philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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**Scholarship on and from the Margins: Festschrift in Honor of Resil B. Mojares**

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*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* vol. 67 no. 3–4 (2019): 279–84

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# Scholarship on and from the Margins
## Festschrift in Honor of Resil B. Mojares

A motif that runs through the articles in this special double issue in honor of Resil B. Mojares is the fecundity of the geographic and social margins. Mojares himself celebrates the margin as a "good place to be in" for a writer, who, he emphasizes, must not lapse into isolationism and parochialism. The articles in this issue exemplify scholarship from and on the margins, which are expansive in orientation, yielding fresh insights that challenge current interpretations and giving rise to new historiographies.

**KEYWORDS: MARGIN • PERIPHERY • HISTORIOGRAPHY • RESIL MOJARES**

How does one locate an intellectual like Prof. Resil B. Mojares? For a homegrown scholar who has spent virtually all of his academic life in the Philippines, while traversing many a disciplinal boundary, the answer to this question is not easy.

This special double issue of *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* in honor of Professor Mojares features ten articles by academics who participated in a conference held in July 2018. It also presents an interview with Mojares, who provides an answer in spatial terms to the question posed above: "my 'provincial' origins and location—growing up in Mindanao, living in Cebu—have been an advantage. . . . The challenge is to plumb the advantages of location without being disconnected from a wider discourse and lapsing into parochialism" (p. 640). He then repeats what he had said in another conference: "The margin is a good place to be in" (ibid.).

Certainly, the city of Cebu in the Visayas has been a "good place" from where Mojares started his writing and teaching career, where he delved into literature, first as a short story writer and later as a literary critic; where he ventured into historical studies, local but also national; where he had fun writing biographies as a way of understanding political culture and intellectual history. For Mojares, the margin is an exemplary place for intellectual explorations. Indeed, the margin is a central motif in this festschrift, a space of vibrant fecundity of scholarship from and on the margins.

Several contributors emphasize that the margins have their own dynamism that is far from being merely derivative of the center. Focusing on Cebu as a site of nationalist and activist ferment in the early 1970s, Karlo Mikhail Mongaya recaptures the beginnings of Mojares's grappling with the social by retrieving the latter's essays as an early-career journalist for the Cebu newspaper *The Freeman*. Mojares used his provincial location to practice new journalism, a reportage that was not content with presenting history as it unfolded but was committed to being a part of the making of history. Also in the vein of local history, Grace Liza Concepcion investigates snippets of Laguna's history—land donations to a hospital in the seventeenth century and a dispute about town boundaries in the eighteenth century—and discovers the heterogeneity in the practices of land ownership and possession. The fragments of history enable Concepcion to argue against the simplistic notion of a linear evolution and transformation from precolonial "communalism" to colonial "private property," because the evidence bears out the existence among the natives of notions of individual ownership of land by purchase, inheritance, and possession at the beginning of contact with the Spaniards.

Mongaya, Concepcion, and other contributors to this issue may be focusing on local history, but they frame the local in self-consciously national and even transregional and global terms, conformable to Mojares's advice. They are attuned to imperial exchanges and negotiations between Spain and the colonies in Asia and Spanish America as well as to the relations between the Philippines and other realms and states and between individuals and the constellation of powers with which they must contend.

Geographically, the Philippines and Southeast Asia were peripheral to Pan-Asianism, which has been seen largely as a discourse centered on Northeast Asia. However, Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz asserts that attention must be given to the Pan-Asianism of the periphery, which she pursues through a study of Mariano Ponce as the First Philippine Republic's foreign emissary (1898–1912) and thereby shows that Pan-Asianism can be understood as a network of material support as well as of affective ties, as exemplified by Ponce's relationship with Sun Yat-sen. The margin thus offers a good vantage from which to question commonly held ideas.

Beyond geography, individuals and groups also constitute the margins. Viewing the past from the perspective of these individuals and groups offers a fresh understanding of the past. For example, J. Travis Shutz revisits the 1575 campaign to repel Limahong and his horde of pirates and argues that these pirates—whose existence in the maritime margins had allowed them to elude and challenge the centralizing forces of terrestrial states—were responsible for instigating contact between Ming China and the Spanish Philippines, two empires that until then had no formal linkage. The unrehearsed nature of these two states' fleeting alliance became manifest in the way this event was reported by their respective officials, influencing subsequent histories that occluded the participation of the other side: the Chinese mention the Luzonese soldiers but not the Spanish contribution, while the Spanish mention the Luzonese fighters but never the Ming naval forces. A new historiography thus emerges in the way Shutz brings together global history and history from below.

Several "interesting elite personalities," as Mojares calls them (p. 644), such as Pedro Pablo Róxas y Castro, Pedro Paterno, and Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera, discussed by María Dolores Elizalde, occupied in-between locations whence they acted in society. By being on the margins of racial categories in the late nineteenth century, these persons served as "bridges and intersections," to use Elizalde's term, across racial divides that the Spanish empire instituted

as a means to order and regulate the plural society that arose in the colonial Philippines. Elizalde argues that, amid the rapid transformations in the second half of the nineteenth century, coexistence and collaboration as played out in everyday encounters in the economic sphere and the public arena proved that the racial differentiation of colonial society was other than rigid. Liminal groups and individuals could break down barriers because of their economic and social prominence, resulting in political recognition and even positions in the colonial state apparatus.

