

Introduction: War, Race, and Nation in Philippine Colonial Transitions

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The late nineteenth to the early twentieth century is the most intensely studied period in Philippine history. For students of Southeast Asia, the reasons are well known. It was during this period that the Philippines suffered through a series of dramatic transformations, going from colony to revolution to Republic, then back to being a colony within a span of six years (1896-1902). Igniting the first anti-colonial Revolution in Asia, Filipinos established the first Republic in Malolos, only to see it fall to the brutal invasion and subsequent occupation of an emergent United States. The articles in this special issue of *Southeast Asian Studies* seek to address and account for specific episodes of these transformations. What follows is a brief and necessarily attenuated sketch of the larger context of these transitions from one power regime to another.

From the Spanish conquest of 1565 to its demise in 1899, *las islas Filipinas* was located at the western most end of the Spanish empire, furnishing a vital link between Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia. New World silver monetized Asian economies just as Asian goods brokered by non-Han merchants and shipped on galleons constructed and powered by native labor enriched Spanish and other European traders. However, in the wake of Spanish liberal reforms from the later eighteenth to the nineteenth century that sought to establish closer political and economic ties between the colonies and the metropole, the Philippines proved to be the exception. It was administered by the most illiberal authorities of the Catholic Church, the Spanish regular orders, while its populace, regardless of wealth or ethnicity were considered racially inferior and thereby excluded from participating in metropolitan politics. While Cuban and Puerto Rican creoles enjoyed political rights and representation in the Spanish Parliament, Filipinos were ridiculed as recalcitrant savages and potential subversives. In a similar vein, the U. S. annexed the Philippines as the most distant of its overseas frontiers in the aftermath of its war against Spain. But unlike the predominantly white settler colonies of the continental Southwest such as Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma that were designated for eventual admission into the union, the Philippines was legally defined along with Puerto Rico, Hawai'i and Guam as part of a series of "unincorporated territories." Filipinos were consigned to the status of wards, unfit for self-government and thus in need of American instruction. This imperial schooling meant, however, that American sovereignty, always articulated in white supremacist

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terms, was imposed without the juridical rights and protections of the American constitution. Thus the paradox of imperial liberalism, whether coming from Madrid or Washington, D. C. On the one hand, both defined the archipelago as a state of exception, which is to say a site of continuing war and incomplete conquest, where whatever rights were conferred to a populace thought to be racially inferior could be arbitrarily and often violently taken away. On the other hand, fin de siècle liberalism also meant opening the economy and society of the colony to the currents of global trade, cosmopolitan cultures, technological and medical innovations, penal and educational reform, the movement of new ideas, and the irresistible, often catastrophic effects of inter-imperial and revolutionary wars.

Spain's defeat in the Seven Years War and its need to match growing British imperial power led it to instigate a series of major reforms that transformed the economic and military basis on which its empire was run. In the Philippines between the 1760s to the 1860s, such reforms included the hugely profitable Tobacco Monopoly, paving the way for the agricultural revolution of the 1820s, the rationalization of revenue collection, the re-organization of the colonial militias, the opening of the archipelago to world trade allowing for the entrance of British, American, French, German merchant houses, the lifting of the ban on Chinese immigration, the beginnings of a public school system, the reform of the penal code, the easing of press censorship and many other developments. Such were attempts to modernize the Philippines, increase its profitability especially in light of the loss of Spanish America, and prevent its separation from the *imperio*. But it was precisely out of fear of losing *las islas Filipinas* that the Spanish colonial authorities, no matter liberal or conservative, intensified their dependence on the Catholic church and in particular on the Spanish friars to maintain what they considered to be gullible because racially inferior population of indios, mestizos and other Filipinos subservient to Spain. Whereas the liberal revolution in the Peninsula had taken away the power and property of the friar orders in Spain and the colonies, their influence increased as never before in the archipelago thanks to the cynical racism of the colonial state.

