Book Recommendation

Jorge Mojarro's *More Hispanic than We Admit 3: Filipino and Spanish Interactions Over the Centuries, Quincentennial Edition, 1521-1820*

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Abstract

The Jorge Mojarro-edited book, *More Hispanic than We Admit 3* (2020), takes a look at Filipino-Spanish engagements during the first 300 years after the Magellan arrival in the Philippines. This latest installment of the *More Hispanic than We Admit* series continues with examinations of interactions between the colonized (Filipinos) and colonizer (Spaniards) began in the first two books that came out in 2008 and 2015, respectively. The essays in the recent collection provide various perspectives in the treatment of different topics. While the two earlier books explicitly focus the reader's attention on the country's cultural history, all three nevertheless zoom in on Filipino agency inside a colonial context, posing the idea that Filipino-Hispanic culture was the eventual result of engagements between the natives and the Spaniards, not a top-bottom transmission.

Keywords

Filipino-Spanish interactions, Filipino Hispanic culture, Philippine intellectual history, Filipino-Hispanic identity, Spanish colonial period.

Academic publisher Vibal Foundation's latest addition—the third—to its *More Hispanic than We Admit* series under its Academica Filipina collection comes as a timely read with the commemoration of the quincentennial anniversary of the Spanish arrival on Philippine shores. Edited by Manila-based Spanish scholar Jorge Mojarro, the book purports to discourse on "Filipino and Spanish interactions over the centuries," as its subtitle proclaims.

The subtitle is nothing new. Five years earlier, Vibal Foundation released the Richard Chu-edited *More Tsinoy Than We Admit: Chinese-Filipino Interactions Over the Centuries,* and a quick survey of the publishing house's released titles will show its fascination on "interactions." Mojarro's volume follows *More Hispanic Than We Admit 1: Insights into Philippine Cultural History* (2008) and *More Hispanic Than We Admit 2: Insights into Philippine Cultural History* (2015), edited by compatriots Isaac Donoso and Gloria Cano, respectively.

Despite having a different subtitle, the first two books hardly differ from the third one. While the two earlier books explicitly focus the reader's attention on the country's cultural history, all three nevertheless zoom in on Filipino agency inside a colonial context, posing the idea that Filipino-Hispanic culture was the eventual result of engagements between the natives and the Spaniards, not a top-bottom transmission.

In the last decade, scholarship on Philippine identity, especially those by non-Filipinos, has been shattering the idea of a monolithic Filipino self. The discourse is particularly on peripheral aspects—hyphenated, if one will—of this selfhood. This is seen in Donoso's explorations of the rich Muslim dimension—with traditions from the Middle East and Spain—of Philippine intellectual history in *Islamic Far East: Ethnogenesis of Philippine Islam* (2013) and *More Islamic than We Admit* (2017); in the essays in the aforementioned works, Richard Chu edited the 2015 volume, and those found in *More Pinay than We Admit* (2010), was edited by historian Maria Luisa Camagay.

In 19 essays, the foreword included, *More Hispanic than We Admit 3* aims to show the dynamics of Filipino-Spanish political and cultural cohabitation from the 1521 arrival of the Magellan expedition to 1820, three centuries later. Three of the essays—one from American historian William Henry

Scott (1921-1993), the lone foreigner to teach Philippine history at the post-war University of the Philippines, and two from psychiatrist-genealogist Luciano Santiago (1942-2019)—are posthumously reproduced in this collection, suggesting the importance given to them by the book's editor in reconstructing the story of Spain's first 100 years of colonial rule in Asia.

Scott's 1986 piece ("Why did Tupas Betray Dagami?") delves on how *Adelantado* Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's 16th century version of gunboat diplomacy influenced the dynamics of relationships between native chieftains. On the other hand, Santiago's two contributions—"The Houses of Lakandula, Matanda, and Soliman (1571-1898): Genealogy and Group Identity" and "The Brown Knight: The Rise and Fall of Don Nicolas de Herrera (1614-1680)"—tackle genealogical narratives. The first, published in 1990, shows how the Manila *lakans'* pursuit of their self-interest juxtaposes with the Spaniards' desire to solidify control of their Luzon outpost in the late 1500s. Santiago's short but well-researched biography of Nicolas de Herrera, published in 1991, displays the late genealogist's typical practice of teasing out the story of individuals from bare-bone facts found in archival documents. In taking a second look at Scott and Santiago's essays, the old "Great Men" (or "Women") theory in historiography comes to mind, and one wonders whether, in reconstructing Spain's first century in Asia, Mojarro is unconsciously showing a belief on the need to plot the milestones of those initial 100 years through the lives of the individuals who are the subjects of the three earlier-published works.

