

Expressions of Localities: Positionalities and “Powerful Particulars”

Localities have a unique place in the circuits of global cultural political economy. Other than geographical locations or sites of cartography, localities are analytical entry points into the subnational that are sometimes hidden from view or situated at the margins, hence not accorded prominence. Absent such emphasis, scholars run the risk of losing sight of local actors and the specificities that animate their life worlds.¹ As an optic, localities and their relatively “autonomous complexities” (Geaologo 1993, 108) offer different perspectives to oft-told stories.²

One of the features of localities—and key to their analysis in this special issue of *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*—is their intrinsic embeddedness, that is, how their situatedness serves to filter power into myriad forms, creating distinct practices and relations conveyed as shared lived experiences. These are “powerful particulars” (Urry 1981, 455) that in turn co-constitute them. This issue of *Kasarinlan*, composed of works from the fields of archaeology, cultural studies, and history, dwells on particular localities as the local symbolic

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1. Arjun Appadurai’s *Production of Locality* describes locality as “the key characteristic of place, defining it as a phenomenological quality, constituted by a sense of social immediacy, technologies of interaction and the relativity of contexts....[it] emerges through a series of attachments and commitments that characterise local subjectivities” (quoted in McKay and Brady 2005, 91).
 2. In the field of history, see for example Francis Geaologo’s (1993, 108) discussion of local history’s “autonomous character,” which meant “local history is not only written for national history to have local color, but for local conditions to take center stage in reexamining the previously accepted generalizations on national history.”

and material conditions in which power ebbs and flows. They recast localities from the purview of the illicit, the contested, and the peripheral or what Deidre McKay and Carol Brady (2005, 91) referred to as the “expression” of these localities: from the site of illicit trade of gold cultural materials founded on *hierarchical meaning-making practices* of diggers, financiers, collectors, and the cultural elite spanning laundering, misrepresentation, and fraud; five rival mosques in one Muslim compound as *contested spaces of representation* in their uneven construction and operation based on the competing narratives not just between outsiders and insiders but also within that Muslim community; to a “*peripheral*” province’s *political history* shaped by the rise and fall of a local dynasty.

THE ILLICIT

Victor P. Estrella’s “Illicit Trade in Gold Cultural Materials in Butuan, Philippines” is an archaeologist’s “attempt to get closer” to the covert interactions and meaning-making practices of local actors in *pagaantik* or the illicit trade of gold cultural materials in the northeastern part of Southern Philippines. Where this illicit phenomenon lies at the intersections of local and global contexts, Estrella’s microanalysis examines the flows of cultural materials as they pass through “markets” or “hubs” in Butuan, which can be “a source, transit point, or destination . . . [and] can be both illegal and legal, and the participants . . . both criminals and legitimate business people.” Estrella’s closer look into the “gray market” in Butuan serves to counter the stereotypical macroview of illicit trade in cultural materials and further examines the social nature of *pagaantik*, tracing the complex relations of the different actors from the local diggers or *mangkalot*; financiers; collectors; to the cultural elite, to “see not just the plundering of cultural materials, but also the abuse of the workers and the perpetuation of dependency.” Moreover, he weaves these relationships with the actors’ meaning-making practices surrounding gold’s transformation as cultural material: from (1) “laundering” or when gold transforms from an illegal to a legal object; (2) “misrepresentation” or the meaning-making practices of the diggers and “the deliberate attempts of the financiers to obscure the context of the materials to increase the price, and the legitimization of the collectors who try to fit these materials in the Butuan narrative.” In short, the co-creation of the cultural material’s

“new provenance” through the stories financiers and collectors tell; to (3) “fraud” or the negotiations of risk and trust among these actors.