At odds with itself, Spanish colonial liberalism crashed on the weight of its own contradictions. Filipino nationalists claiming to be Spaniards in every equal measure blamed the most retrograde agents of the empire, the Spanish friars in frustrating their efforts at gaining political recognition in the metropole and dignity and justice in the colony. Seething with resentment, many were driven to consider separation and plot revolution. Thus did Jose Rizal organize the separatist, Freemason-like society, *La Liga Filipina* upon his return to the colony in 1892, that in turn begat Andres Bonifacio's secret society, the Katipunan, which launched the Revolution in 1896. By the latter part of 1897 and most dramatically between 1898 to 1899, the Revolutionary forces in tense and fragile coalition with wealthier, more conservative elites, drafted the constitutional basis for what would become the short-lived Malolos Republic. Frantically seeking recognition abroad while attempting, at times violently, to establish its hegemony across the archipelago, the Malolos Republic was welcomed by many of the people as the acme of revolutionary accomplishment. At the same time, it met with stiff resistance from some peasant armies who saw the Republic as an elite-dominated government unable to control

the abuses of its soldiers while its leaders sought to continue where the Spanish colonizers had left off. Indeed, a cursory reading of the Malolos Constitution shows how the Republic's leaders drew from some of the more liberal features of the Spanish and American constitutions, from the inclusive definition of the basis of citizenship to the separation of Church and State. But its laws also favored a strong legislature over the executive, insuring that the more conservative elite faction would gain greater control of the new government, shaping its policies to guard its economic advantages and social privileges. In this sense, the Republic was far from being a democracy and arguably set the pattern for the emergence of a Republican oligarchy. Given the social tensions and military fragility of the new Republic, it was not surprising that it would fall rapidly to the advancing forces of the United States.

The protracted and valiant Filipino resistance against the U. S. was initially so effective precisely because it was not led by a centralized Republic. Emilio Aguinaldo, the Republic's president spent much of his time retreating and hiding from the Americans. As with all sustained guerrilla movements, Filipino resistance was decentralized and largely under local initiatives led by charismatic commanders. The capture and cooptation of these commanders alongside the use of brutal tactics ranging from torture to mass killings, political exile to the re-concentration of entire villages that spawned illness, famine, economic and ecological collapse led to the eventual dissipation of Filipino resistance and the conditional hegemony of the U. S. Furthermore, active elite collaboration with the new imperial masters, buttressed by an extensive network of spies, an emergent infrastructure for gathering intelligence and infiltrating sites of militant resistance like labor unions, and the calculated censorship of nationalist sentiments by way of legislation and libel suits, quickly drove radical politics to the margins. U. S. "pacification" was further consolidated with the spread of an extensive public school system, secular in organization and liberal in outlook, with English as the lingua franca, through which other government programs could be channeled: public health that sought to link proper sanitary practices with rationality and bodily control; a liberal notion of citizenship that envisioned uplifting the sub-standard lives of the rural and urban population into a common "average" that would mitigate the "feudal" power of the rich; the suppression of heterogeneous labor regimes in favor of the standardization of work into wage labor that would allow for the colony's integration with the global capitalist market; and so on.

What we might think of as the biopolitical practices of the U. S. colonial state — that is, policies and procedures meant not only to brutally suppress insurgent challenges to its sovereignty but also to reinvent the very conditions for living life itself in the colony — were ordered towards preparing the people to become recognizably liberal subjects fit for self-government. U. S. colonial governance while comprehensive and profound in its penetration into everyday lives was at the same time conceived to be temporally limited in its formal, external presence. Filipinos from the start were seen to be vital agents in the realization of imperial rule. Initially ambiguous about the status of the Philippines, the U. S. Congress as early as 1916 decided that independence would be the ultimate fate of the colony. However, it would be an independence whose terms would be dependent on the U. S., and thus always conditional,

deferred and subject to continuous surveillance, testing and periodic re-evaluation. The eventual outcome of this bizarre vision of a dependent independence was the non-sovereign sovereignty of the elite dominated Commonwealth of the Philippines between 1935–41. Like the Malolos Republic before it, the Commonwealth would be decisively shattered by yet another foreign invasion, this time at the hands of the Japanese imperial army. Though briefly revived in the early months of 1946, the Commonwealth would give way by July 4, 1946 to the post-war Republic. It was a Republic that bore more than a striking resemblance to its colonial ancestor. Its formal sovereignty was contingent on the continuing material, military and cultural hegemony of the United States as much as its offices were dominated by the same oligarchy. However, it was also a Republic that was, as Reynaldo Ileto's essay in this issue points out, at constant war with itself. Haunted by the specters of an unfinished Revolution now filtered and mediated by cultural nationalist notions fostered under the Japanese occupation and besieged by a communist-influenced peasant uprising, the Republic would struggle with the meaning of independence, the limits of its sovereignty, and the possible future of freedom in the country.

