Isabelo's Archive

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IT WENT LARGELY unnoticed. On 15 March 1885, an open letter appeared in the Manila press written by a young Ilocano journalist named Isabelo de los Reyes.[1] In this letter, Isabelo called on people to send to him and newspapers in Manila manuscripts, documents, and all kinds of verbal or non-verbal materials relating to local folklore. The appeal seemed innocuous enough except for the ambition that was behind it. Proudly announcing that the "young science" of *folk-lore* was the "New School" (*Nueva Escuela*) in Europe, he urged the formation of a movement he called *folk-lore regional Filipino*. He wrote:

> 'Folk-Lore de Filipinas' has for its aim to collect, compile, and publish all of the knowledge of our people in the diverse branches of science (Medicine, Hygiene, Botany, Politics, Morals, Agriculture, Industry, Arts, Mathematics, Sociology, Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Archaeology, Languages, etc.)

Such knowledge, he said, is found in local customs and traditions preserved in writings, artifacts, and oral traditions, encompassing verbal and art forms, vocabularies and speech practices, ceremonies, games, and other expressions of

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popular behavior and thought: "in sum, all the elements constitutive of the genius, the knowledge and languages of Filipinos... [the] indispensable materials for the understanding and scientific reconstruction of Filipino history and culture [Isabelo's emphasis]." The appeal did not quite generate the response Isabelo hoped for, and the folklore society he envisioned did not materialize.

Four years later and almost singlehandedly, he would publish *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889), a two-volume compilation of local knowledge to demonstrate what he had in mind. But, a man of many projects, Isabelo could not sustain what he had begun. The significance of what he was up to was not fully appreciated in his time. I think it is not fully appreciated even in our own time, in part because the idea of *folklore* has contracted into something less ambitious and encompassing than what Isabelo proposed.

Many thought the enterprise quixotic. The Spaniard Jose Lacalle (*Astoll*), a professor at Universidad de Santo Tomas, praised Isabelo for his daring but expressed pessimism about the project, chiding Isabelo for his high "scientific" ambitions. "The science of anthropology is as familiar to the Filipino as the inhabitants of the moon," Lacalle remarked.

Yet, Isabelo's project was a radical move. It was a call for the creation of an archive of local knowledge in the Philippines. One may call it the founding moment (if one likes such moments) of "Philippine studies" by Filipinos. In a larger sense, it was nothing less than an attempt to carve out a space of knowledge out of which a "nation" could emerge.

I WOULD LIKE to trace the genealogy of Isabelo's act, to see it in relation to its connection to outside scholarship, specifically the rise of folklore studies in Spain, and, more important, its radical value in terms of the formation-in Isabelo's time and ours-of a national scholarship.

The immediate inspiration for Isabelo's appeal came from the Spaniard Jose Felipe del Pan (1821-1891), long-time Manila resident and journalist who, a year earlier, had written an editorial calling for folklore contributions to his newspaper *La Oceania Española* ("*Folk-Lore de Filipinas*," 25 March 1884).[2] Encouraged by del Pan, Isabelo, one of his protégés in the press, started to publish folklore articles in *La Oceania Española* and *El Comercio* (beginning "May 24, 1884," Isabelo provides a curiously exact date). Del Pan subsequently sent these articles as "exhibits" in the 1887 *Exposicion General de las Islas Filipinas* in Madrid.[3] More

important, del Pan put Isabelo in contact with folklorists in Spain.

It was only some three years earlier that the folklore movement in Spain began when the ethnologist Antonio Machado y Alvarez (1848-1893) convened a nucleus of folklorists in Seville on 3 November 1881. Inspired by the founding of the world's first folklore society in London in 1878, Machado had just issued *Bases de la organizacion de El Folk-Lore Español*, a prospectus for a Spanish folklore society called *El Folk-Lore Español*. Days after the Seville meeting, *Sociedad El Folk-Lore Andaluz* was established. This was shortly followed-in a conscious strategy of building the local or regional bases of the national folklore-by societies in Catalonia, Castile, Galicia, and other regions. The movement was launched in a flurry of organizing, publishing, and networking with scholars and enthusiasts in Europe and various parts of Spain and her empire.[4]

This was the group to which Isabelo was connected. Isabelo said that Machado ("founder of *Folk-Lore Español*") and Alejandro Guichot ("secretary general of *Folk-Lore Español*" and "editor of *Boletin Folk-Lorico* de Sevilla") supplied him with "all the writings on folklore published in Spain" and encouraged him to initiate the creation of folklore societies (sociedades folk-loricas) in the Philippines. At their instance, he issued his public appeal of March 1885 and contributed an article to *Boletin de la Institucion de Ensenanza* (31 August 1885), of the famous Institucion Libre de Ensenanza in Madrid.[5]

Isabelo adopted the Spanish folklorists' vision of *folk-lore* as a science of "popular knowledge" (*saber popular*). His statement on the scope and purpose of Folk-Lore de Filipinas is almost a direct transcript from Machado's Bases de la organizacion de *El Folk-Lore Español*.[6] Like Machado and Guichot, Isabelo saw folk-lore as an all-embracive "anthropological" science, coextensive with all branches of human knowledge in the wealth of materials it describes and the range of disciplines it implicates. Like Machado and Guichot, he underscored folklore's status as an empirical science by highlighting methods of collection, recommending the use of "musical sheets, drawings, stenography, photography" and other means of scrupulous documentation. He likewise stressed the importance of a learned and systematic comparativism in the analysis of materials. To write folklore, he said, one needs to be a "disciple of Zola" and aim for *naturalismo y realidad*, and possess in addition the virtues of "honesty, exactitude, fidelity, and absolute truth."

