A FAILURE OF IMAGINATION? THE NATION IN NARRATIVES OF THE 1896 PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION*

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A partial and non-exhaustive examination of a number of studies on the 1896 Philippine Revolution, confined here mainly to English-language publications, suggests that narratives about the revolution have been undergirded by contradictory impulses, resulting in the simultaneous upholding and undermining of the nation as an imagined egalitarian community. The deep-rooted causes are identified in terms of the tension between an indigenous worldview privileging rank and status contests and the appropriation of a non-hierarchical model of the nation.

The "Unfinished Revolution"

Hardly would any Filipino who has spent some time in the Philippine education system doubt the significance of 1896 in the life of the nation. The rising that became a revolution against Spanish colonial rule marks an indisputably high point in Philippine history, a pivotal juncture that eventuated in a declaration of independence and the birth of the nation—an historic event commemorated at great expense, with elaborate symbols of modernity, and much outpouring of patriotic emotion during the recent centennial celebrations of June 1996. Momentarily, the many questions that have remained unresolved about the revolution were submerged by the collective rejoicing. For a good portion of the 20th century, however, the portrayals in Filipino historical writing of the revolution launched in August 1896 generated a profound unease among the Filipino intelligentsia. The lack of a denouement, attributed by many to the imperialistic intervention of the United States in 1898, has left the story of 1896 without a proper closure. The unexpected entry of a new colonial master twisted the revolutionary plot, the turn of events not providing satisfaction to the nationalist imagination which, since early this century, has groped for the elusive catharsis into glorious national selfhood.

Indeed, there has been a lingering sense in which 1896 is an "unfinished revolution", a sentiment initially suppressed by the elite beneficiaries of US colonialism but which, since the tumultuous 1960s, has become mainstream in Filipino political discourse [Ileto, 1993]. The coming-to-its-own of the nation may have been finally reached during, or the urgency in seeking closure to the revolutionary narrative mitigated by, the triumphant four days of People Power that brought down the Marcos dictatorship in February 1986. A struggle with a conclusive ending, that event generated a reservoir of national pride that welled up during the centennial celebrations, making concerned Filipinos phenomenologically bracket aside for the moment the unresolved questions about the 1896 revolution.

Taken at its face value, the idea of an unfinished revolution as a broad judgment on history has been encountered in other parts of the world. Borrowing a phrase from Marx and Engels, Trotsky conceived of Russia after the October Revolution of 1917 as requiring, in order to attain true socialism, a "permanent revolution" on a global scale, a goal deemed to have been betrayed by Stalin, his doctrinal insistence on "socialism in one country", and his running of the Soviet bureaucracy. The Indonesian left-wing editorial cartoonist of the late 1950s and early
1960s, Sibaranigraphically conveyed the message that the promise of the 1945 revolution remained to be fulfilled: "The Revolution was by no means over." [Anderson, 1990: 191]. Although the radical politics of various strains of the Filipino Left has certainly fostered the notion of the unfinished revolution [cf. Ileto, 1993], its acceptability among a broad segment of the Filipino intelligentsia suggests the possibility of a pervasive subtext that transcends the inclinations of particular political camps. Based on the writings of nationalist historians in the 1970s, Ileto [1993] has eloquently indicated that the absence of a Great Tradition prior to the Spanish conquest leaves little room for anchoring national pride except in the idea of a struggle for national liberation: "Without great monuments or a court culture to serve as an alternate focus or centre of national aspirations, the ensemble of events and ideas called 'the Revolution of 1896' has had to serve as some sort of charter or as the legitimizing principle for subsequent calls for unified action" [Ibid: 78]. That the search for national selfhood is to be found in struggle due to the paucity of a recognisably great pre-colonial civilisation will need to be reconsidered, however, in light of the fact that many of Thailand's nationalist historians, despite Siam's elaborate court culture and history have, been similarly involved in pinning Thai history to a plot of struggle for national liberation [Thongchai, 1994; Reynolds, 1993]. In the case of Cambodia, the very existence of Angkor Wat has not forestalled, but rather has generated a brittle nationalism, owing to French historical machinations [Barnett, 1990].