The Chinese mestizo, progeny of a Chinese father and *indio* (native) mother, and their offspring, who also found themselves classified as Chinese mestizo, comprised a major in-between category in the nineteenth-century Philippines, a category that was not regarded as Chinese but as "native" of the Philippines. The Chinese mestizo occupied a marginal structural position, squeezed between the "pure native" (the *indio natural*) and the Chinese. Gregorio Sancianco, whose ideas are assayed by Filomeno Aguilar, is one such Chinese mestizo, who straddled the generation of the 1860s that was traumatized by the repression of the Cavite Mutiny and the generation of the 1880s that gave birth to the Propaganda Movement. Although largely obscured in nationalist historiography, Sancianco criticized the tribute not only as a racial ignominy for the colonized but also as forming a deep wedge between the indios naturales and the Chinese mestizos. No other propagandist had put down such incisive critique in writing. From his historically in-between position, Sancianco described a past before nationalism obliterated the Chinese mestizo from the collective consciousness of the nation.

Even within the Catholic pantheon, the margin exists: San Vidal, Cebu City's patron saint, has been overshowed by the Santo Niño, as Michael Cullinane's *longue durée* narrative attests. San Vidal's feast day, 28 April, is the day that is set aside to remember the "apparition" of the Santo Niño as well as the day the conquistadors took over Cebu and introduced Catholicism, but that day is seldom remembered for the saint associated with it. While the Santo Niño's appeal seemed guaranteed by the manner of his appearance, the martyr from Ravenna relied on institutional support that was far from even, in fact fluctuating, in the course of the past five centuries. Nevertheless, Cullinane seizes San Vidal's bumpy journey in Cebu to narrate the complex history of a locale intersected by imperial edicts, the vagaries of ecclesiastical decision making, and local pieties and antagonisms.

In the way politics is conceived, the personal, private, and intimate are treated as bearing either little significance—although at times they may be accorded too much importance. Caroline S. Hau explores the seemingly "marginal" Dovie Beams scandal in 1970 as impacting US–Philippines bilateral relations and spurring the anti-Marcos movement. The scandal gave occasion for the socially and politically marginalized to engage in subversive laughter and thus momentarily narrow the gap between them and Ferdinand Marcos, whose high seriousness crashed as he became the subject of ridicule. Thus, the marginal can have an influence on society and history far greater than what most observers contemplate.

In the global state system, the Philippines is peripheral. The first two decades after the Second World War and the declaration of formal Philippine independence was internationally a period of decolonization and the Cold War. It was also during this time that American Jesuits established three institutions of knowledge production (this journal, a research institute, and an academic press), which are now under the Ateneo de Manila University. In examining the setting up of these three institutions, Charlie Samuya Veric argues that they formed a coherent and coordinated network undergirded by neocolonial ideologies in pursuit of US aims, even as they made Filipinoness an object of research.

It might seem that the margin is at the mercy of the imperial center. Nevertheless, the trajectories of these institutions of knowledge production are not overdetermined by their putative origins. The margins can and do write back. People at the margins are not devoid of agency. With a change in context, these institutions of knowledge production have been appropriated to serve Filipino ends and even those of global scholarship.

This proposition is exemplified in this volume by Christian Jil Benitez's fine-grained study to recover Filipino knowledge and sensibility through a close reading of dictionaries to recover and unpack complex, multidimensional notions of temporality (*panahon*). Benitez demonstrates that dictionary meanings articulate panahon in terms of the encounter of material things (*bagay*) the essence of which is knowable only by chance or in the moment of utterance. From this Filipino perspective, Benitez argues, history (*kasaysayan*) is a thing, a concrete practice, that is interwoven with the temporality (panahon) it seeks to represent.

The margin, therefore, is a good place from which to view the wider world, from which to look back and comprehend the past and forward new interpretations. But these fresh understandings require the hard work of research; the resourceful use of fragmentary evidence, as Concepcion does in emulating Mojares; the cross-examination of disparate sources, as Shutz does, to detect the silences in given texts, as also Mojares has counseled; and the

excavation of new sources that illumine the archives, as all the contributors do. Seeing far and wide presupposes, in the famous phrase of Isaac Newton, standing on the shoulders of giants, as the contributors here do by building on the insights of Mojares on the art of the exposé, as Hau does; on the densities of time, as Benitez does; on the itineraries of Ponce, as CuUnjieng Aboitiz does; and on the biographical approach on which Elizalde relies.

Being mindful of the wider context is indispensable to gaining insight on the past. Within the broader context, key events can be identified as representing turning points that do change the course of history. Several contributions in this festschrift attest to this point. Despite the seemingly freewheeling traversal of racial boundaries in the late nineteenth century, the Philippine Revolution was the day of reckoning when ambiguity was not congenial to politics: the "creole" Róxas, accused as a *filibustero*, could no longer remain in the interstices and was even labelled an "*indígena*" (native). Ultimately, one had to be either a Filipino or not a Filipino. The grounds were cleared for the crystallization of Filipino national identity when the race-based tribute was abolished in 1884, officially obliterating the distinction between indios naturales and Chinese mestizos and fulfilling the longing of Sancianco. In this case, the late nineteenth century represented a series of conjunctures that resulted in the rise and assertion of Filipino nationalism.

In the twentieth century, Marcos's declaration of martial law represented a watershed event. The common interpretation of the Dovie Beams affair sees it as a turning point in the marriage of Ferdinand and Imelda Macros in which the bumbling philanderer inadvertently gave Imelda ammunition with which to demand various forms of appeasement that augmented her political domain. The scandal is seen as transforming Imelda from a ceremonial First Lady to a powerful conjugal dynast. However, by parsing the chronology Hau shows that the imposition of martial law, which dismantled institutional checks and balances, was the crucial milestone that enabled Imelda to amass power. Martial law also represented a critical juncture in Mojares's career. After his incarceration, he left short story writing and journalism to become an academic and literary critic.

Turning points can be for ill or for good, depending on the structural location of historical actors and the individual choices they make. In Mojares's case, it eventuated propitiously in the margin turning out indeed to be a good place to be in.

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