AMERICA'S BOY

A Century of Colonialism
in the Philippines

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Introduction

As a nation the Philippines is not well understood in the West, suffering as it does from a confused image. This owes much to a sad and complex history which saw the archipelago fall beneath the successive dominion of Spain, the United States and Japan before belatedly achieving independence in 1946. The country that emerged was an anomaly, widely perceived politically as an American satellite while at the same time being the only formally Christian state in Asia. By appearing not to fit comfortably into the bloc of neighbouring nations that includes China, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, it tended to slip through the highly selective grid of Western public awareness. From the mid-sixties onwards, however, this conceptual no man’s land steadily acquired notoriety, if not a geography, by being the locus of a famously exotic ruling couple: Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Their story, as sporadically seized on by the international media, was played out in largely journalistic terms: unbridled corruption, wild extravagance, brutal dictatorship and a sensational, if not sticky, end.

It is just a dozen years since an apparent turning-point in post-war Philippine history. In February 1986, after the so-called ‘EDSA’ or ‘People Power’ revolution, the Marcos family was helicoptered out of Manila’s Malacañang Palace and flown to exile in Hawaii. Such images as the world has today of the Philippines are mainly rooted
The little Philippine village where I have been living, on and off, for the best part of twenty years could itself be said to dwell in shadow. This is partly the fault of the spotlight that is forever fixed on Manila, where most news is generated, leaving the bulk of the country in relative obscurity. But another part of the shadow comprises a good deal of what was not illuminated by all those books about the Marcos years. In my provincial outback I kept encountering fervent wishes for Ferdinand’s return. The Marcoses, or at least their local party representatives, had to some extent penetrated village life. No matter how physically distant the President had been, some token of his personal voltage had seeped through to every last barrio, or village, in the country. In many regions this was probably the first time such a thing had ever happened, so remote and aloof could the capital feel from elsewhere in the archipelago. (In a forgotten interview of 1969, none other than Senator Ninoy Aquino described it thus: ‘Manila is an imperium in imperio, a republic within a republic, and that Manila is as alien to the Philippines as Hong Kong.’) When Marcos went, the sense of a patron or a godfather went too. As Mrs Aquino took over, that already tenuous central government presence withdrew. Her photograph replaced those of the Marcoses in the village school and the barangay (village) hall, but that was all. The whole community felt as though it had moved further away from the centre of things, back to the old self-sufficient marginality of pre-Marcos days.

That many ordinary Filipinos missed the Marcoses (although few would admit it to foreigners) should come as no surprise. Rural folk everywhere are notoriously conservative and often value the old order, however little it did for them, over some brave new regime that has installed itself in the far-off capital. For over twenty years the Marcoses had run the Philippines from Malacañang Palace; they had long since come to seem like fixtures. True, rumours of corruption and chicanery had filtered through to the furthest province, but what of it? They were to be expected. There had never been a Filipino government without its whispers of malpractice and criminality. That was politics, local or national. More to the point, ordinary people had the distinct impression that the Marcoses had at last put their country on the international map. Thanks to all that moving and shaking by wily old Ferdinand, and
thanks equally to Imelda’s antics and high-glamour diplomacy, the Philippines was no longer some obscure Southeast Asian nation like Laos that nobody could quite place. Nor was it merely a vast American aircraft carrier permanently at anchor off the coast of mainland Asia. Whatever his domestic faults might have been, Marcos had given the country a measure of pride and independence and a proper foreign policy of its own . . . People in the village were pretty vague about the exact details of Marcos’s foreign policy, but they did retain the image of a man with his own nationalistic agenda. ‘He had balls,’ they said succinctly. ‘He was clever. Only he had the nerve to snub the Americans – not once, either, but over and over again,’ adding darkly: ‘That’s what did for him.’ This was one of their principal theories for the President’s downfall. The other was that his wife was to blame. ‘He was ill, poor man, and Imelda simply took advantage of his sickness by making her own power-play.’ That would be a paraphrase. The unexpurgated version over glasses of palm toddy was couched in more macho terms, the traditional male myth of the good man undone by a woman, by Woman herself – the scheming, devilish principle whose fatal allure-made-flesh drags its hapless victims towards that Venus flytrap, the vagina dentata. I think it was then that I first began to feel sorry for Mrs Marcos.