The subtext of the Filipino idea of an unfinished revolution may be located in the feeling that the revolutionary episode was "stolen" by more powerful forces in an "uneven contest", and the Filipino people "cheated" of a conclusive victory [Aguilar, 1994]. The helplessness of the historical underdog inflames resentment against a lopsided struggle in which the Filipino has no "fighting chance", the odds too uneven and unfairly stacked up against the Filipino whose behaviour is akin to one deceived and misled. In the People Power of 1986, however, the electorate would have been "deceived" had the "people" not acted decisively to stop the dictatorship from "stealing" the vote, hence the rising that toppled the Marcos regime produced a narrative in which the "Filipino people" may be regarded as its "winner". Despite the fact that the elite subsequently "stole" its potential for fundamental change, the 1986 People Power met the desire of many Filipinos for a national catharsis in four days of what Victor Turner calls "communitas", a moment of collective ritual shared even by residents in remote corners of the country by means of the transistor radio. Unlike the 1896 revolution, the 1986 narrative offers some closure and, despite the recent comeback of several Marcos associates after Estrada's election to the presidency, the emotion-laden event at EDSA may be "constructed" as a revolution; as a collective ritual to which the trope of popular sovereignty is attached, it ended the Marcos dictatorship and has become the basis for resisting any return to autocratic rule; even the communist movement suffered a severe dislocation in its wake [cf. Sewell, 1996]. Nevertheless, some nationalist question whether 1986 is a genuine revolution. On the other hand, despite some gaping holes in its narrative, 1986 is firmly ensconced, indeed revered, in the national imagination as The Revolution. The only drawback, it would seem, is that a new colonial hegemony stole the revolution.

But perhaps there is still another reason for the incompleteness of the 1896 revolution, one allied with the notion of contests and the hierarchies thereby created. As argued in this paper, the story of the revolution that gave birth to the nation is frequently told in a way that upholds the nation while undermining it at the same time. I seek to support this proposition by examining some historical details which are symptomatic of broader patterns in the historiography of the 1896 revolution. The discussion is premised upon Benedict Anderson's [1991] illumination of the nation as an imagined community, imagined as generically egalitarian, culturally pure, internally coherent and fundamentally homogeneous, a fraternal comradeship of members bound together by "natural" ties. In this fictive community, social differentiation and status hierarchies have been banished: the nation is an imagined community of equals. However, an examination of several major texts produced by Filipino historians on the 1896 revolution, written from varying shades of nationalist standpoint, reveals a marked tendency to highlight differences that divide and subvert the nation. Such differences include but go beyond the well-known debate on the respective roles of the ilustrados and the masses. What is rather un-nationalist in these texts, written by contemporaries as well as later historians, is the persistent attempt to rank the major ethnolinguistic groups among Filipinos in terms of their participation in the revolution. Thus, these narratives affirm but also blame, they encompass even as they also create hierarchies, they promote even as they subvert the nation.

Tagalog Hegemony and Nationalist Mistranslation

In the Filipino historiography of the 1896 revolution, it has been standard practice to equate the territories and environs of the Tagalog-speaking colonial capital as the principal site of action. The rise to arms of the Katipunan in August 1896 is the canonically recognised event that led an entire people to rise against its colonial oppressor. The Tagalog landscape is thus made to represent the whole Philippines. Emblematic of this putative equivalence is the uncritical translation of the word "Tagalog" in Katipunan documents to "Filipino", and similarly of "Katagalugan" to "the Philippines". Bonifacio's famous manifesto entitled Ang Daabat Mabaitid ng mga Tagalog is conventionally rendered as "What the Filipinos Should Know". Teodoro Agoncillo [1956: 95] proffers such a translation, and so does Gregorio F. Zaide [1939: 25, 27] and, even earlier than Zaide, Epifanio de los Santos [1918: 39]. The slippery substitution of "Filipino" for "Tagalog" is easily justified within the nationalist frame of mind. Bonifacio occupies a prominent place in the pantheon of heroes of the nation; surely he must have meant Filipinos, surely he must have been addressing the entire nation rather than directing himself exclusively to the people of Katagalugan. How would later generations of Filipinos, who would have to be taught love of country and reverence for its heroes, relate to Bonifacio if he was narrowly concerned about his fellow Tagalog only? Surely, as a national hero he must rise loftily far above the crowd; otherwise, one would have to confront the possibility that Bonifacio was rather like the average Filipino with a penchant for "regionalism". O. D. Corpuz in his two-volume opus, The Roots of the Filipino Nation, is a notable exception to this pattern of nationalist mistranslation; Corpuz confronts the issue squarely, calling the linguistic extrapolations "unjustified" and "misleading" [1989: 219-223]. Most Filipino historians, however, have taken the liberty to redefine Bonifacio's "Tagalog" as referring to all Filipinos.