Equally significant, there were affinities between Isabelo and the Spanish folklorists in terms of their socially-minded, progressive approach to the subject.

Machado, Guichot, and their colleagues were not musty antiquarians but liberals influenced by evolutionism, Krausism, and Spencerian philosophy. They were enthusiastic about folklore's prospects as medium for social reform, of "returning to the people, improved and purified, their own heritage."[7] Their advocacies went beyond folklore to projects of popular education, local autonomy, and cultural regeneration. These were advocacies Isabelo shared.

There were crucial differences, of course, in the context in which the Spaniards and the Filipino worked. The folklore movement in Spain was stimulated by anxieties over Spanish nationalism. In the wake of the crisis created by the loss of Spanish American colonies in the early 1800s, the French invasion (1808-14), and regional conflicts in the Iberian peninsula, Spanish Intellectuals struggled with the question of the "Spanish nation." There were contested views about what constituted the nation, divergent tendencies expressed in the ways in which folk-lore was imagined and used. On one hand, folk-lore was viewed as a vehicle for the creation of a unitary Spanish identity. Machado and his colleagues expressed this view when they spoke of folklore as a resource for uniting "the regions that constitute Spanish nationality." On the other hand, folk-lore fostered centrifugal tendencies in conceptions of national identity and helped nourish regional, cantonal, and federalist movements vis-à-vis the central state. Machado and Guichot, it may be noted, played a role in inspiring Federal Republicanism in 1868-1874 and the regional movement called Andalucismo well into the twentieth century.[8]

At another remove, liberal intellectuals imagined the Spanish nation as one that did not only encompass the Iberian provinces but Spain's remaining colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines), now conceived no longer as a distant las Indias but the provincias de ultramar. As Christopher Schmidt-Nowara writes: "Spaniards sought to construct a national identity that folded the colonies into the metropolitan historical narrative."[9] It was in this sense that Isabelo's Spanish patrons spoke of a folk-lore regional Filipino, i.e., "regional" in relation to Spain. In Machado's Bases de la organizacion, the regions that constituted "Spanish nationality" (nacionalidad Española) — in which folklore centers were to be established-included Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.[10] Isabelo echoed this concept. This was, after all, the discourse of "assimilation" shared by liberals in metropolitan Spain and the Philippines, one expressed not only in the pan-Spanish folklore movement but in such political causes as the campaign for Filípino representation in the Spanish Cortes.

This intellectual positioning, however, was neither static nor homogeneous.

There were cultural and political faultlines not only within Spain but between Spain and her colonies. In the Philippines (as in Latin America), where patriots were less interested in the unity of Spain than in the differences between their homeland and the metropolis, folklore served other purposes.

THIS IS WHERE Isabelo's project takes its own particular trajectory. Writing with the enthusiasm of an initiate, Isabelo bannered his European connections to lend authority to his appeal. It was more than Spanish patronage, however, that excited Isabelo. What he did with folk-lore was not quite what his Spanish patrons intended. This can be appreciated if we turn away from Spain and look at the local context of Isabelo's "movement."

The first attempts to publish Philippine folklore were made by European missionaries interested in cataloguing the "customs and beliefs" of the natives they sought to know and convert. Early missionary investigations were driven by the double impulse of marking resemblance (the natives were fellow-humans, God's lost children) and difference (not-quite-human, the Devil's captives, the European's Other). In recording local customs, the missionaries built an archive at once corrupt and indispensable. They compiled and created knowledge that provided elaboration and proof for Biblical and universal histories and, on a more pragmatic level, aided and justified conquest and conversion. Yet, they also preserved (if in densely mediated ways) knowledge that would otherwise have been lost and one that the natives, in their turn, had to confront, reinterpret, and use.

In the nineteenth century, as publishing widened beyond the control of the Church, Spaniards and Creoles pursued more secular, "modern" interests in matters pertaining to the country. Like their liberal counterparts in Spain, Manila Spaniards like Jose Felipe del Pan worked not only to disseminate in the colony "the best" in Western culture but to study local history and customs as part of Spain's imperial archive.[11] In this context, they cultivated local lore in articles, poems, sketches, and novels in the mode of what was called *costumbrismo*. While this indexed growing Creole identification with the land, it was one that mixed science and romance, biased in favor of what was quaint, bizarre, and exotic. Their interest was not only literary or touristic however. Stimulated by Enlightenment ideas of modernity, the colony's intellectuals also looked on local manners as ground and object of social and moral reform. It was in this vein that, in a note appended to Isabelo's letter of 1885, the *El Comercio* editor endorsed Isabelo's project for its value in providing a base for correcting the natives'

"ridiculous" and "absurd" beliefs and practices.