As the years following EDSA went by, and President Cory Aquino was succeeded by Ferdinand Marcos’s own cousin, President Fidel Ramos, I began to miss an account of the Marcos era that would investigate these patches of darkness: something that would explain how an alleged monster could still command degrees of wistful or belligerent loyalty at grassroots level. Ideally, the sort of account I was hoping for would not treat recent political history solely from the usual perspective of American corridors of power. I was curious to learn what the connection was between Marcos and ordinary Filipinos – the men and women of the rural barrios who grew the country’s rice and went to cockfights and sewed their children’s dresses for Flores de Mayo parades. After all, in spite of the vast disparity in wealth, they shared a cultural heritage. Finally, in default of the text I wanted, I began to pursue my own enquiries. I soon realized that the Marcoses would only become comprehensible when put into a much longer context than was fashionable, and seen against a background of coconut palms and paddy fields as well as of executive office furniture. And in due course I found I had written a book of my own.

For the sake of convenience I have decided to use again the name ‘Kansulay’ which in an earlier book, Playing with Water, disguised the provincial village I was describing. For the purposes of this present book, ‘Kansulay’ is less a disguise than a fabrication based on several communities I have known in the Southern Tagalog region. The same goes for its fictitious inhabitants, none of whom represents a living person. Such a device enables sweeping generalizations to be made about ‘the provinces’ from beneath two cloaks of anonymity: one which conceals the village where the author still lives, and another which partially shrouds that author, who is not always the ‘I’ of his own discourse.

It will be noticed that, whereas the references of printed sources are given, verbal quotations are sometimes anonymous. This usually means that the people concerned only agreed to being quoted provided they were not named. Occasionally I have decided that attribution would be indiscreet or unmannerly. In all cases, though, the quotations are verbatim unless otherwise indicated in square brackets.
A history told by foreigners

Until recently, the Philippines' history was that of its colonizers, written by foreigners in a foreign tongue. There is plenty of archaeological evidence to show that the archipelago has been inhabited for the last 30,000 years at least, but the first written references to it are in Chinese state documents that refer sketchily to trading relations (all those porcelains!) between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. Here the significant thing is that the Chinese traders found themselves dealing not with a country that would later become known as 'the Philippines' but with various ports-of-call scattered throughout a group of islands. It is clear that there never was a proto-Philippines in the sense of a political entity with some sort of centralized administration — no Angkor Wat, no Borobudur. At the most there were fiefdoms with local chiefs. There are a few other vague references from the time of Marco Polo onwards (his uncle Maffeo headed a Venetian trade mission to China in 1260–9); but as a moment's reflection will show, it was hard for returned travellers in those days to explain precisely where they had been. Crude magnetic compasses existed, but much of the globe was still blank to European sea-going explorers who in any case had no way of fixing their longitude accurately until the eighteenth century. Travellers tended to plot their journeys by references to the various courts they visited, and these are often hard to identify at 700 years' distance.

Where the Philippines is concerned there are virtually no proper accounts of its indigenous peoples before late sixteenth-century Spanish friars began keeping records of their communities and writing reports for their superiors in Manila and Spain. It is exactly this dearth of documentation that led to forgeries in the nineteenth century. The late William Henry Scott stated the matter with characteristic baldness: 'No Philippine historian has yet published a prehispanic document of uncontested authenticity....' From the first, the Spaniards' colonization of this archipelago was quite different from their conquest of Latin America. The sheer sailing distance of Manila from Madrid meant a journey via Mexico, with an arduous overland trek intervening between risky crossings of both the Atlantic and the Pacific. For the next two centuries and a half the galleon supply route sailed unreliably between Acapulco and the Philippines. In a sense Philip II's new acquisition became the colony of a colony because throughout those 250 years the Philippines was actually governed from Mexico. It tends to be overlooked how many different foodstuffs and words which today's Filipinos think of as either indigenous (maize, pepper, papaya, tobacco) or Spanish (tocayo, sombrero, palenque) are actually Mexican in origin. Even less is it remembered that two of the commonest and most intimate Filipino words (namay for 'mummy' and tatay for 'daddy') were imported from the Mexican Indian language Nahualte. Genes also made the Pacific crossing abundantly in both directions.