This deliberate transposition of "Tagalog" into "Filipino" has been facilitated by the use of the English language in the writing of Philippine national history. If that history were to be written in another Philippine language, Bonifacio's tract might have to be translated, for example, as Ang Kinahangan Mabait-an sang mga Tagalog (Ilonggo) or Ang Kaibahan Naaringangan kang mga Tagalog (Bikol). In other Philippine languages, "Tagalog" is untranslatable to a word other than Tagalog. Even if national history were to be written in Tagalog, or Filipino, or however the national language is called, a ghastly explanation would have to be inserted to say why
Bonifacio's Tagalog stands for all Filipinos. That is, in fact, what happens in Agoncillo's *Pinipinas Kong Mahal* (1981: 174), where the historian, confronted by the untranslatability of "Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog", resorts to a disingenuous tale, saying "Noong panahon ng Kastila, ang nang Pilipino. Kaya't ang kahulugan ng 'Tagalog' dito ay 'Filipino'." During the time of the Spaniards, the word "Tagalog" was used to refer not only to the Tagalog, but to all Filipinos. Thus, here, the meaning of "Tagalog" is 'Filipino'. Such concoctions are unnecessary in English-language books. Paradoxically, the nationalist glosses in the writing of Philippine history have been made possible by the use of Spanish. In line with the Spanish word, Filipinos, the oppressor's language has provided in the first instance the medium by which the nation is imagined, discursively created and textually reproduced.

The writing of national history in English, however, reveals rather than camouflages the specifically male narrative of national history. The dominance of national realism is signalled by the usual translation of the association's name *Kataasatan Kayalonggaganang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* as "Highest and Most Respectable [or Most Exalted and Most Respected] Society of the Sons of the People" as in the works of Benitez [1954: 270], Alip [1954: 116], Agoncillo [1956: 46], Zaide [1968: 79], and Corpuz [1989: 218]. These published texts in English extend the earlier rendering of the Katipunan in Spanish as "Suprema Asociacion de los Hijos del Pueblo", as in Rafael Palma's manuscript [Palma, 1972: 549]. One wonders why these Filipino writers did not translate the non-gendered "mga anak ng bayan" into English as "children of the nation". Renato Constantino [1975: 158] steers clear of this pitfall in his *A Past Revisited* by omitting the Katipunan's full name altogether. But Constantino [ibid: 168] also slips into a male history by referring to Bonifacio's dialogue *Katangkulan Gagawin ng mga Anak ng Bayan* as "Duties of the Sons of the People", which puts him in the company of Benitez [1954: 272], Kalaw [1969: 22], and Zaide [1968: 93]. Agoncillo [1956: 97] tries to skirt this issue by omitting the title and calling it simply the "Decalogue". However, gendered misrepresentation is merely the symptom of a perspective best captured by Zaide who writes: "The Katipunan was originally a society for men. Bonifacio knew the common weakness of women—their inability to keep secrets" [1968: 88]. But the wives of Katipunan members, according to Zaide's narrative became "suspicious" and, to thwart their "jealous" reactions, a "women's section" was formed; they "remarkably kept the secret of the Katipunan, a rather unusual feat for a group of women to achieve" [ibid: 89-90]. Going beyond such condescending view, the historian would carry on with his indictment of women as will be discussed in the next section.

There is another point to be noted about the easy slippage between "Tagalog" and "Filipino": it begs the question of just how fully developed the idea of an imagined national community and geo-body was at the end of the 19th century, not least among the Tagalog audience and readership of Bonifacio's manifesto. No doubt, feelings of patriotism ran deep. But patriotism in relation to what kind of imagined community and with what spatial referent? In assessing this issue, it must be acknowledged that the technologies of power in the late 19th century were not sufficiently sophisticated to disseminate a view of the nation that, in the abstract, would have been far greater than the constituent ethnolinguistic "regions" which would be inclusive of all areas "from Aprill to Jolo". Consequently, Filipinos (the Tagalog rendition of the Spanish, Filipinas) became thinkable as a nation, not in geo-body terms [Thongchai, 1994], but rather, as Reynaldo Ileo [1990] has demonstrated, as the native mother (*Umay Bayan*) more faithful and more deserving of political love and sacrifice than Mother Spain—Bonifacio's translation into kinship terms of Rizal's

historical plot of the contract breached by Spain [Schumacher, 1979]. By thinking of the nation in maternal terms, the same imagination could remain profoundly Tagalog-centric.

The hazy articulation of Tagalog with Filipinas is finely illustrated in the following stanzas from Bonifacio's poem, *Kataposan Hikib ng Pilipinas* (The Final Lament of Filipinas), quoted by Ileo [1979: 102]:

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Samisikat na ina sa sinilangan
ang anong ng poot ng katagalugan,
taling daang taong amin iningatan
sa dagat ng duwa ng karanasan.
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Mother at the horizon, has risen
the sun of Tagalog fury;
three centuries we kept it
in the sea of woes wrought by poverty.

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at ikaw ay di na ina naming lahat.
Walong istinup kaming yong anak
sa bagoym masalas ng dalat't hirap.
Ilsa ang puso niitong Pilipinas
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Your children's hut had nothing to hold it up
during the terrible storm of pains and troubles,
all in Filipinas are one of heart—
no longer a mother you are to us.

It is remarkable how, in the same breath, Filipinas is conceived as a unity—it is of one heart (*ilssa ang puso*)—but its anger at the injustices inflicted by Mother Spain is specifically and ineluctably Tagalog (*poot ng katagalugan*).