The articles in this special issue of *Southeast Asian Studies* grapple with the history of these transformative years. They map both the disruptive and productive effects of wars, the formation of colonial subjectivities predicated on the categories of race and ethnicity that directly emerge from such wars, the shifting definitions of colonial citizenship, the conflict of aesthetic sensibilities rooted in the languages of Spanish, English and the vernaculars, the radicalization and repression of hispanophile nationalists, and the contests over the meaning of the Revolution amid the mass movements and social unrest of the post World War II era.

War was an indispensable means for imposing sovereignty, whether imperial and national. John Blanco notes how sovereignty itself, the power to decide on who dies and who lives, was invariably shaped by shifting notions of race. He explores a set of related contradictions to illuminate the co-constitutive relationship between war and race. First, he looks at the economic and social liberalization of the Spanish Philippines as that which simultaneously opened the door for the most virulently racist and exclusionary depictions of Filipinos; second, the seeming dissonance between the official U. S. proclamations of "benevolent assimilation" and the racially charged exterminatory campaign of the U. S. military against Filipino insurgents; and finally, the ethnological insistence in the nineteenth century that there was no such thing as a "Filipino race," only heterogeneous "tribes" organized into a racial hierarchy as against the racially inclusive rhetoric of "the Filipino race" invoked by nationalists from Rizal to Bonifacio in their attempts to conjure a community emancipated from colonial rule. War as the means for establishing sovereign power, whether that of the imperial authorities or nationalist fighters, thus mobilizes racial projects even as these projects determine war's unfolding and outcomes. In this sense, one could think of Philippine history as a specific instance of the global unfolding of modernity characterized by the contradictory *and* complementary workings of race making (coincident with nation-making) and racism (as a weapon of reactionary colonialism).

Race also figures significantly in Filomeno Aguilar's nuanced reading of the vicissitudes of citizenship traversing three regimes. He asks: what did it mean to be a Filipino citizen in the

eyes of the law? What did the law see when someone, for example, a mixed race person with Chinese ancestry, sought recognition as “Filipino”? How was the same law interpreted differently between the metropole and the colony, between the Spanish and the U. S. regimes, and among the Malolos Republic, the Commonwealth and post-war Republic? Legal definitions of citizenship were predicated on three rights: *jus soli*, the right of birth; *jus sanguinis*, the right of blood; and *jus domicile*, the right of residence. Each regime emphasized one or the other in deciding appeals for naturalization especially for what was until the latter nineteenth century referred to as “Chinese mestizos”: individuals with Chinese fathers and Filipina mothers. Surprisingly, the Malolos Republic proved to be the most liberal in its grants of citizenship, placing equal value on all three rights. Aguilar explains this liberality in terms of the dire needs of the new Republic under siege to attract as many different supporters into its ranks. Just as significant was the fact that the colonial Supreme Court under the U. S. made up of Filipino and American justices often proved to be far more liberal than the U. S. State Department in following the Fourteenth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution in recognizing citizenship on the basis of *jus soli*. Such rulings were particularly striking given the racist context of U. S. immigration law. The U. S. had extended the Chinese Exclusion Act to the colony to prevent “Asiatics” from using the Philippines as a backdoor to enter the U. S. Additionally, the American Supreme Court defined the Philippines along with Hawai‘i, Guam and Puerto Rico as “unincorporated territories,” designating the status of its racially mixed inhabitants in denigrating terms as “foreign in a domestic sense.” Yet, in deciding naturalization cases on the basis of *jus soli*, the colonial Supreme Court, as Aguilar points out, set aside considerations of race in favor of taking into account the specific conditions of the individual. By contrast, the Commonwealth and then the Republic revised earlier rulings and ignored the Fourteenth Amendment, shifting decisively to *jus sanguinis* as the main determinant of citizenship. Filipino legislators sought to use limits on naturalization to stem the putatively deleterious economic and cultural effects of the Chinese. Indulging its racist fears under nationalist cover, the post-war Republic tended to adhere to a conservative, exclusionary understanding of the law.

