of Filipinos in Sabah is difficult to ascertain; Sabah is home to the largest population of Filipinos in an irregular situation. The Philippines' claim on Sabah complicates the Philippines' response to the situation of Filipinos there. The claim precludes the establishment of a consulate in Sabah. Every now and then, the Sabah claim comes up and is accompanied or preceded by deportations.

When we conducted the study to explore the HIV vulnerability of migrants in Sabah, it was a challenge to surface health and HIV issues because Filipinos in Sabah were more concerned about their lack of legal status. Without legal status, they live precarious lives, and they are always at risk of being deported.

Migrants in an irregular situation in Sabah cannot send their children to public schools, and they cannot afford a private school either. In Sabah, I met a domestic worker in church, Susan. When I visited her place, she was tutoring some 30 children in the kitchen. I was touched by Susan's generosity in spending her free time teaching kids the alphabet and numbers. At the same time, I was saddened by the children not being able to study. I thought, "My God, this is the future. This is an entire generation that will never have a fighting chance in Sabah." Years later, I learned about an NGO called Stairway of Hope that runs education programs for the undocumented and stateless children in Sabah. At the same time, our Department of Education established Alternative Learning Centers (ALC) to meet the educational needs of Filipino children there.

I learned from the interviews that migrants don't avail themselves of the public health system for fear of deportation. So, it was truly challenging to surface HIV issues. Plantation workers, for example, live in remote locations. What would

render them vulnerable to HIV? More than HIV, they were more plagued by seemingly common ailments. Do they even have access to health centers?

JOC: Would you say you have done extensive research on migration in Asia?

MMBA: Considering our resources in SMC, I would say that we have done our best in addressing some of the key migration issues that need research attention. I would summarize the research SMC has done into three broad areas: 1) migration, gender, and family, 2) migration governance, and 3) migration and development.

There are some research questions that we would have wanted to pursue, but limited sources get in the way. For example, irregular migration is significant in Asia. We conducted a study on irregular migration in Southeast Asia in the late 1990s; we wanted to conduct further studies, but there is no funding, unlike the resources for human trafficking. At times, we are constrained to carry out research on important questions due to lack of time or lack of human resources.

Migration Studies, Asian Studies, and State Policymaking Nexus

JOC: Are there studies on migration that you feel worth exploring in Asia?

MMBA: Plenty, but I'd like to highlight border studies. When we were doing research about migration to Sabah, people from Tawi-Tawi commonly referred to the migration to Sabah as a phenomenon that has been going on "since time immemorial." Deportation does not deter the movement of people between Tawi-Tawi and Sabah. The presence of families and established networks on both sides, the lack of economic prospects in origin communities, and the use of the "backdoor" by traffickers and criminal elements are the drivers and facilitators of this migration. Although there is a documented way to go to Sabah—through the ferry that plies between Zamboanga City and Sandakan—the backdoor channel did not stop.

For people who live in border areas, how do they view and think about borders that supposedly draw boundaries between states? What kind of governance would best suit mobility and migration in border areas? How do mobilities and immobilities operate in communities with land versus maritime borders? Are maritime borders more porous than land borders? These are some of the questions that would be fascinating to explore. Tackling such a research topic will benefit from a transnational approach that will consider not only the perspective of the Philippines, but also that of other interacting countries.

JOC: Have you done something on the geopolitics of migration?

MMBA: Not as much, although I believe that political factors are certainly shaping migration in Asia. Demographic factors, like ageing and fertility decline in developed economies such as Japan and South Korea, are also important mega trends. That is why South Korea is currently piloting, bringing in foreign domestic workers in the hopes of increasing their fertility rate. I am not sure whether that is a sustainable solution to declining birth rates. Population ageing obviously has

labor market implications. Seeing the Philippines as a potential source of workers for ageing countries is not a good solution because our population is also ageing, although not as fast, and our workers are ageing as well. How do we also address our own labor market needs? Population ageing is already happening and is proceeding faster in other parts of the world; it is a phenomenon that confronts us all. How will we prepare our society in facing this future?

JOC: How can migration research output or results influence state policymaking?