It would appear that what needs emphasising is that the birth of the nation was imbricated with the struggle to make Tagalogs (as well as other ethnolinguistic groups) think beyond the narrow confines of their own geographic space, and to make them think in terms of the much larger entity represented by Filipinas. A later turn of events would prompt Aguinaldo to confront a more basic problem: the disunity among the Tagalogs themselves as well as among several provinces in Luzon. In a speech delivered at Malolos in February 1899 entitled *Mga Kapatid na Pilipinos* [cited in Ileo, 1979: 122], he exhorted the peasantry to think in the broader terms of a nation—a siblinghood—in which differences are obliterated by the all-encompassing and unifying label of "Filipinos".

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Yuan na nang lahat ang mga partidos at iba pang nakakagulo sa ating pagkakataon, at tygo ng lahat ay mag-iisa na lamang pong pangalan—Filipinos—sinulit hagga na isa lamang bayanging nasyon, isa lamang bayanging loob, at isa lamang bayanging Katipunan.
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Let us leave behind all these parties and other things that cripple our unity,
and let us all be one in name—Filipinos—a sign that we are one nation,
one loob, one katipunan.

Evidently, the Tagalogs did not have a fully crystallised view of the nation, as they needed to hear Aguinaldo's lecture, yet nationalist history goes by the easy
assumption that the Tagalogs were ready-made nationalists. The orthodox, if tacit, assumption appears to be this: because the revolution started in the Tagalog-speaking regions and nearby areas, the people of these territories occupy the apex of a hierarchy of participants in the revolution. As the concluding section of this paper suggests, such a view is inscribed in the design of the Philippine flag.

The portrayal of Tagalogs as foremost nationalists might not be a problem if other ethnolinguistic groups were pictured along similar lines. But that is precisely not the implicit assumption in the historiography of the revolution, a point to be explored in the next section. The image of other ethnolinguistic groups as anti-nationalist is a direct heritage of the earliest Tagalog writing about the revolution. In Carlos Ronquillo’s version of the event with the title Ang Paghitamisngik Laban sa España (The Uprising Against Spain), printed in the June 1911 issue of Renacimiento Filipino [Iletó, 1979: 132], the notion of enemies from within is elaborated upon. The Ilonggos and Macabebes are singled out as the “real” enemies of the Revolution who arrive from outside, that is, from non-Tagalog origins, in order to overrun Imus and capture Aguinaldo [ibid: 146]:

Na cuan caya lamang na awas-ausan
dahil sa ilonggong ditto, i, nasigadatal,
at ang macabeeng tauong salangapang
mangcyong matibay sa buning general.

[Blanco’s] sadness was alleviated
only by the timely arrival of Ilonggos
and Macabebes, rogueish people
who made a firm pledge to the illustrious general.

Iletó stresses that the poem depicts the Macabebes as the worst traitors because, as Kapampangans, they were “considered participants in the Katipunan phenomenon” [ibid: 146]. In later histories, this view of the Macabebes has been perpetuated, this group thereby assuming the undeniable role of traitors in Philippine history [e.g. Corpuz, 1989: 458-459]. Within a Pasyon-inspired reading of revolutionary history, they have become the quintessential Judases. But note that the Ilonggos do not receive the same measure of moral condemnation, not because they acted differently from the Macabebes, but because, coming from the Visayas, they were not “considered participants in the Katipunan phenomenon”. Even the determination and ranking of traitors to the nation abided by a Tagalog-centric logic.

Ethnolinguistic Hierarchies and Betrayal of the Katipunan

The regional-ethnic divide in the revolutionary narrative has been reinforced by highlighting the Visayan-ness of the “betrayal” of the essentially Tagalog Katipunan, which resulted in the discovery of its existence by the Spanish authorities and, in turn, prompted the premature start of hostilities. In some of the earlier histories, Visayan involvement in the “discovery” of the Katipunan did not figure prominently. Mabini’s account, *La Revolución Filipina*, does not make a big issue of this incident, declaring simply that “the head of the printing press of the *Diario de Manila*, having discovered that some of his employees belonged to a secret society handed them over to the constabulary for the corresponding investigation” [Mabini 1969: 43]. In 1925 Kalaw published his *The Philippine Revolution*, his version stating that “incomplete reports” about a secret association “were strongly corroborated when

Teodoro Patiño, through one of his sisters, an inmate in the orphanage of Mandaluyong, revealed to Father Mariano Gil, priest of Tondo, a great many of the details of the Katipunan plot” [Kalaw, 1925: 18]. Kalaw further suggests that Patiño’s sister was not entirely to blame, for the information obtained through her was combined with “the confessions forced from many citizens who were immediately arrested and tortured” before “the whole secret plot of this formidable popular association was unraveled.”

