

Introduction

The keynote address of National Artist Resil B. Mojares at “Reading the Regions” conference in Davao City last February 2020 has been included in this volume. Besides the privilege of having NA Mojares as contributor, it is also a stroke of fortune that his paper can fittingly set the tone of this *Lirip* issue.

With the title “Reading and Writing the Region,” the paper brings to light the “rise of academic interest in the local, the popular, and the regional.” At the interface between the local and the national, the fragmented and politicized concepts of nationhood are apparently no longer tenable. The centrality of the “regional” and the qualitative leap of local studies in the field of literature are affirmed by Dr. Mojares. Placing value on local resources and cultures, he widens contexts of intellectual and academic pursuits. Given this mindset, not only literature but also other disciplines can move toward viewing more spheres of regional knowledge.

His assertion regarding the “lack of belief in our pallid constructs of the nation state” is a challenge that pulls together related sociological, political, historical, and cultural dimensions of regional studies. Provocative insights into the challenge do not overlook but perceptively examine ideological constraints and other viewpoints refracting the idea of nationhood at very narrow angles. Dr. Mojares mounts substantial arguments against what he believes as a “reductive” idea, namely “that regionalism is our bane.” He convincingly demonstrates the primacy of the “regional” by citing the post-Martial Law “interest in decentralization, autonomy, and people empowerment,” etc. The regional is crucial in “broadening and enriching the base of a national culture”—an understatement emphatically driving home his point.

A logical inference is that the dictum “to be local is to be global” is preceded by “to be local is to be national.” The latter rests solidly on the internal strength and coherence of local cultures whose self-determination has been established naturally. Dr. Mojares, in fact, reckons that “the regional can no longer be thought of as marginal.” This perspective is worth considerable attention and critical engagement, without presuming that the historical and political underpinnings of the aspects of the regional can be ignored.

To be emphasized is the growing recognition of the value of locality embodying its distinct identity. Existing frontiers characterizing this uniqueness make a great contribution to different fields of knowledge.

Dr. Mojares cites the “utility of the regional for writers,” in particular, and underscores location as their “comparative advantage.” Writers’ resources—language, local tradition, folklore, history, etc.—are all drawn from their geographic location, profoundly shaping their creative consciousness. Rootedness is a wellspring of precious heritage. And a sense of self is inextricably linked with a sense of place—a vital thread in the act of creation. The National Artist makes his point clear regarding the advantages of being “rooted in the realities of the region”:

It means having a particular vantage point from which one can look out into the world;
it means knowing a particular landscape intimately deeper than others would; it means
having a language, a sensibility, and a style of feeling and thinking that could not but be a
product of one’s having been formed in a particular place and way of life.

Such profound and critical exposition is also a practical reflection on the significance of the regional, with the local writer operating dynamically and creatively within a given milieu. True to his calling as National Artist, Dr. Mojares makes way for the pursuit of national literature by imbuing local literature with important latitudes that can enhance national literature. Focusing sharply on this role of local literature promotes not only inclusivity but also diversity, appropriately covering the literary landscape of the country.

A meaningful way of framing the regional does not only happen in the field of literature. Other disciplines have also brought regional studies into sharp focus. The present volume features locally situated interdisciplinary research. To put local research—a kind of driving force for advancement—to the service of the community is a dominant theme.

And what can be more local than Indigenous communities whose lifescape and landscape are inextricably intertwined? This strong identification of the Indigenous tribes with their natural habitat is an idea that has been an acknowledged tradition of concern among different disciplines, not to mention advocacies in areas such as sustainability and conservation.

Florencia Charito Sebastian's "reflexive ethnographic" paper amply subscribes to the aforementioned tradition. Safeguarding the Pinatubo Ayta communities, which have always been subject to the inherent dangers of development, is a fundamental issue confronted by the study. The effort to elucidate the embeddedness of this tribe's existence in its territorial realm and to highlight the need to preserve its cultural heritage is a key contribution to the growing array of regional inter-disciplinary researches.