Where Estralla writes that “[a]rchaeologists, in their study of the distant past, do not only excavate sites but also participate in the social dynamics of a locality;” he describes Butuan’s “notoriety as both the historical and archaeological locus of gold items in the Philippines” as well as site of interactions “for profit and narrative making.” Estrella strongly positions his manuscript as an alternative entry point in understanding this illicit phenomenon. As an archaeologist who witnessed firsthand and talked to the different local actors engaged in this illicit activity, he ends his piece by espousing this advocacy:

As much as [local diggers] are the front liners of cultural destruction, they are also potential protectors of their own cultural properties, through education and local community engagement....by involving [them] in the active protection of their own cultural properties, we are actually reducing participation in the loss and opportunity to further destroy cultural heritage, and, at the same time, increasing awareness for its protection.

THE CONTESTED

ACT Ruiz’s “Muslim Migrants and Hybrid Placemaking of Mosques in Culiat, Quezon City” examines religious placemaking or mosque making within the five-hectare Al-Salam Mosque Compound. Her work updates Akiko Watanabe’s study on mosques and Moro migrant settlements in Culiat in Metro Manila, and also extends previous works on the Muslim compound by focusing not solely on the tensions between insiders and outsiders; but among insiders as well. As long-time resident of Culiat and through her outsider status in the compound, Ruiz attempts to examine these tensions and how they “intersect and result in the specific physical environment of the compound [constituting the] social experiences” of its Muslim inhabitants. She describes the compound as “an amalgamation of all the pull factors seen in other urban Muslim communities—state intervention, economic networks, diaspora, and tribal cooperation,” but argues that it is foremost a “space of representation” where “[beneath] the veneer of the [community] label ‘Moro’ lies an explosive heterogeneity of people who simultaneously accommodate and refuse

the essentialism dealt from the Manila majority, and from one another.”

In describing religious placemaking in Al-Salam, she surfaces the visual (prominent or hidden mosque structures and the suspect speed of their construction), aural (the language of the khutbah), and tactile (cleanliness and congestion in the mosques) elements to mosque making and how they are experienced, made sense of, and negotiated by the different local actors in the many mosques. While Ruiz has argued that, through religious placemaking, “[the] diversity of mosques [has allowed] multiethnic and multilingual Moros the choice to determine which religious space best reflects their unique identity,” she also notes that four other mosques were built aside from the Al Salam Mosque not solely because of its incomplete and thus inadequate structure, but because to construct a mosque is “to control the compound.” This intense rivalry, according to Ruiz, has in fact “triggered the dispersal of the jama’ah, violent confrontations, and even the resignation of former administrators.” The construction of a mosque enables its maker to ask for donations from the community and even from groups in the Middle East, and where “there were efforts to deter corruption by accepting donations in kind only . . . patrons [who were] turned off by the intrigues, withdrew their regular donations, [and the] Saudi Arabian embassy withdrew its annual Ramadan donations supposedly due to allegations of corruption.” The above demonstrates the tensions within the Muslim community, where tensions between insiders and outsiders, that is, the Muslim minority versus the non-Muslim majority, have more often been the focus. Ruiz thus makes a clarion call for the non-Muslim majority to learn more about the Muslim minority in the area, where she describes these contestations as product of the Muslim migrants’ ongoing struggle from within and from without.

THE PERIPHERAL

Kristoffer R. Esquejo’s “Family and Politics in an Archipelagic Province: The Moreno Dynasty in Postwar Romblon, 1949-1969” fills a gap in Philippine political studies of peripheral provinces and their provincial elite. A Romblomanon himself, Esquejo made use of documentary sources and oral interviews with members of one of Romblon’s political dynasties, the Morenos. Romblon, with its geographical isolation as an archipelago, small voting population, and divided