In the late 1920s, however, various accounts of the Katipunan’s discovery by Spanish colonial authorities were published in the popular press, in response to which Zaide sought to rectify what he saw as erroneous reporting. In 1930 he obtained several affidavits from people whom he presented as credible sources of information for the reconstruction of events leading to the discovery of the secret society. These testimonies appear as appendices to his *History of the Katipunan* published in 1939, a work inordinately preoccupied with seeking the “truth” about the “discovery” to which three of its ten chapters are devoted. After unequivocally stating that, “On August 19, 1896, Teodoro Patiño betrayed the Katipunan to Father Mariano Gil of Tondo, and thus was the K.K.K. [Katipunan] discovered” [1939: 61], Zaide provides an assessment of the various “conflicting versions” of this incident. His concern is to settle, once and for all, such issues as whether a male or a female betrayed the Katipunan, and whether the revelation of the group’s existence violated the confidentiality of the sacrament of confession. In the process, he repeatedly casts the spotlight on certain feminine villains, and on the Patiños and their provincial origin: Dao, Capitás.

In the following extract, the Visayans are vividly portrayed as engaging in fatal gossip and intrigue, the pivotal person being a nun of the “appropriate” ethnicity who overhears a conversation between the siblings Teodoro and Honoria Patiño:

Accidentally the Madre Portera (Sor Teresa) overheard their conversation which was carried on in Visayan. She understood everything because she was a Visayan herself. She approached Honoria and comforted her. Realizing the gravity of the situation, [the Madre Portera] advised Teodoro to tell what he had already told his sister to Father Mariano Gil, Augustinian cura of Tondo [Zaide, 1939: 100].

In his later works, many details would be deleted but the Visayan angle would remain. In *The Philippine Revolution* published nearly three decades after *History of the Katipunan* saw print, Zaide restates his main points, albeit shifting the crucial role from the nun to include Patiño’s sister:

In the evening of August 19, 1896, at 6:15 PM, a Bisayan katiununero, Teodoro Patiño, who was then working in the printing shop of the *Diario de Manila*, appeared at the Tondo convent and revealed to Fr. Mariano Gil, Augustinian cura of Tondo, the startling news of the Katipunan plot. He did it upon the advice of his sister, Honoría, who was living in the Augustinian Orphanage in Mandaluyong, and the madre portera, Sor Teresa de Jesus, a Bisayan nun. He went to see Father Gil not to confess any sin against God, but to betray the Katipunan [Zaide, 1968: 107-108].

The plot of betrayal is thus reducible to: one Visayan man lost his marbles and revealed the secret of the Katipunan, but at the instigation of some Visayan woman who re-enacted the role of Eve the temptress. At any event, the culprits are all Visayans ranged against the Tagalog Katipunan.
Moreover, Filipino nationalists in the late 19th century belonged to what Anderson [1991] calls "the third wave" of nationalism (following after the creole pioneers of nationalism in the Americas and the second-wave nationalists of Europe), and therefore heirs to a modular nationalism with a standard set of fixtures. Part of the conventional nationalist furniture is a linear history, the culmination point of which is the "birth" of the nation. This climactic event is heralded by a similarly singular event that signals "the beginning of the end". The patterns set by earlier experiences of nation formation set the grid for the structuring and interpretation of Philippine history. For instance, a protracted controversy has surrounded "the Cry" of 1896, some arguing it occurred in Balintawak, others proposing it occurred in Pugadlawin (an issue that may finally be resolved through Jaime Veneracion's [1990] innovative suggestion that "the Cry" occurred in several locations [Evangelista, 1996: 89]). The point, however, is that "the Cry" has been intensely debated because of its presumed significance in the nationalist narrative, one historian comparing it to "the storming of the Bastille" [Zafra, 1960: 1]. In light of external models of nationalist histories, the Revolution is the Katipunan, and the Katipunan the Revolution.

In the pursuit of a single event and a single historical actor in the birth of the nation, Corpuz, who otherwise is careful not to conceal the regionalism of Bonifacio, Jacinto and Aguinaldo by not mistranslating when they write and say Tagalog or Katagalugan, is led to encapsulate the revolution in the Katipunan. Indeed, he emphatically declares that the Katipunan "would become the first concrete embodiment of the Christian Filipino nation" [1989: 222]. Not only is he then Tagalog-centric (despite claims that the Katipunan outgrew its Tagalog origins [ibid: 223]) but, in the space of one sentence, Corpuz manages to exclude religious, spatial, and ethnic minorities and peripheries from the nation. Apart from such drastic homogenisation of the nation, the distillation of "the Christian Filipino nation" (a phrase that in itself is highly debatable) into the Katipunan is rather dangerous: What was the Katipunan's fate? Would it be the same as the nation's?