These dangerously stretched lines of communication between metropolitan Spain and its latest colony severely restricted the numbers of travellers, so there was never a mass migration of adventurers, bureaucrats and military to the Philippines as there was to South America. This in turn meant that the archipelago was never really conquered in its entirety. None but the most zealous missionary could penetrate to the mountain tribes living in remote isolation in, for example, the middle of Mindoro or the high Cordillera, while the thinly spread military were obliged to give up their attempts to subdue the 'Moors' in the Moslem south, in Jolo and Sulu and parts of Mindanao. There, the local datus (princes) and petty sultanes were far too well entrenched, trading from easily defended fiefdoms up sheltered estuaries amid thick jungle. And there they still were, not much changed, when Joseph Conrad
described them in his novels at the turn of the twentieth century. Even today, people in certain parts of the country still refer to the habagat — the southwest monsoon — as the ‘pirate wind’, commemorating an ancient fear of the seasonal gales that brought crews of marauding Moors up from their southern strongholds, attacking the galleon trade and carrying off slaves even from the northernmost parts of Luzon. Many of the defensive watchtowers the locals built can still be seen.

Those southerners owed their Islamic influences to Arab traders from the Indian Ocean, while Indians themselves had some slight cultural sway elsewhere in the Philippines. This was at least partly religious, and had percolated overland across Asia to Indochina before making the leap across the South China Sea. It survives discreetly, mainly in vocabulary. Among the Sanskrit loan words whose arrival in the Philippines must greatly have pre-dated that of the Spaniards were two for deity or royalty: bhattara and devata. By the time the Spanish missionaries arrived these words had taken their present-day forms of bathala and divinta and were applied to a wide selection of idols and spirits. Optimistically, the earliest priests assumed they described the local equivalent of their own Judaeo-Christian god (they were all too wrong), so that today the Tagalog word for God is Bathala. However, in this as in so much else the Filipinos’ true spiritual pluralism shoved triumphantly through, since the word can equally mean a false god or an adored woman, just as divanta means a lovely maiden or a fairy. A more obviously Hindu influence can be discerned in the name of the capital town of Pangasinan Province: Lingayan. This derives from the lingam, the phallic symbol of Siva, and the Spanish priests were obliged to make the pragmatic gesture (which all the great monotheistic religions have had to make in a variety of ways) of assimilating the fertility dances associated with the lingam into Christian ritual. Today’s dancing devotees have simply redirected their songs from a giant phallus to the co-founder of the Poor Clares, St Clare herself.

A second factor lay behind the peculiar way in which the country came under Spanish rule. Unlike in South America there were no myths of El Dorado, no great mines of silver and precious stones. The result was that there were no brutal and greedy conquistadores looting the country from end to end. Instead — and uniquely — the Philippines was largely subdued and administered by los frailes: friars of various Catholic orders whose official task was that of conversion. The Spanish Crown’s grandly ambitious aim was nothing less than the spiritual conquest of Japan and China, and only incidentally that of the Philippines, which was viewed more as a stepping-stone. Describing himself as ‘an instrument of Divine Providence’, Philip II regarded it as a matter of moral scruple that this ‘barbaric archipelago’ should be won for Christ by the Bible rather than by the sword. A measure of the mission’s success is that the Philippines became, and remains, Southeast Asia’s only predominantly Christian country. This alone would ensure it a later history different from that of other colonized countries in the region.