Isabelo was aware that folklore had been used as proof of his people's "backwardness." He cited the reluctance of his fellow-Ilocanos to have their beliefs and customs written about because they feared these would only be used to malign them. In response, Isabelo distanced himself from foreign observers by claiming the privileged position of an insider who embraced the culture as his own and was committed to its development. In his article in Madrid's *Boletin de la Institucion de Enseñanza* in 1885, he proudly announced to his Spanish readers he was "brother of the forest dwellers, the Aetas, Igorots, and Tinguians." He was no Igorot or Tinguian, of course. He placed his faith in the transcendent value of "scientific" study, asserting that science and patriotism (*patriotismo*) were not only compatible but that one was necessary for the other.

European folklorists saw in folklore the method and materials for reconstructing the "early history of mankind" and had a special interest in "savage" and "primitive" races. Isabelo was less interested in world-theorizing than reconstructing his people's history *prior to* and *apart from* coloniality as well as demonstrating the persistence of this history into the present. Isabelo appreciated folklore's value in making available data useful for new and emergent sciences. Yet, he saw its value for *patriotismo* as well in reconstructing the country's past and enabling a fuller, critical self-understanding on the part of his people.

Machado and his colleagues imagined Filipino folklore as a "regional" constituent of Spanish folklore in the same way as the Andalucian or Extremaduran were. For his part, Isabelo quickly demonstrated that he was less interested in the idea that his people's folklore was, like the Galician, Basque, or Catalan, a component of Spain's "national" folklore than in the prospect of local knowledge as a resource for a separate nationality. It is interesting to note that while Machado and his colleagues began their movement by forming local and regional societies (such as *Folklore Regional Gaditano* in Cadiz and Sociedad de *Fregenal de la Sierra* in Badajoz) as a way towards forming a national society, Isabelo immediately proceeded to stake out Folk-Lore Filipino (instead of, say, Folk-lore Ilocano) as his field.

For Isabelo, folklore was a resource for nation formation and not something merely ethnological. In calling for the recovery and study of the people's knowledge, he envisioned a "national" project, one that was not executed by one person but involved everyone. He saw the native not only as a privileged informant but as his own country's scientist and scholar. He approvingly quoted

Guichot saying that "to know and study the feelings, thoughts, and desires of the native (indio), as well as matters of his land, one has to become a native." Through folk-lore, a *psychic* (and political) need for a national identity will be filled, a privileged site claimed for a discourse on the "soul" of a people. For these reasons, Isabelo advertised the project, called for contributions, and urged the promotion of a national folklore movement.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF Isabelo's project can be appreciated if we compare it to the work of two other Filipinos, Jose Rizal and Pedro Paterno, who were in Europe and were about to embark on their own projects to write Philippine history at the time Isabelo issued his appeal in 1885.

Rizal recognized the need to promote "Philippine studies" by Filipinos themselves and had suggested in 1884 that Filipinos in Spain collaborate on producing a book of essays on the Philippines. Nothing came out of the proposal. But in 1888 Rizal was in the British Museum in London to work on his own history of the Philippines. In 1890, he published in Paris his annotated edition of Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (the work of a Spanish colonial official published in Mexico in 1609).[12] While working on Morga, Rizal also conceived the idea of organizing *Association Internationale des Philippinestes*, an international group of scholars that would "study the Philippines from the historic and scientific point of view" and undertake conferences, competitions, and the establishment of a Philippine library and museum. He began preparations for holding the association's first "international congress" in Paris to coincide with the Universal Exposition in that city in August 1889. These were audacious moves that had few parallels in world colonial history: a "native" initiating (if aborted) an international association and congress of scholars on his country, a "native" publishing his critical annotation of an "official" European account of his country's history.

Lacking the sources and the time, Rizal chose the annotation as his form in writing the history of the Philippines. The annotation offered him a direct and exemplary form of counterhistory. Through footnotes (literally, a "speaking from below"), Rizal interrogated the Spanish textualization of his country from within the text. He did not only show this text to be biased, imperfect, and contingent, he sketched the outline of an alternative history by showing what had been misinterpreted or excluded, and claiming in the process a privileged position outside the colonialist text and the authority of an "insider" to speak about and for the country.

Rizal adopted a more transparent anti-colonial stance than did Isabelo (who operated under more restricted circumstances than did Rizal). In writing his version of Morga, however, Rizal was limited by matters of sources and form. He lacked source materials outside what the European themselves had written and was constrained by the mode and structure of Morga's book. A civic chronicle that devotes seven of its eight chapters to narrating accomplishments under successive Spanish administrations and only one chapter to native society itself, Morga's text delimited the space for Rizal to discourse on native society in its own terms.