Against the general pattern sketched out here may be mentioned Constantino's "people's history", which provides considerable space to "resistance" and "nativist" movements in the provinces outside Central and Southern Luzon before and after 1896. But that as it may, these groups and movements are depicted as having engaged in "fragmented struggles" that were "devoid of ideology". As a result, they are treated as fundamentally secondary to and derivative of the main event, the Katipunan which he celebrates as the "historic initiative of the masses" [Constantino, 1975: 167].

Notwithstanding significant divergences in their approach to Philippine history, many leading Filipino nationalist historians, irrespective of their individual political persuasions, thus share a common perspective: their narratives operate within the rigid framework of an event-oriented history, with a strong emphasis on one formal organization that is virtually indistinguishable from one key event. We are yet to see "the throwing off of the heavy Spanish yoke" depicted in processual terms, of the revolution as a process that can be imagined as taking multiple forms, nurturing hybrid ideologies, and occurring simultaneously in various parts of the country.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Who is No. 1 of Them All?

The problem with the often unconscious attempt to construct an invidious hierarchy of participants in, and even traitors of, the revolution has also manifested itself in the protracted debate as to who ought to be recognised as the revolution's...
"real" heroes. At one level, the debate has been preoccupied with the status of Rizal in contradistinction to that of Bonifacio. These two gentlemen, however, are mere proxies for a deeper ideological debate as to whether the glory of the revolution belongs to the wealthy ilustrados or to the unlettered peasant masses. Earlier histories highlighted the exemplary role played by individuals coming from the elite segments of native society. A section heading used by Kalaw [1969: 72] is indicative of the elitist plot: "The People Acclaim the Revolutionists." Obviously "the people" cannot be one and the same as "the revolutionists." The negation of the earlier elitist perspective has been forcefully advanced by Constantino with his stress on the "historic initiative of the masses." That the elites were pragmatic and opportunistic in their participation in the revolution has now become conventional wisdom [Agoncillo, 1956; Constantino, 1975; Guerrero, 1982; Corpuz, 1989].

But let us look again at how "the masses" dislodged the ilustrados from centre stage. There appears to be a consensus that this displacement occurred with the publication of Agoncillo's The Revolt of the Masses in 1956, although it was originally completed in 1948 as an entry in a state-sponsored competition focusing on Bonifacio's biography. As Ilo [1979: 4] reflects back on this "classic work," the book's title "indicates Agoncillo's purpose—to rectify the tendency of historians before him to regard the revolution as the handiwork of upper-class, Hispanized natives." Indeed, when it first appeared the book created a stir and was even denounced as a Marxist-Communist interpretation of the 1896 Revolution [Hernandez and Del Rosario, 1956]. In hindsight, such an accusation can be seen as part and parcel of the ideological histriionics of the Cold War, probably triggered by Agoncillo's anti-clerical asides. Looking at Agoncillo's text from the vantage point of the 1990s, however, we can see that the masses dominated centre stage only as far as the book's title goes. Despite its celebratory banner, the book's title does not take long for one to discover that The Revolt of the Masses is caught in the "great man" theory of history: it remains anchored upon the personality of a few key individuals who are portrayed as the genuine historical actors rather than the so-called masses—perhaps unavoidably so as the manuscript was meant to be a biography.

A similar interpretation would re-emerge in Constantino's A Past Revisited which, notwithstanding its lauding of the "historic initiative of the masses," elevates Bonifacio to exalted heights because of what is presented as his unique ability "to articulate the desires of the people" [1975: 169]. As Constantino explains with neat theoretical elegance:

While the early revolts were movements without theory, the ilustrados were the exponents of theory without a movement. It took a Bonifacio to synthesize the two, for Bonifacio, though he came from the lower middle class, had the instincts of the masses. It is characteristic of the middle class that its members have latent inclinations toward both the upper and the lower class. To his credit, Bonifacio resolved this ambivalence decisively in favor of the masses whereas other leaders of similar economic status would later opt for absorption into the upper class, thus abandoning the people [ibid].

It is evident that, in Constantino's framework, while the masses may be credited with the "historic initiative," the "historic potential" was really to be found within "the middle class". Ultimately, the masses are seen as incapable of articulating their own desires. Their ideology is, at best, "primitivistic" and "inchoate" [ibid: 169-170], a view that probably reflects the longstanding ambivalence in Marxist thought about the "true" revolutionary potential of peasants.

If so, and I am here phrasing the question absurdly to make the point stark, is the "middle class" then the greatest of them all? The answer would seem to be in the affirmative as far as Constantino is concerned. But, for Agoncillo [1956: 104], the term "middle class" encompasses the ilustrados and, consequently, this evasive and malleable category of "the middle class" does not earn as much credit in Agoncillo's work as it does in Constantino's. However, what is patent in The Revolt of the Masses is that "the masses" are not to be emulated, for Agoncillo's text unashamedly overflows with references to the inherently negative nature and constitution, as he saw it, of the peasantry.