Describing the Aytas and underscoring the likelihood of losing their traditional resources under the disruptive processes of development, Sebastian frames her analysis of the impact of this progress syndrome and goes right to the heart of the matter. She admonishes that inclusivity be an aspect of the developmental paradigm and that support be provided by institutions to prevent the "disappearance or cultural annihilation" of the tribe.

With such negotiated postulation, the plan regarding the transformation of the former American military base into New Clark City is brought into focus. The Aytas, who will be caught up in this change, remain powerless as indicated by the research. Thus, rising to this challenge, the researcher joins hands with these threatened people and attempts to provide a holistic vision that ties development with cultural and environmental sustainability. She builds upon this concept the inclusive development approach that should provide "culturally-appropriate education to this group" and "a central role in bio-diversity development." In particular, she proposes the "Ayta Ethno-Botanical School" to be located in an area "devoted to the planting of forest and fruit trees interspersed with vegetable, medicinal and other plants for food and medicines and other domestic uses." A comprehensive plan that includes a contextualized curriculum has been suggested, and among the expected outputs of the school are: "knowledge-reclamation of the Aytas of themselves, their heritage, their community, and the world around them; rehabilitated, developed, and protected forest in the

New Clark City and subsequently the forests in the ancestral domains of the Aytas.” This trajectory has a lot of advantages since it entails collaboration and integration of the tribe in the pursuit of development. Endowed with unstinted Indigenous knowledge and practices, Aytas can nurture biodiversity, which has been in their custody for ages.

By making a case for upholding the welfare of the Aytas, Sebastian’s research has generated significant data and valuable insights that are useful in hedging in the tribe’s ecological and cultural domain as well as in overcoming the threats of the hegemony of modernization and mindless development.

Still on local knowledge and invaluable heritage, “Mathematics in Art: Color Symmetries of Pampanga’s Giant Christmas Lanterns” explores a new dimension of a traditional craft in the province of Pampanga. Giant Christmas lanterns are local crafts that are recognized as essential to the continuing cultural progress in the province. These cultural symbols bespeak the Kapampangan creative construction organically linked with a whole gamut of influences as substantially traced by this research. And with the indication that lanterns have more potentialities for further innovation, the attention of the current researchers has been drawn.

The writers, Imogene Evidente and Angela Carreon, take an academic perspective based on the classic relation between art and mathematics. “Art can demonstrate the elegance of mathematical theory” is one dictum; “Conversely, math is a servant of the arts” is another. Embracing such harmonizing principle, the authors embark on an almost ceremonious representation of reciprocity as they examine the lantern structure. Their technical competence becomes a large factor in discerning the marriage, so to speak, of mathematics and art in the case of the cultural icon of the Kapampangans.

Their approach, in both its traditional and technical sense, includes mathematical postulates for the enhancement of the inherent features of native craftsmanship. Focusing on color symmetry, an integral element of a lantern, the researchers are able to offer a relatively new method to express fascinating patterns. The visually dynamic rhythm of bright colors being highlighted in the work of art has always been lavished with admiration, and will be all the more impressive if this artistry is supplied with mathematical formulation as a source of fresh vitality. With this innovation, the

symmetry can display contrast and variety—a quality of liveliness that is apt to furnish the lantern even more striking effect.

Such elaboration aided by mathematics is in accord with the imaginative rendition of the product. Thus, a natural corollary is that mathematics can very well be an instrument of the imagination.

Math art, therefore, opens up an exciting interdisciplinary frontier with its rich repertoire of creative and, at the same time, systematic methods. Evidente and Carreon have underscored the great promise offered by the interface between the two fields. To substantiate their point, they cite Professor Rene Felix of the UP Mathematics Department who “pioneered the study of symmetry and color symmetry in the country.” This remarkable but rare appropriation of the math art concept because of its apparent complexity is acknowledged by the authors. But the dreaded difficulty does not prove to be insurmountable. Their current study demonstrates the possibility of fostering math art in the area of local craftsmanship. And this innovative contribution to the creative process of lantern-making, to a great extent, will be an important factor in propelling the intended extensive promotion of the creative industry in Pampanga.