Spanish colonial policy towards the Philippines in the sixteenth century is often made to seem like a private whim of Philip II, albeit backed by a religious motive. That is to overlook the intellectual, spiritual and political ferment in Europe at the time colonization was taking place. The conversion of the Far East to Christianity had full papal backing, not merely that of the Spanish Court. Many of the friars who went to the Philippines had probably studied with men and women we now know as saints. In Spain, the late Renaissance was in full flower. Both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were very much alive, though not yet canonized. (It is interesting that the notion of a ‘common man’ is named after John, this mystical theologian and virtual founder of the Discalced Carmelites. Britain’s John Smith (or John Bull) and America’s John Doe are in the Philippines Juan de la Cruz.) Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, had himself died only in 1556. His Society of Jesus was an essential intellectual prop of the early Counter-Reformation, the movement hastily set up by Roman Catholicism to combat Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. The Vatican’s new policies were set out in the three sessions of the Council of Trent (1545–63), several of them concerning the need to spread the Catholic version of the gospel overseas. Ignatius’s Jesuits were prominent in foreign missions; his friend and fellow Basque Francis (later St Francis) Xavier was nominated papal nuncio for the East and in the last ten years of his life went to Goa, Ceylon, Malacca, the Moluccas, the Malay peninsula and Japan, finally dying in China in 1552.
All this is a reminder that the Spanish friars whose job it was to mould the Philippines into a spiritual and political entity must have been an odd mixture. Some would have been highly sophisticated intellectuals seeing their task as part of a broad strategy by the Church militant to reach as much of the globe as possible before the Protestant heresy did. The majority, though, were no doubt like majorities everywhere and were profoundly unexceptional men. They were the Church’s foot-soldiers, separated from their own peasant backgrounds by a few years’ seminary living and probably less than brim-full with proselytizing zeal. In fact, many of them might have resembled the nineteenth-century ne’er-do-well sons of middle-class British families who were saved from disgrace at home by being packed off to the colonies to try their hand at sheep farming in Australia. By what right does one assume this? Simply by the historical fact that the Philippine revolutionary movements that finally gathered to a head at the end of that same nineteenth century were initially a reaction to over 300 years of friar abuses, often so brutal and so gross one can only conclude that at least some of the men concerned must have been shipped from Spain and Mexico as a convenient way of dumping the Church’s embarrassing, semi-criminal element in a Far Eastern outback. A less damning way to look at it might be to say that since communications with Europe were so intermittent (an exchange of letters might easily take two, even three years) and the priests in the Philippines so scattered and isolated, many of them could – and did – maintain an almost Kurtz-like existence in the communities they ruled like petty kingdoms, unchallenged and largely unsupervised for years at a stretch.

From the late sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, therefore, the Philippines was effectively run by a foreign church. The task these Spanish friars had set themselves was prodigious: nothing less than the ‘cultural cleansing’ of an entire population. Their view was that the natives’ primordial and benighted ways must swiftly be replaced by the Christian, humanistic ideals of Renaissance Europe. The early priests discovered that a written syllabary showing Indic influence already existed, betraying their instinctive charges of barbarism, but they marginalized this writing system as inadequate and replaced it with the Castilian alphabet. Nationalists used to claim, and some still maintain, that the friars systematically eradicated a glorious and widespread Filipino system of writing. This is demonstrably untrue, since a version of it survives to this day among the Mangyans of central Mindoro. That aside, the evidence for general literacy rests on precisely two Spanish documents (those of the Jesuit Pedro Chirino in 1600, and of an administrator, Antonio de Morga, in 1609), the second of which clearly relies on the first. Chirino’s assertion goes, in part:

So given are all these island people to writing and reading, that there is scarcely a man, and much less a woman, who does not read and write in the characters used in Manila.³