The masses "are not accustomed to the intricacies of the rational processes and are moved by the impact of feeling and passion and refuse to see, if reminded by their intellectual betters, the probable effects of their planned action" [Agoncillo 1956: 99]. In other words, the masses are irrational and stupid. They are swayed by Bonifacio who is "blunt," of a "one-track mind," and "mercilessly demagogic" but whose "mediocre" poetry "would strengthen them in their hour of weakness" [ibid: 91, 94-95]. Their "astonishing tenacity and will-power" is a product of their "fanatical belief in ultimate success," a fanaticism which equips them with "the all-pervading readiness to die for a cause...to hurl themselves barehanded against any and all weapons of destruction" [ibid: 110, 111]. Their "excited mental state...was propitious for the uninhibited release of brute strength" [ibid: 167]. With such peasant attributes, the Katipunan fighters started "with the emotive cry of freedom, followed with the instinctive resort to physical force to realize the primitive urge to be free" [ibid: 290]. The fight for freedom is not the fruit of the intellect, but merely a primitive urge. Moreover, their grievances were "fundamentally economic" [ibid: 150-152], rather than political.

In the end they needed a military leader in the person of Aguinaldo "who could give battle to the Spaniards on something like equal terms" [ibid: 160]. Eventually becoming "an easy victim of their credulity," Bonifacio was ultimately abandoned by the "unschooled masses [who], usually gullible enough to believe news that was difficult to verify, were infected with the venom of the rumor and were led to believe that Bonifacio was not the man they had thought him to be" [ibid: 228-229]. In short, as far as the author of The Revolt of the Masses is concerned, the peasant masses are ignorant, irrational, undisciplined, emotional, fanatical, reckless and gullible; if left to themselves, they are incapable of taking a strong case for the historical organisation, they fight with blind rage, given their erratic behaviour, they first idolised, then victimised, Bonifacio (thus indirectly absolving Aguinaldo of responsibility for the murder of Bonifacio in peasant hands). Could these traits have been "the instincts of the masses" that, in Constantino's view, Bonifacio personified? What irony that the peasant-bashing of The Revolt of the Masses played a strategic role in edifying Bonifacio and in glorifying the "revolutionary" character of the people.

It would take Ilo's Pais y Revolution [1975] to cast the Tagalog peasantry in a favourable light, this study making a strong case for the historical significance of a distinctive peasant rationality and structure of meaning. Using Robert Redfield's terminology via Harry Benda, Ilo elucidates the worldview of the Little Tradition which, in turn, is presented as, by nature and essence, opposed to the Great Tradition of the elites [cf. Ilo, 1988]. However, there is in Ilo's work an unbridgeable chasm that splits society in two, the ilustrados and the masses, the Hispanized and the un-Hispanized, the official Catholic and the folk Catholic, the former adhering to Western-derived notions of nationalism, rationality and independence, in contrast to the latter who subscribe to non-linearity and are animated by the indigenous conception of freedom and national belonging. There seems to be no meeting ground. Ilo does strive to allow the peasant masses to speak
in their own voice; nonetheless, he retains the basic divide between elites and masses. Following his own inimitable style and innovative methodology, Ilento celebrates the peasant masses as the "real" subversives who challenge and undermine all forms of Western-derived knowledge and power, whether of the Right or of the Left.

The overall result of the debate on who ought to be considered the "real" movers of the revolution has been confusion, recriminations, and bitter divisions among present-day Filipino scholars and intellectuals, belying any fictive communality among them and, of course, in the nation—that entity which is the common object of their imagining, study, and affection. Unavoidably, the debate has generated images of the nation as dichotomised, polarised and fragmented. Socio-economic divisions certainly existed at the turn of the century and beyond, but the point is that the Filipino historical imagination has not produced and invented a monumental drama incorporating elites and masses alike in a narrative of national communion. Studies of the revolution by Filipino historians have been guided, wittingly or unwittingly, by the notion of a zero-sum game: "either my view of history or yours; we cannot have both." In effect, they are propounding a view of history that is singular and homogeneous, with only one genuine hero and the finality of one perspective on the past.

Perhaps the challenge is to write plural, disparate and heterogeneous histories of the revolution in which heroes matter yet do not matter that much, in which class divisions are evident yet fluid, divergent yet internally articulated, in which every social group makes an important contribution, though not everywhere and at all times. I would think that no human organisation, kin group or society, has ever been completely unified. Homogeneity and unity are myths ingeniously constructed and propagated rather than accepting plurality and heterogeneity as part of the process of becoming, we seem to be preoccupied and fascinated by our own singularities (having no idea of the fractuousness of, say, Indonesian history) as if these were ends in themselves. And hence there is the constant harping on singularities, the elaborating and magnifying of differences until they dominate our cognitive maps—which may be all right if the national imagination has sufficiently matured, but it has not.