For all its advantages, the annotation is an auxiliary rather than autonomous form. Footnotes dictate a discontinuous commentary that lacks the fullness and coherence of a narrative and does not quite displace the main text as the "master narrative." Moreover, Rizal does not question the validity of Europe's historiographic mode and its rules of evidence and persuasion. Thus his annotations-many of which are clarificatory and explanatory in nature-serve to "complete" as much as subvert the European account. For all its daring, Rizal's Morga is a tentative performance, a shadow history, a prospectus for a national history rather than that history itself.

At this time, Pedro Paterno, a flamboyant Tagalog scholar based in Spain, had also embarked on his own project, publishing *La Antigua Civilizacion Tagalog* (1887), the first in a series of ethnological treatises on what he called "ancient Tagalog civilization."[13] Paterno announced his work as "a humble effort to form the foundation on which to build the History of [a] forgotten people.' Despite the rhetoric, Paterno was not a victim of modesty. He positioned himself as a metropolitan scholar conversant with world-knowledge.

Mining the European cultural sciences and their styles of proof and presentation (comparative taxonomies, evolutionary schemas, copious citations), he constructed an overblown theory of "Tagalog civilization" comparable to the world's "high" civilizations.

There are many similarities in Isabelo's and Paterno's arguments about the "high" state of precolonial Philippine "civilization," arguments that undercut colonialist assertions that the natives are a people without a culture and a history. For Isabelo, this provided charter for a distinct nationality (and the possibility this raises for claims to independence and sovereignty). The political implications of this argument, however, are not clearly articulated in Isabelo since it was not until 1897, when he was deported to Spain (where he stayed until 1901), that he could write and publish freely.

In Paterno's case, there is no doubt that his motives were politically conservative. What Paterno desired was that Mother Spain recognize the glories of one of her possessions. He did not claim for his *civilizacion* a sovereign existence but a favored place in the stream of *historia universal* and the realm of magna *hispaniae*. Following European evolutionary theories, he located his *civilizacion tagala* in a linear, evolutionary sequence in which it was succeeded by Hindu, Muslim, and Euro-Christian civilizations. While he pointed to the persistence of elements of this ancient civilization, he effectively relegated it to the status of the exotic and forgotten, representing it in the static form of an ethnological treatise instead of the dynamic form of a historical narrative. What Paterno wrote was, as politics, a call for the closer integration of the Philippines to Spain, and, as scholarship, a speculative, non-critical addendum to European imperial history.

Rizal attempted a counterhistory, Paterno engaged in mimicry.

UNLIKE RIZAL AND Paterno, who were both educated and based in Europe, Isabelo de los Reyes was a homegrown intellectual who worked within the narrow and dangerous confines of the colony. A printer, publisher, and writer, he produced articles, issued them as chapbooks, or compiled them as anthologies. In a time when the relations between journalism and scholarship were incestuous, Isabelo, tireless and uninhibited, wrote under many pseudonyms, "pasted up" newspaper articles into books or parts of books, and produced copy for entire newspaper issues. While he mainly wrote in Spanish, he also wrote or recycled his works in Iloko and Tagalog translations. He was conscious—more than Rizal and Paterno were—of his differential location within the colony and his relation to specific local publics.

He was a denizen of the colonial world of print—where books were cheap, hybrid and perishable because facilities were primitive, paper scarce and expensive, and quickness and portability were prized because of surveillance and censorship; where the author, whether political agitator or petty entrepreneur, produced his work almost singlehandedly, without grants or commissions, outside of universities and learned societies, with limited access to archives and libraries, oblivious to protocols of scholarship and respectable publishing.

Like Rizal and Paterno, Isabelo aspired to write the country's history. He wrote local history, *Las Islas Visayas* (1887) and *Historia de Ilocos* (1890), and attempted the first full history of the Philippines by a Filipino, *Historia de*

Filipinas (1889), conceived as a two-volume work.[14] Only the first volume, *Prehistoria de Filipinas*, was finished. Conscious of Rankean rules of history writing, he was stymied—as Rizal was—by the fact that, lacking indigenous sources, he had to work out of European texts and documents. While a critical, interrogatory temper informed his writing, he must have chafed against the limitations of source and method in writing his people's history.

It is in relation to these limitations that Isabelo's *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (1889) assumes significance as an effort in content building that goes beyond what Paterno and Rizal attempted Envisioned as an open-ended, multi-volume project (although only two volumes were produced), it compiles and makes available native and local documents, and articles collected and mostly written by Isabelo himself.

Its value can be appreciated if we bear in mind that, from its beginnings, Filipino scholarship has been a wrestling with content and form. In Isabelo's time, it was hounded by the problem of an inchoate, ill-defined subject (*Filipino, nacion*) that was not so much "out there" as something that had to be constituted in the act of writing itself. (Hence, Paterno's invention of a *civilizacion tagala* and a country called *Luzonica*.) Filipino intellectuals struggled with the lack of self-definition, the sense that colonialism had divided Filipinos from their past by means benign and violent. (Rizal lamented the Spaniards' destruction of native documents, depicted the past as a "shadow," *sombra*, and was compelled to speak through somebody else's text.) Europe dominated the technologies, language, and forms of writing. (Rizal wrote on the margins of a Spanish *cronica*, Paterno mimed the Orientalist encyclopedia.)