Overall, the essays provide a diversity of perspectives with which to view the colonial engagements (though there was no colonial situation to speak of during the half-century 1521-1571). Pieces on the historiography of religious encounters dominate, accounting for a fifth of the collection. It should also be interesting to note that the adjective "colonial," which appears in a fourth of the titles, functions like a double-edged sword semantically: not only is it used to indicate historical period, it also describes the relationship status prevailing during that era (one party is colonized; the other is the colonizer), thus further nuancing "interactions" found in the subtitle.

The essays cover a wide range of topics: from literary texts written by Spaniards in the Philippines to Spanish missionaries' imagining of Asia (and the Philippines within it); from religious issues (evangelization, indigenous pagan religious leaders like the *catalonan*), to the economic construction of empire; and from the emergence of the local mestizo elite, *los criollos,* to the birth of Philippine artistic expression as a function of the intersection of Islamization, Hispanization, and the native resistance to the latter. In all of them, one can see hints of attempts to lay out a field of vision alternating between the local and the global.

The third *More Hispanic* installment is a logical continuation of the first two titles, but with a difference: Mojarro's volume specifies a time frame which the essays should cover. Donoso and Cano's editions do not do this. Hence, this most recent one is tighter in terms of historical time, making it much easier to establish chronological intertextualities.

There is, however, a confusing part in the book's title. Who is the subject "we"? Filipino readers, taking a cursory glance at the cover, would immediately think one of them, or a group of them, is addressing fellow Filipinos. Yet a quick check on the section "About the Contributors" would reveal more non-Filipino than Filipino essayists. The phrase "more Hispanic than we admit" thus gives the impression that non-Filipino Hispanists are telling Filipinos about their own Hispanic-ness, instead of Filipinos themselves (the purported "we") realizing that there is more to this identity than has been "admitted." The inclusion of non-Filipino authors renders the "we" problematic, especially in the case of the *españoles,* who cannot go any more Hispanic than they really are. Taking the cue from the two earlier titles from the series, the "we" refers to Filipinos—Filipinos who have yet to realize the full extent of how much Hispanic their identities are.

The book's subtitle should have been its title. For the most part, the essays are, indeed, about Spanish-Filipino interactions. Discussion of Filipino Hispanic-ness is largely relegated to the pieces of Marya Svetlana Camacho ("The Beaterios and Recogimientos in Manila in the Eighteenth Century: Religious Accommodation and Social Contribution"), Gaspar Vibal ("Philippine Art and Architecture Between Islamization, Hispanic

Colonization, and Resistance"), and to a certain extent, Santiago's de Herrera genealogical tracing.

The potential confusion that can be caused by the "we" in the title gets amplified by the denomination for certain things happening during the Spanish era as "Spanish Philippine." A case in point: Mojarro's use of the label "colonial Spanish Philippine literature" in two of his three contributions (the third is his Introduction to the book, being its editor)—"The Defense of Indigenous People in Colonial Spanish Philippine Literature (1569-1581)" and "Colonial Spanish Philippine Literature between 1604 and 1808."

With three cumulative adjectives preceding the word "literature," and "Philippine" appearing as the third in the sequence, Mojarro locates the corpus as originating and produced in the country, that is, literature in Spanish written in the Philippines during the colonial era. This is inevitably a Spanish perspective, not a Filipino one—because when one talks about literature, one has to account for authorship (or "ownership," if one will), world view, and target readership, not to mention purpose. A Spanish missionary writing in his language about Philippine matters during his nation's imperial possession and occupation of the archipelago was not producing "Philippine literature"—and with ownership/authorship not Filipino, neither were perspective nor target readership—but Spanish letters. An analogy can be the case of Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* published in 1943, was not considered "American" literature despite having been written in the United States, but "Asian American," a literary work of hyphenated origin,

The years Mojarro marked (1569-1581 and 1604-1808) were clearly years of Spaniards writing in the Philippines for a Spanish readership. Filipino (read: native-born, not *peninsulares* or *insulares*) writing in *castellano* with the sophistication that would match that of Spaniards' texts and destined for Filipino readers, would have to wait until the late 19th century to emerge. True, Ladino writers, with Fernando Bagongbanta and Tomás Pinpin as principal representatives, would appear sometime in the early 17th century, but their works have come down to our time as samples of early writing, mainly religious in tone and didactic in nature. In the case of Bagonbanta's oft-cited *Salamat nang ualang hanga*, its bilingual text (the

Filipino line followed by a Spanish translation) reveals its raison d'être: a tool to help in learning Spanish, no different from the American period children's song which goes: "One day/isang araw; I saw/nakita ko; One bird/ isang ibon; flying/lumilipad."