ethnolinguistic groups (Asi, Romblomanon, and Unhan), had two significant political dynasties: the Asi-speaking Festins and the Romblomanon-speaking Morenos. Esquejo describes how it was the latter that made its mark in Romblon's political history and elevated the province to the national scene: "At the time, it was quite rare for a small province to have produced a political family that has members occupying powerful positions in both the legislative and executive branches of the national government." However, where studies on political dynasties have focused on feuds between families, Esquejo hones in on the "internal rivalry" between two Moreno brothers, Florencio or "Pensoy" and Jose Daniel or "Joe." He elaborates how their careers in government were entangled with national party politics, as well as the practice of "politica de familia," at the helm of which was the Moreno patriarch Juan Quirino M. Moreno or "Tan Angki." Esquejo puts forward how "the elections of 1953, 1957, and 1961 were living testimonies of the guaranteed collective electoral victory of the Morenos in the position of congressman as long as the brothers were united in supporting each other"—with complementary efforts of the father. He further describes how this initially clashed with the Moreno brothers' American colonial education and "bureaucratic professionalism," but that the elderly Moreno would mobilize the family businesses to ensure the electoral victory of his sons, and in return, the young Morenos would oblige their father's requests.

Esquejo points to the 1969 elections as the intensification of the sibling rivalry, when Pensoy ran against Joe. It became a "display of disunity," which resulted in the victory of the next political dynasty that would reign over Romblon until the present, the Unhan-speaking Madronas. This rivalry devastated the Moreno dynasty; continuing throughout the 1971 elections and martial law, it ensured that no chance was given for the Morenos to return to power. When the Moreno patriarch passed away in 1975, the gap between the two brothers would continue to widen to the point of no return. Esquejo's piece can be seen as a way of giving recognition to the Moreno brothers, despite their family's faults. Where it is interspersed with mostly positive accounts of remembrance from oral interviews among locals, the article hinges on the "pride of place" that the Moreno brothers instilled among their constituents. Romblon is only one of many archipelagic provinces literally and figuratively "isolated from the center," and Esquejo's focus on feuds within the family of a

Romblomanon political dynasty is one contribution to understanding localities from the periphery.

While dwelling on particular localities—Estrella shows how the price of gold in the illicit trade in Butuan is fluid in the hands of local actors, which exposes the disadvantageous and precarious position of the diggers; Ruiz elaborates on how mosque makers compete for socio-political capital in Culiati, which illustrated the challenges of Muslim inhabitants in negotiating and reconstructing identities from within and without the Al Salam Compound; and Esquejo surfaces how peripheral provinces have their own share of stories that need not be isolated and left unheard and unexamined—the authors also reckoned with how their positionalities figured in how they analyzed the above localities. Where the “national” no longer takes precedence as “the primary site for the source of representation” (Pertierra 1995, 14), accounts of localities showing illicitness, contestation, and marginality provide rich sources of situatedness and understanding. Raul Pertierra, decades ago, called for the social sciences in the Philippines to “reflect and inform these varied sources” of knowledge (1995, 14). With globalization, localities are no longer circumscribed by physical boundaries and territories as they now “extend across long distances and different topographies” (McKay and Brady 2005, 89). This entails new modes of analysis and reorienting social science scholarship to include such localities as units of analysis.

Finally, we are pleased to note that all three articles are products of the Third World Studies Center (TWSC) Writeshop. Since 2014, the Writeshop has been the TWSC’s training and advocacy centerpiece. It focuses on building the research and publication capacities of early career researchers, junior faculty members, and graduate students to help them produce a scholarly article for *Kasarinlan*. The authors featured in this issue are representative of the variety of TWSC Writeshop fellows over the years. Estrella is an archaeologist who recently obtained his master’s degree and teaches at the Philippine Normal University and Ateneo de Manila University; Ruiz is a theater-for-development practitioner who is also a graduate student at the Asian Center in University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman; and Esquejo is a recent PhD teaching at the History Department of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman. Ruiz and Esquejo were 2017 TWSC Writeshop fellows while Estrella was a fellow of the 2018 TWSC Writeshop.

This issue of *Kasarinlan* also includes reviews of the second edition of Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso's *State and Society in the Philippines* and Reynaldo Ileto's *Knowledge and Pacification: On the US Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History*, written by Miguel Paolo P. Reyes and Joel F. Ariate Jr., respectively. ❀

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