Filipinos needed to build an archive of local knowledge, a storehouse of distinctive materials and repertoire of forms. *Folk-Lore Filipino* responded to this need for building local sources and providing an epistemic base, as it were, for an "autonomous" history of the Philippines, one that is worked out from within the culture instead of appended (as in the case of Rizal and Paterno) to an already-written imperial or "universal" history.

Isabelo calls *Folk-Lore Filipino* an "archive" (*archivo*) of all aspects of popular knowledge needed "in understanding and reconstructing scientifically the history and culture of a people." He does not quite elaborate on the notion of an "archive" he also uses the words "museum," *museo*, and "arsenal of data," *arsenal de datos*) but its use is felicitous in the light of contemporary scholarship on the nature, power, and limits of the archive, imperial, national, or postcolonial.

Isabelo surely imagined an archive as the sum total of a community's memory of itself, a resource without which a group or nation cannot know its distinctness and coherence. Preserving such an archive was his aim although, writing as a colonial subject, he may have felt obliged to soften its political implications by stressing instead its merits as a "contribution" to world science. Yet, he was not unaware of its subversive value in building the knowledge base for a national consciousness and deepening the site from which narratives of domination could be interrogated.

Considered as an attempt in the creation of a "national archive," Isabelo's *Folk-Lore Filipino* is hurriedly and carelessly designed and executed. It is a hodge-podge of miscellaneous items: reprints of Isabelo's historical and cultural articles, original manuscripts (including a fictional narrative by Isabelo on the irrational workings of the colonial bureaucracy, entitled *Folk-Lore Administrativo*), the poetry of Isabelo's mother Leona Florentino, the text of the Iloko epic *Lam-ang*, and a most diverse range of popular lore. There are contributions from Mariano Ponce, Miguel Zaragoza, Pedro Serrano, and Pio Mondragon on the folklore of Bulacan, Pampanga, Tayabas, and Iloilo, in addition to articles on the folklore of Zambales, Malabon, and Pandacan. While aspiring to be national in scope, the work remains understandably heavy on Ilocano folklore.

It is very much a work-in-progress. While there is an attempt at following a classificatory system, the arrangement of contents is ultimately desultory and adventitious. Some items were added when the book was already in press and many more items were planned but could not be written for lack of time. Each of the two volumes is continuously paged (345 and 300 pages), but to each volume is appended a three-page article written by Isabelo: on "women and flowers" in the first, and, in the second, Isabelo's cursory reflections on his career as a writer, entitled "*Mi pobre pluma: articulo de relleno que nadie interesa*" (My poor pen: a filler article of interest to no one). They were written, Isabelo notes, because the typesetters (*cajistas*) told him they lacked three pages to complete the printer's sheet (*pliego*). In my copy of the 1889 edition, the two volumes are bound as one together with Gabriel Beato Francisco's verse chronicle, *Casaysayan nang Bayan nang Sampaloc*, a 136-page pamphlet (*folletin*) issued by Isabelo's newspaper La Lectura Popular in 1890, the year the second volume of *Folk-Lore Filipino* appeared.

Folk-Lore Filipino is a makeshift performance, determined by the exigencies of colonial book publishing, the circumstances of the compiler (Isabelo was a writer-in-a-hurry, ambitious and uninhibited), and the fact that the project was,

in the main, a solo performance. While Isabelo spoke of folklore as a systematic science with its divisions of subject matter, he said that "since I cannot count on a collaborator in writing this book, I will adopt a simple division organized according to my opinion and the material at my disposal." Moreover, *Folk-Lore* was not meant to be a closed and finished book but an open-ended series that could well have run to more volumes than the two that were produced.

It was printed on cheap paper, with the economical page size of 110 x 150 centimeters. This was not the French *Encyclopedie*—that grand Enlightenment project to classify and sum up the entire breadth of the arts and sciences of the "world," that ran to a total of twenty-eight massive volumes between 1751 and 1772, and to which the leading European *philosophes* contributed. (Even then, despite its majestic ambitions, Encyclopedie was also a jumble of information that contained "thousands of words about grinding grain, manufacturing pins, and declining verbs." It was ideologically driven as well, meant to be both reference work and *machine de guerre*.[15])

Isabelo's opus was a rickety *machine*. That it is so does not, however, take anything away from the significance of what the project intends. Though Isabelo may not have been fully aware of all the implications of what he was doing, this was what he was about: building a place in which his people could locate themselves, look out, and speak to *others*, the keepers and purveyors of dominant knowledge, European or, for that matter, the local ruling elite itself.

I think it is not facetious to say (though they seem worlds apart) that Isabelo would have agreed with what Jacques Derrida wrote: "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."[16]

TWO ASPECTS OF the content and form of *Folk-Lore Filipino* are of particular interest in the light of contemporary scholarship.