With this plausible conception and application of math art in lantern-making, the researchers have established a strong reason to encourage “collaboration between mathematicians and artists, especially those of Central Luzon.”

Another research, “Evolution of Management Control Systems in Private Non-Profit Higher Educational Institutions” by Purisima Panlilio, has been carried out in Pampanga. The case study has generated promising accounts relative to the present state of higher education in the locality. High-valued quality and relevance of education as the foremost priority can be gleaned from the results of the study involving local educational institutions.

Panlilio diagnoses the management control systems of three private institutions and points out the revitalization process which they have undergone, leaving them a net gain of organizational maturity. She does not fail to mention their “rich academic histories” as they pioneered the offering of higher education—their long-term commitment to their communities.

Prodded on by this consideration, they have consistently pursued their vision and successfully put up with the swirling currents of change through the years of their existence. For instance, they have surmounted the hurdle of fast advancing technology and the introduction of a new system such as K-12.

Moreover, the fact that the management controls and processes of these institutions evolved from informal to formal systems to respond to the turbulent wave of technological, economic, and social changes is a dawning recognition of their improved capacity and capability. Thus, higher levels of performance can be expected in their lines of enterprise. This renewed confidence is fairly impressive, adequately meeting the required standards specified by Panlilio. To a great extent, it is the openness to new developments outside the area of traditional practices that is fostered within the organizations—a rewarding value and an enabling reason to achieve goals effectively.

Evident in the next research is the distressing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, not sparing any domain of existence. The far-reaching and severe effects of the plague, as experienced by a sample of educators, are the featured narratives in the paper “Coping with the Transition to Remote Learning: The Experiences of Tertiary Level Business Educators in Angeles and in Clark, Pampanga” by Maria Eunice Felix.

Hard-pressed to perform their duties, the educators have struggled to develop adaptive measures as they face the transition demands of remote learning. Their sagacity to switch to a different teaching scheme has been challenged by an unnerving situation caused by the pandemic. And Felix distils their “lived experiences” and issues—which are possibly integral to their introspected concerns during a bewildering transitional period—and brings out corresponding themes implicit of the immense value the normal teaching methods hold in the teachers’ thoughts and even emotions.

Felix counts on her subjects’ responses in her study using her “phenomenological” approach. The flux of experiences that lend themselves to scrutiny reveals the educators’ complex mental processes and initiatives in coping with an unforeseen dilemma: a phenomenon, indeed, and a timely piece of inquiry.

Despite the uncertain transition period, insufficient technical support, and unpredictable results of adjustments, the educators, readily yielding themselves to an emergent system of instruction, have not lost their control over their situation but have capably set the direction of the new learning set-up. And Felix has this to say: “remote learning has promoted a learner-centered approach compared to the teacher-centric method used before this transition.”

A closer observation of the articles in this volume reveals how the writers have sought out the fruitful knowledge derived from their local community and found the latter rich in potential areas of exploration. Stimulated precisely by the rigorous exposure of their researches, the writers are able to expand the frontiers of regional studies.

Finally, to widen its spectrum of discourses, this issue has made room for book reviews by Niles Jordan Breis. With his light and impressionistic approach, he communicates the socio-cultural and aesthetic value of: *Agwat-Hilom*, an anthology of literary pieces focusing on COVID-19, *Balager, isang kalipunan ng sanaysay* and *Maqueda sa Alimpuyo ng Isla, isang kalipunan ng mga kwento*. Contributors of *Agwat-Hilom* are from the different regions of the country; on the other hand, writers of the *Balager* and *Maqueda* are both from Bicol. Essentially, the reviews round out the chain-link of regional studies created in this volume.

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Editor