MMBA: Our experience with the Migrants' Associations and Philippine Institutions for Development (MAPID) project, which was carried out from 2008 to 2010, has been instructive. The MAPID experience suggests the importance of partnering with a government agency that's also invested in pursuing the same objectives and championing the agenda in the government sector. When we implemented MAPID, we partnered with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO). The project's approach to migration and development focused on migrants' associations and Philippine government institutions as potential partners for development. We cooperated with academic institutions in Italy and Spain to survey Filipino migrants' associations in these countries. The project had several components: research, training, and dissemination. The research component found a disconnect between migration policies and development policies. The National Economic and Development Authority's (NEDA) development plans are formulated without considering migration dimensions, and while our labor migration policies are good, they are not linked to development policies. MAPID asked how we could leverage our migration experience so that it contributes to our development. We were very fortunate to have a CFO as a partner. Secretary Imelda Nicolas was so dynamic. CFO championed the inclusion of migration in NEDA's Philippine Development Plan and the formation of a sub-committee on migration and development. Researchers need government partners to promote the use of research-based knowledge in policymaking.

The MAPID study also found a disconnect between the national framework and the local government units. While migration-related institutions are fairly well-established at the national level, there are few migration-related institutions at the level of local governments. When we shared the research findings in Naga City, the city government of Naga used the findings in establishing a migration resource center.

Stella Go did a study around the 2000s on the use of migration research in policymaking. One of the key findings was that policymaking is more attentive to advocacy groups than to research findings. There is a need to foster appreciation for data and research-based knowledge in policymaking. The growing importance of multi-stakeholder dialogues and the philosophy of a whole-of-society approach will hopefully enhance the contributions of research-based knowledge to better policies.

The Asia Pacific Migration Journal (APMJ): Challenges and Opportunities

JOC: And speaking of the knowledge production-policymaking link, we can now connect that to the mission of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) as a research center, given that you engage with multiple stakeholders. Being with the SMC for more than 20 years, what do you consider your greatest achievement/s so far?

MMBA: A lot of the work in migration research is relational because research is a collective process. Even if SMC is a small organization, I would say that we have established a good network with academic institutions in East, Southeast, and to some extent, South Asia. We have yet to form networks with researchers and research institutions in North and Central Asia. Running APMJ is collaboration with many scholars. Aside from the contributors, the journal relies on the contributions of scholars who agree to review submissions. The journal does demonstrate the value of a scientific community. You don't need to know each other personally, but you get to work together, you get to collaborate. Research and the work entailed in producing a journal are essentially made possible by co-production and collaboration.

JOC: What pieces of advice would you give to budding migration scholars and researchers in the country?

MMBA: Very traditional advice. You have to keep improving your craft. Writing is very important. The journal format is very helpful because you start with the background context, then you have to define the objectives, methodology, and in the presentation of findings, you have to make sure that they address the objectives. Of course, writing is not that easy. In my old age, I still struggled with writing. The only thing that will really help is to keep at it. There is no shortcut. It is also important to focus on selected topics to develop depth and a level of expertise.

JOC: In terms of themes in migration and the profile of contributors to APMJ, have there been many Filipinos writing on migration recently?

MMBA: Not really—thus far, few Filipino scholars have contributed to APMJ. It would be great to see Filipino migration scholars also gaining recognition for their work outside of the country. APMJ hopes to feature the work of more Filipino migration scholars in the future. We also hope to receive more submissions from North and Central Asia. APMJ's recent special issue is on India, and this year, there will be a special issue on Sri Lanka, and another one on seafarers and the maritime industry.

JOC: What do you think about creating a Philippine migration journal in the future?

MMBA: Why not—but it takes a lot of work and a dedicated group of people to sustain journal operations. If the focus of the journal is the Philippines, it might be difficult to have enough contributions, say, four issues per year. Aside from the number, the issue of quality contributions is another matter. APMJ receives many

contributions, but many of these do not make it to the external review process. Finding reviewers is a constant challenge as well. One strategy is to have a special issue—this way, the journal can highlight topics or themes that have not received much attention. It is also important to think about the marketing and distribution aspects. APMJ's partnership with SAGE has been helpful in bringing in their expertise about these matters.

JOC: Thank you, Ma'am.