The first has to do with Folk-Lore Filipino's mixed, hybrid content. While Isabelo attempted to record the earliest known beliefs and practices, his stress was on *saber popular* rather than *saber tradicional*, on the dynamic cultural reinventions of the present rather than a fixed heritage from the past. He was less interested in the "authentic" and the "original" than in what the living culture was. He worked out of what the local realities were, marking out what beliefs were not in fact *of the people* but had been introduced from the outside, what

practices had been misrepresented or transformed, what had become anachronistic, and what could be developed or "refined" for the present and the future. While he spoke of the need to recover and preserve what was threatened by "progress," Isabelo was not a sentimental indigenist. He was interested not just in the pure and autochthonous but the hybrid and borrowed, not just what was past and archaic but knowledge present and contemporary.

Together with descriptions of "precolonial" beliefs and practices, Isabelo includes contemporary local histories, Spanish borrowings and accretions, as well as his own literary inventions. Thus his archive has the character of a palimpsest, with its layers of thought that represent not so much one "originary place" as an active, syncretic process of cultural persistence, combination, and recreation. Archaic beliefs survive in fragments; the Iloko epic *Lam-ang* appears in a Spanish version of what was transcribed and probably edited by a nineteenth-century Spanish priest and then reedited by Isabelo himself; the early history of Manila is pieced together from nineteenth-century wills and testaments in the Spanish colonial records; the already Hispanified verses of Leona Florentino are offered as specimens of "native poetics." Mediations and contaminations make of Isabelo's archive one that is highly complex and unstable.

By refusing to essentialize the culture, Isabelo exposes its dynamism and creativity, that deep instability Derrida calls "archive fever," the archive's permanent incompleteness, nostalgia for origins never satisfied, and openness to the future. Isabelo was no purist. He gloried in his people's gifts of invention and reinvention, their capacity to absorb diverse influences and remake their culture. (On the natives' gift for linguistic play, for instance, he says: "The indigenes are natural corruptors of languages and inventors of thousand upon thousand new terms.")

The archive's instability is further conveyed in the form and style of *Folk-Lore Filipino*: a pastiche of inventories, "curious" documents, newspaper articles, folktales, poems and fictional sketches. It recalls what the French called *bibliotheque*, a loosely-ordered, luxuriant, and open-ended compilation of miscellaneous pieces, a library-in-a-book, meant not so much as a finished "book" as a ready, accessible repository of useful information. Isabelo elsewhere referred to his writings as *centon* ("crazy quilt"). And if Isabelo's book is to be imagined as a kind of museum (since this is also how he calls it), it is closer to the medieval cabinet of curiosities than the modern museum.

The form of the book may largely be the product of the practices and habits of an early print culture, in which independent, amateur printer-publisher-

authors (Isabelo was one produced ephemeral forms of literature, such as small newspapers, chapbooks (*folletin*), broadsides (*papeles volantes*), and posters (*pasquines*).

Yet, despite the book's circumstances and what may have been Isabelo's intentions, the form of *Folk-Lore Filipino* is distinctly oppositional in its effects, and highly contemporary (blurring as it does, for today's readers, the boundaries of the premodern, modern, and postmodern). It reminds me of an image raised by the Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo, in his *El sitio de los sitios/ State of Siege* (1995), of a literary underground of polyglot "copyists, clerks, interpreters, monks of scant virtue, wayward young scholar-poets" producing "theories, commentaries, sophistic arguments, interpolations, and apocrypha" that undermine the certainties and dogmas of the medieval Church (and modern state power, since the novel deals with the siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s). Goytisolo writes: "Victims of the cruelty of history, we took vengeance on it with our histories, woven out of ambiguities, interpolated texts, fabricated events: such is the marvelous power of literature."[17]

This is not wholly what Isabelo would have said. He was not writing out of what seemed like history's end but its beginning. His work could not have been otherwise but imperfect and unfinished. As it stands, however, it does convey something of the contingent dissonant, unincorporated, and unsaid that contemporary scholars deploy to undermine or trouble history's *grands recit*.[18]

Though it is a product of the time and circumstances of its production, there is much that *Folk-Lore Filipino* can tell today's scholars not only about the need for archive building but its limits and dangers.

The archive, Derrida reminds us, involves the operation of an authority or law that organizes the past and governs public memory. The word archive (Greek *arkheion*; Latin *archivum*) originally referred to a ruling office, town hall, or the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, "those who commanded" by their power as keepers and interpreters of official documents. (In Derrida's words, it is "*there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from *which* order is given.") It involves a process of institutionalization in which a group, nation, or state accumulates, stores and inscribes its memory of itself in a body of symbols, documents, and texts.

The archive lays claim on order, completeness, and objectivity. Yet, the process of formalization by which it is created also excludes or represses what the archive's makers, its archons, choose to forget as hostile, irrelevant, or inconvenient.

It can be said that, in Isabelo's case, the form of *Folk-Lore Filipino* is not completely open and centerless. This is not Jorge Luis Borges' "Book of Sand," in which the pages shift and multiply as you leaf through them. "No page is the first, no page is the last."[19] A monstrous book that "defiled and corrupted" reality, this was not what Isabelo intended.