Perhaps we need to realise that, after all, history is a selective enterprise, an abstraction of distinct but countless human actions, a disjunctive representation of the past irredeemably gone, seeking empirical grounding but is better regarded as tentative, an exercise in the manufacture of meanings that may symbolically divide or unite depending on how one chooses to write. Moreover, rather than being burdened by the absence of a glorious ending that a linear plot requires, a more imaginative nationalist historiography of the revolution may choose to take as its project the visualisation of simultaneous multiple revolutionary processes with a divergent set of participants. After all, ancient modes of retelling the past in our part of the world relied upon the sound of words to evoke recurring, repetitious representations of the past and the present in timeless intimacy [Errington, 1979]. Perhaps, instead of formal academic treatises, the Filipino historiography of the 1896 revolutionary process should take advantage of modern technologies to tap the indigenous predilection to non-linear imageries in order to advance the modern construct of the nation in a plural and inclusive nationalist narrative.

Indigenous Thought and The Nation

The suggestion to reconsider the representation of the past from a visual, and not merely written, perspective reminds us that the protagonists and antagonists in the various debates that have surrounded the Filipino historiography of the 1896 revolution have all written their histories using the genre of narrative forms influenced by Western thought, whether these influences be pro- or anti-Marxist, pro- or anti-Enlightenment, structuralist or post-structuralist. Although these written histories employ a Western form, their compelling urge to form hierarchies of provinces, ethnolinguistic groups, heroic individuals, historic classes and genuine radicals, they have in my view unconsciously partaken of the peculiarly Southeast Asian preoccupation with rank and status contests.

The various pre-conquest groups, settlements and migratory bands, conventionally lumped in modern histories under the homogenising label of barangay, in the islands that would become the Philippines were configured by cosmologically informed, non-monolithic hierarchies of status inequalities, dependencies, alliances, and betrayals [Rafael, 1988, ch. 5; Aguilar, 1998, ch. 1]. In such a cultural milieu, the structure of any social group would tend to be fluid, the resulting polity being akin to what Oliver Wolters [1982] has called the mandala, or what S. J. Tambiah [1976, ch. 7] has referred to as the galactic polity, where power emanated from the core and radiated outwards to peripheral areas arranged in concentric-like rings, the outermost ring in receipt of the faintest radiance from the core. If the pre-conquest societies in the islands that became the Philippines conformed broadly to the model of the finely stratified and ramified mandala polity, then the persistence of this indigenous worldview is fundamentally at odds with the concept of the nation as an imagined egalitarian community in a bounded territory. The national idea may indeed be intrinsically alien to the indigenous cultural template of Filipinos, but only in so far as the latter continue to be guided by the ancient ideal of a cosmos ordered by status contests. And if they are, it is possible that the national imagination may be compelled by the need to propagate. Rather than accepting plurality and heterogeneity as part of the process of becoming, we seem to be preoccupied and fascinated by our own singularities (having no idea of the fractuousness of, say, Indonesian history) as if these were ends in themselves. And hence there is the constant harping on singularities, the elaborating and magnifying of differences until they dominate our cognitive maps—which may be all right if the national imagination has sufficiently matured, but it has not.

At present, there is one visual summary of the existing historiography of the 1896 revolution: the Philippine flag. Without a doubt, the flag is a sacred symbol of the nation. At the same time, the principle of the pre-conquest mandala appears to be tacitly operative in the flag as well. Occupying the core of revolutionary history and national life, the mainly Tagalog centre is vividly enshrouded in the flag, specifically in the eight rays of the sun. As Zaide [1990: 6] explains, "The sun inside the triangle [reminiscent of the Katipunan] represents liberty, and its eight rays stand for the first eight provinces to take up arms against Spain". Aguinidlo itself was reported to have offered the explanation that "Those brilliant rays stirred up the Filipinos and spread the light of their passion for freedom to others" [Baja, 1928, reprinted in Zaide, 1990: 6]. Thus, the predominantly Tagalog centre is truly where the light is most intense, and whence radiates the light that illuminates the rest of the nation. The three stars represent the peripheries—the remainder of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao—which have their acknowledged, but derivative, roles in the mandala-cum-republic.

The Philippines is not unique in the mandala-like organisation of space within the territory of the nation-state: witness the preponderance of Java and the primacy of Bangkok in the simple coloured strips of the flags of Indonesia and Thailand, however, the national imagination obliterates internal hierarchies and status
distinctions. In examining the flags of other countries, one would be hard put to find one that accords a special distinction to the first that did this or the first that did that for the nation. But the Philippine flag is different in being a symbol of the nation and, at the same time, the antithesis of the imagined community. The ranking embedded in the flag is, therefore, a graphic summary of the Filipino nationalist historiography of the 1896 revolution and its fundamental contradiction, bequeathing to future generations an incomplete revolution.


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