Whatever texts in Spanish appeared in the Philippines—prior to the clamor for political reforms during the 1880s-1890s Propaganda Movement—was clearly Spanish writing, or Spanish literature produced by Spaniards for Spaniards in the Philippines. It was, by no means, Philippine literature, as Mojarro himself reveals in the works he enumerates in his essays. Unfortunately, his definition of "colonial Spanish Philippine literature" takes out the element of struggle and critique of colonial rule present in the writings of Filipinos themselves—"we define 'colonial Spanish Philippine literature' as primarily the literature produced in the Philippines by any author from 1521 until…the second half of the nineteenth century." (459) [emphasis mine].

Fil-hispanic literary bibliographies list, among others, aside from Jose Rizal's two novels, his contemporaries Graciano López Jaena's *Fray Botod* (1874), Marcelo del Pilar's *Soberanía Mónacal* (1888), and Antonio Luna's *Impresiones* (1891)—works that tackle native [read: Filipino] identity politics in Spain's colony in Asia and which, at the same time, attack the colonial set-up there. Denunciations of Spanish colonization is one attribute principally absent in Mojarro's inventory of literary oeuvres. In short: "colonial Spanish Philippine literature" (writings by the colonizers) is not Philippine literature in Spanish (writings of the colonized).

Mojarro is correct, however, in batting for a balanced historiography, a "universal history that is viewed with consensus everywhere" (xi), as he says in his Introduction. He elucidates this narrative-making as a three-dimensional task, one that goes beyond a) "Spanish interpretations done in the context of colonialism"; b) "interpretations framed by Filipinos who tried to ignore any foreign influence or contribution to their own history" and c) "all prejudices resulting from American interpretations that have reproved the Spanish regime in the Philippines in order to justify their own intervention in the islands" (xi).

In the search for this "universal history," he notes—with the quincentennial apparently in mind—that

> much prevarication has greatly contributed to obscuring this three-hundred epoch, thus discouraging scholars from engaging with this past due to misguided notions [he calls them 'fossilized preconceptions' a few lines later] that equate it as nothing more than the history of foreigners in the archipelago. (xxiv)

Mojarro's remarks call to mind historian Teodoro Agoncillo's statement which shocked local academia in the 1950s: that there was no Philippine history to properly speak of before 1872 (the year of the Cavite Mutiny and execution of the Gomburza priests) because any history prior to that time was the history of Spaniards in the Philippines (Ocampo; Ileto, 497; Zafra, 454)

While Agoncillo might dispute Mojarro's assertion of "misguided notion" the former's claim, the latter is correct in arguing for a wider—global, that is—perspective in viewing Philippine historical events. He is right in saying that there is a much bigger context with which Spanish actions in the Philippines, even Filipino responses, should be examined. But there should be a caveat: it is easy to fall into the trap of Western metanarratives, where non-Western peoples, or the former colonized, are subsumed under the label of "the rest of the world," and are seen as just acting in concert with, or merely following the lead of principal Western (read: former colonizer or now neo-imperialist) countries in the march of history.

The trauma of colonialism remains unhealed in these former colonies, evidenced by their economic underdevelopment. Part of the healing process for these now-independent developing nations is the telling of their stories in their own words. While there is a need to see local events from a much bigger field of vision for a much deeper understanding, these countries' histories, the Philippines' record of past national life included, should be told in their own voices. In the case of the Philippines, the task of striking a balance between looking from a bigger viewpoint and narrating national

experiences should be the responsibility of Filipino historians, present and future.

To conclude: *More Hispanic than We Admit 3* continues with the coverage of Philippine cultural and intellectual history initiated by its first two predecessor volumes. It also highlights Filipino agency within the colonial context and, like the first two, suggests that Filipino Hispanic culture/identity is less a matter of top-down transmission and more the result of engagements happening between Filipinos and Spaniards. But unlike the two, this latest collection applies a strict time frame in which these engagements are boxed—the 300 years after the Magellan arrival in the Philippines.

As a postscript: is the publisher pulling a prank on Mojarro, or are both conspiring to pull one on an unsuspecting reader by substituting the face of Sebastian Elcano (1486-1526) with Mojarro's on page 2?

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