The exclusionary racial project of Filipino nationalism in relation to the Chinese, however, takes on a different significance in the anti-Americanism of early twentieth century hispanophile nationalists. Heirs to the ilustrado legacy of the Propaganda Movement and the Malolos Republic, they were united in their use of Spanish as a lingua franca of opposition to what they regarded as the arrogant philistinism of the English language Anglo-Saxon culture and imperial policies of the U. S. regime. Gloria Cano’s reconstruction of the history of the nationalist newspaper *El Renacimiento* provides us with an important window into this vital movement. Events in Spain between 1812 to 1868 were crucial in instituting the basis for the emergence of a liberal public sphere sustained by the flowering of numerous media of publicity, principally the political newspaper. From the 1880s on, numerous publications emerged in the colony, echoing the political debates in the metropole. As Cano points out, much attention has been devoted to the premier nationalist newspaper based in Spain, *La Solidaridad*. But what has been almost completely forgotten is the fact that the colony’s print media such as Pascual

Poblete's *El Resumen*, the initially liberal *La Voz de España*, Isabelo de los Reyes' bilingual *El Ilocano*, and *Diariong Tagalog* where Marcelo H. del Pilar had cut his editorial teeth before fleeing to Spain and editing the *Sol*, preceded and influenced *La Solidaridad* in their vigorous debates with several conservative publications. It is within this longer history of bilingual political journalism that Cano situates the emergence of *El Renacimiento* during the first decade of American rule. Its editors were dedicated critics of the colonial regime as much as they were advocates of a revolutionary nationalist tradition in Spanish and the vernaculars. With the inclusion of a Tagalog language section, *Muling Pagsilang* edited by Lope K. Santos, the circulation of the paper increased considerably, alarming colonial authorities and the small but vociferous American community. Colonial officials responded by resorting to censorship through legal means. Officials such as the Philippine Constabulary commander George Allen who objected to the newspaper's dogged investigation of PC corruption and that great pontificating windbag, Dean C. Worcester, harassed the editors of *El Renacimiento* with libel suits that eventually bankrupted the paper. Yet the legacy of *El Renacimiento* — its critique of the abuses and hypocrisies of state power, its advocacy of nationalist culture, its highly polemical responses to injustice — is all still very much alive in the practice of Filipino and Filipino-American journalism today.

This persistent attempt and recurrent failure of state power, imperial as well as national, to colonize the life worlds of its citizens and transform their heterogeneity into a set of measurable standards and calculable values is the overarching theme of Neferti Tadiar's article. She examines the U.S. colonial regime from the perspective of a history of mediation, looking specifically at the media technologies which laid the infrastructures for what she calls the "milieu" of colonial citizenship. In this way, her article compliments those of the previous three while clarifying how something like a colonized consciousness came about. Education was the key apparatus in this process and Tadiar takes particular aim at the formative history of Filipino literature in English. Beginning the early twentieth century, the short story emerged as the pre-eminent genre of literature in English. Such authors as Paz Marquez Benitez and Manuel Arguilla came to embody in their work an aesthetic of transparency, one related to the emergent technologies of photography and the cinema. Their accomplishments, or so colonial literary critics claimed, lay in their ability to make English seem unrheterical, as if it were a kind of local dialect that organically grew out of everyday experience.

The mystification of English as the aesthetic equivalent of local speech made it seem that English could substitute for Spanish and the vernaculars. Additionally, the seeming transparency of English, and thus its power to convey worldly reality, made it appear as if the aesthetic qualities of other literary forms such as vernacular and Spanish poetry, the *komedya*, the *cenaculo*, the *pasyon*, the *zarzuela*, and so forth were excessively ornamental, epistemologically obtuse and woefully anachronistic. Colonial literary education thus consigned an entire range of indigenous and Spanish literary practices to be backward and obsolete. Freighted by rhetorical flourishes that supposedly distorted rather than conveyed the really real — the "meaning" that lay behind a story, for example, or the "revelation" that was conveyed by a