Isabelo, after all, does not only believe in the reality and necessity of nations, he maintains a strong editorial presence, as shown in his glosses and commentaries and his vain attempt to establish logical divisions for his materials. Clearly, Isabelo saw himself as more than just a collector or compiler. He aspired to be an archon, the editor and interpreter of the archive. This is shown in his later attempts to construct out of popular knowledge an ideology of the Katipunan revolution (when he wrote *Religion del "Katipunan"* in 1899) and a theology of a national church (when he produced doctrinal texts for the Philippine Independent Church).[20]

A further illustration was his proposal for a national educational system at the time that the Malolos Congress had began to create such a system by establishing *Universidad Literaria de Filipinas* in 1898. In contrast, Isabelo proposed in 1900 a decentralized "academy of the country," constituted out of a network of semi-autonomous schools, sociopolitical clubs, and discussion groups (*academias, centros, circulos, clubs, ateneos, casinos, katipunans*), many of which had mushroomed in the wake of the revolution. Naming his proposed academy *Aurora Nueva* ("New Dawn"), Isabelo proceeded to draw up its organizational structure, statutes, and a plan of studies that, he said, would perfect the Filipino through an education that stressed individual and social rights, patriotism and civic spirit, free inquiry, and the spread of useful, modern knowledge.[21]

His attempts at "institutionalizing" knowledge did not quite succeed. His interpretation of the revolution was ignored during his lifetime; his doctrinal texts were later revised, "cleaned up," or discarded by the church he helped establish; and his plan for a Philippine educational system went largely unread. Isabelo was better at initiating projects rather than building institutions. But his failure is not to be lamented. He was most stimulating when he gave free play to his populist and contrarian instincts. It was when he was most imperfect that he was most interesting.

Isabelo created a raw, inchoate archive. By placing at its center, folk-lore, "the people's knowledge" (instead of the elite's or the official), and by rendering it in a wonderfully imperfect form, he raised the specter of its subsequent institutionalization, when-taken over by organizations, learned institutions, and

government—the nation's memory is organized in terms of which kinds of knowledge are prioritized, what genres, modes, or styles of representation are privileged, how access to this knowledge is regulated, and who exercise authority as archons of this knowledge.

BY MAPPING THE domain of Filipino knowledge, Isabelo initiated the creation of a "national archive" apart from and in opposition to the imperial archive. By locating it in popular knowledge, he poses it against other forms of authority, other kinds of dominant knowledge, including the official, elite versions of what the "national" is. By representing this archive in a half-organized, open-ended form, he reveals (even if this may not have been his intention) the archive's basic instability, the necessary imperfection of a project caught in time between a past that is never fully accessible and complete, and a future that is yet to come.

These are lessons that are highly relevant to the formation of a national scholarship today.

[Editors' note: We are grateful to Resil B. Mojares and Anvil Publishing,. Inc. for allowing the republishing of this article, which first appeared in the book, *Isabelo's Archive* (Mandaluyong: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2013). The book is available for purchase at the online stores of Anvil Publishing, Inc. and select National Book Store branches. We are also thanking Mr. R. Jordan P. Santos, managing editor of Anvil Publishing, Inc.]

Notes

This is a revised version of a paper first published in the *Cordillera Review,* I:1 (2009, 105-120.

1. *El Comercio* (21 March 1885), n.p., datelined "Malabon, March 19, 1885." I have not found a copy of the March 15 letter cited by Isabelo (*El Comercio* does not have an issue on this day, a Sunday; it may have appeared in another paper). The March 21 letter in *El Comercio* is reprinted in Jaime C. de Veyra & Mariano Ponce, *Efemerides Filipinas* (Manila: Imprenta y Libreria de I.R. Morales, 1914), 278-83.

De los Reyes wrote about this appeal in *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (Manila: Tipografia de Chofre y Cia., 1889), I:12-18. The first volume of this work was translated

into English by Salud C. Dizon & Maria Elinora P. Imson and published by the University of the Philippines Press in 1994.

Two important essays have been written on this subject: William Henry Scott, "Isabelo de los Reyes, Father of Philippine Folklore," *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain and Other Essays in Philippine History* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1982), 245-65; Benedict Anderson, "The Rooster's Egg: Pioneering World Folklore in the Philippines," *Debating World Literature*, ed. C. Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 197-213; first published in *New Left Review*, 2 (March/April 2000). Also see Resil B. Mojares, *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes, and the Production of Modern Knowledge* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006).

2. On del Pan: *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana* (Bilbao: Espasa-Calpe, 1920), XLI:635-36. On Isabelo's journalism: Megan C. Thomas, "Isabelo de los Reyes and the Philippine Contemporaries of La Solidaridad," *Philippine Studies*, 54:3 (2006), 381-411.

3. *Catalogo de la Exposicion General de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid: Est. Tipografico de Ricardo Fe, 1887), 584, 589. For examples of these articles, signed by Isabelo de los Reyes or "R," see *La Oceania Española* (13 January 1885), 3; (15 January 1885), 3; (17 February 1885), 2; (12 March 1885), 3; (19 March 1885), 3; (22 March 1885), 3.