symbol — these other literary forms were devalued as not quite modern. Aesthetic education under the U. S. regime thus sought to use literature as a way of “redistributing the senses” in order to produce citizens who were on their way to a democratic society. That strange formation, “colonial democracy” required that colonial subjects think of themselves as individuals with inalienable rights but also with alienable and negotiable interests; as juridical subjects before the law who were also subjected to the irresistible rhythms and irrational movements of the global capitalist marketplace; as the origins of their labor rather than mere servants of feudal masters, but also as receptacles of measurable amounts of labor power exchangeable for commodities. Aesthetic education, including the short story in English, was part of a larger apparatus for instilling and mediating the contradictions inherent in these notions. Yet, as Tadiar points out, this aesthetic education came at the cost of suppressing other expressive forms which nonetheless continued to circulate, “infecting” prescribed colonial aesthetics in the way of mimicry or fantasy beyond the limits of capitalist-democracy.

The survival of alternative modes of imagining and living in excess of colonial forms is a topic that pervades Reynaldo Ileto’s essay. It deals with the contests over the mediation and meanings of the Revolution, which is to say, of the unsettled origins of Filipino nationhood. In his masterful analysis of the career of the historian Teodoro Agoncillo, we see how the latter’s most important book, *The Revolt of the Masses* [[1956]2002], could be read as a telling episode in the struggles between the 1930s to the 1950s to control the narrative and interpretation of what has been regarded as the “unfinished” and thus inconclusive Revolution. Steeped in the traditions of vernacular literature that as Tadiar pointed out tended to be marginalized by colonial aesthetic education, Agoncillo did not begin doing serious historical research until the Japanese occupation. Despite the everyday brutality of the Japanese military regime, Agoncillo and other nationalist artists and intellectuals managed to take advantage of the regime’s cultural policies which encouraged more critical views of the United States alongside the recuperation of the anti-colonial revolutionary legacy. As Ileto points out, the Japanese occupation was a formative period in Agoncillo’s thinking as he began the research that would go into the writing of his book about the Katipunan.

The book itself had a remarkable career. As a prize-winning manuscript in 1948, its publication was blocked by the anti-communist Committee on Un-Filipino Activities whose membership included the future president Ramon Magsaysay. Limited copies were finally allowed to be published in 1956, coinciding with the tumultuous debates that led to the passage of the Rizal bill requiring schools to teach the hero’s two novels. As Ileto argues, Agoncillo’s book stirred controversy precisely because it sought to counter official narratives of the Revolution. Such views held that U. S. rule was truly beneficial. Its tutelary trajectory allowed for the attainment of revolutionary goals. U. S. intervention in the revolution against Spain foreshadowed its role in the fight against the Japanese. Both resulted in the liberation of the Philippines, culminating in the grant of Independence in 1946. Agoncillo like the hispanophile nationalists Claro M. Recto and Jose P. Laurel, along with the members of the Communist Party and the Hukbalahap movement thought otherwise. They saw U. S. colonialism as a disaster, and

experienced Independence as a betrayal insofar as the Americans and their Filipino elite allies refused to recognize the efforts of the Huks in fighting the Japanese. For Agoncillo, the social discontent that boiled over into the Huk rebellion was evidence of the unfinished revolution of 1896. The class antagonism that characterized the Revolution and deferred its success was similar to the sort of class struggle that animated the Huk revolt. The continuing greatness of Agoncillo's book, as Iletto shows, lies in the way it foregrounds the historicity of the present. Arising organically from the intense political debates and social turmoil of its times, the book put forth the anti-colonial revolutionary origins of the nation that were decisively at odds with the official view that understood the country's emergence to be the product of America's benevolent tutelage and unstinting patronage. Agoncillo's legacy infuses Iletto's own work as the "unfinished revolution" continues to be the dominant trope that animates the nationalist understanding of Filipino history. From this perspective, history is not merely a record of transitions, or an accounting of transformations. It is rather the anticipation of that which is to come: perhaps a future reckoning, or the arrival of a kind of justice that outstrips the law. It would be the promise of freedom, however conceived, which, as a promise, is always yet to be fulfilled.

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