4. Alejandro Guichot y Sierra, *Noticia Historica del Folklore. Origenes en todos los paises hasta 1890; desarrollo en España hasta 1921* (Sevilla: Hijos de Guillermo Alvarez, 1922), which has a brief account of Isabelo de los Reyes and folklore studies in the Philippines. I thank Michael Cullinane for a copy of the book.

Also see Sabas de Hoces Bonavilla, "Demofilo, ese desconocido," *Revista de Folklore*, I:7 (1981), 23-30; Salvador Rodriguez Becerra, "El Folklore, Ciencia del Saber Popular, Historia y Estado Actual en Andalucia," *Revista de Folklore*, 19:225 (1999), 75-80.

Antonio Machado y Alvarez was the father of the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado y Ruiz (1875-1939), whose views on literature and culture trace ideas similar to Isabelo's. See James Whiston, *Antonio Machado's Writings and the Spanish Civil War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).

5. In this article, "Terminologia del Folk-Lore," Isabelo comments on whether folk-lore is a science or not, citing such British folklorists as George Laurence Gomme, Edwin Sidney Hartland, and Alfred Nutt. Clearly, he did not see

himself as a mere informant but a contributor to the "theory" of the field. The article is reprinted in de los Reyes, *Folk-Lore Filipino*, 1:20-27.

6. See Guichot, *Noticia Historica*, 165-166.

7. *Enciclopedia Universal*, XXI:450-51.

8. On the domestic situation in Spain: C.A.M. Hennesy, *The Federal Republic in Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 53-56, 210-11; Enric Ucelay da Cal, "The Nationalisms of the Periphery: Culture and Politics in the Construction of National Identity," *Spanish Cultural Studies*, ed. H. Graham & J. Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32-39.

9. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 55; Antonio Feros, "'Spain and America: All is One': Historiography of the Conquest and Colonization of the Americas and National Mythology in Spain, c.1892-c.1992," *Interpreting Spanish Colonialism: Empires, Nations, and Legends*, ed. C. Schmidt-Nowara & J.M. Nieto-Phillips (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 109-34.

10. Guichot, *Noticia Historica*, 166.

11. In historiography, this impulse is illustrated in Manila Spaniard Ricardo de Puga's lament on the lack of a modern *historia general* of Spain and her territories. Criticizing the fragmented, localistic character of existing *cronicas* and *historias*, he calls for integrating the histories of "different kingdoms" in the creation of "Spanish nationality" (*nacionalidad Española*). See R. de Puga, "Reflecsiones acerca de las publicaciones historicas relativas a Filipinas," *Ilustracion Filipina*, II:13 (1 July 1860), 150; II:6 (15 June 1859) - II:13 (1 July 1860).

12. Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas... anotada por Jose Rizal* (Paris: Libreria de Garnier Hermanos, 1890). Facs. ed. published in Manila in 1961; English ed., 1962.

13. Pedro A. Paterno, *La Antigua Civilizacion Tagalog* (Madrid: Tipografia de Manuel G. Hernandez, 1887), *Los Itas* (Madrid: Imprenta de los Sucesores de Cuesta, 1890), *El Barangay* (Madrid: Imprenta de los Sucesores de Cuesta, 1892), *La Familia Tagalog en la Historia Universal* (Madrid: Imprenta de los Sucesores de Cuesta, 1892), and *El Individuo Tagalog* (Madrid: Sucs. de Cuesta, 1893). The last three-mentioned works appeared as a single volume entitled *Los Tagalog* (Madrid: Sucesores de Cuesta, 1894).

14. Isabelo de los Reyes, *Las Islas Visayas en la epoca de la conquista* (Iloilo: Imprenta de "El Eco de Panay," 1887), *Historia de Filipinas: Prehistoria de Filipinas* (Manila: Imprenta de D. Esteban Balbas, 1889), *Historia de Ilocos* (Manila: Establecimiento Tipografica de "La Opinion," 1890), 2 vols.

15. Robert Darnton, "Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the Encyclopedie," *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 191-213.

16. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4n. Also Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 126-31; Sandhya Shetty & Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, "Postcolonialism's Archive Fever," *Diacritics*, 30:1 (2000), 25-48.

17. Juan Goytisolo, *State of Siege*, trans. H. Lane (London: Serpent's Tail, 2003), 94, 97, 116.

18. See, for instance, Catherine Gallagher, "Counterhistory and the Anecdote," *Practicing New Historicism*, ed. C. Gallagher & S. Greenblatt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49-74.

19. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Book of Sand," *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory*, trans. A. Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 89-93.

20. There was in the Spanish folklore movement a basic contradiction not quite resolved in the stress on "the people" and the bourgeois intellectualist bias for systematization and modernization, a contradiction to be found in Isabelo as well. See Mojares, *Brains of the Nation*, 313-31; Ignacio R. Mena-Cabezas, "Recepcion y Apropriacion del Folklore en un Contexto Local: Cipriana Alvarez Duran en Llerena (Badajoz)," *Revista de Folklore*, 23:271 (2003), 6-15.

21. Isabelo de los Reyes, *Filipinas. Independencia y Revolucion* (Madrid: Imp. y Lit. de Jose Corrales, 1900), 118-36.