A modern historian such as Corpuz discounts the whole idea. Firstly, he finds it absurd that a phenomenon like universal literacy should have gone unremarked in the preceding seventy-nine years, and secondly he asks how that literacy could have arisen in the first place. This commonsensical argument is indeed persuasive. People living in small, self-contained communities like Kansulay would simply have had no need to write. Unlike in China there was no centralized state needing a bureaucracy; and in place of anything remotely resembling an organized church were local shamans whose rites needed no writing. All this apart, the Church was not stupid. Its administrative task in a country of over 7,000 islands was daunting enough without destroying an established system of communication that might have made things easier. It never, for example, suppressed the local languages in order to make everyone learn Spanish. Quite the reverse; it obliged its friars to learn the dialects and strenuously prevented the indios from learning Castilian. No; the reason why the syllabary was ignored was that it was too vague for record-keeping. Certain sounds could be transliterated in various ways; and while this might have been all right for story-telling, where the context would have made the correct reading obvious, it was less reliable when it came to people’s names. Names were, above all, needed for administration: names on documents, names on contracts, names on parish rolls.

This reveals the strange dilemma in which the Spanish colonizers found themselves. Until they arrived there was no such thing as a national identity in these islands. There were just groups of people living in barangays by the sea, by the river, or sa ilaya in a
tribal patchwork. The foreigners could not recognize or administer people whose tribal and family identities existed indelibly in the mind but not on a page. The indios were in no doubt about who they were; each could position him- or herself in an immensely complex web of genealogies (unlike the European social system, Filipino familial descent is equally matrilineal and patrilineal). But those who knew each other perfectly well as ‘Father of So-and-So’ or ‘Daughter of Thingummy’ presented an impenetrable, fluid face to their colonizers, who had to assign them ‘proper’ names in order to administer them. Whether consciously or not the Filipinos resorted to parody. Some took typical Spanish names, often that of the priest himself. Some wittily appropriated the names of immensely famous and aristocratic Castilian families. Others adopted names of individual saints or of all-purpose Christian import such as ‘De los Santos’. This was a splendid ploy. The friars could scarcely object; but for the secular administrators who laboured in their wake, faced with umpteen Johns of the Cross, it must have been a nightmare. In matters of justice, finance and public order it led to chaos; in things like marriage it could imply an outrage to morality since under the cover of twenty-eight people in one village all named Mendoza it was impossible for a priest to be certain about degrees of consanguinity. The thought that he might shortly be marrying a girl to her own uncle in conformity with some cheerful pagan practice was not reassuring.

Being effectively nameless by all being called the same was a brilliant expedient on the part of the oppressed. By as late as 1849 the Spanish authorities were reduced to ordering names to be formally assigned to all those without one. The local alcaldes (mayors) usually made things easier for themselves by designating a letter of the alphabet to each pueblo and requiring everyone to adopt a name beginning with that letter. Even today there are small towns where most of the family names start with the same letter; a tribute to tenacity of place as well as to an ancient and ingenious civil disobedience. It should be added that the Spanish were not above playing games of their own, occasionally assigning Filipinos ‘joke’ surnames such as ‘Bizcocho’ (biscuit) and ‘Cagas’ (he shits).

The Church’s missionary task, meanwhile, proceeded apace. The old tribal pantheons of gods and the deep-rooted animistic beliefs had somehow to be eliminated, whether by decrees and beatings,
or – as in the case of the lingam – by assimilation. Filipinos must initially have been deeply bemused by the language question. It was not strange that their conquerors should speak their own language among themselves, but that their unfamiliar religious rituals should be conducted in yet another new tongue – Latin – must have struck them as odd indeed. What kind of gods were these that had to be addressed in a separate language? Especially when the priest told you that the three gods were really one, whom you should consider as your Father. Nobody had ever heard of talking to their own fathers in a separate dialect reserved especially for talking-to-fathers. The whole thing was baffling. And since it was baffling, the process of Christian conversion took the friars a long time. As is now apparent, it was never wholly achieved; the native culture was too ancient and went too deep. A Filipino priest who used to celebrate Mass in Kansulay until a few years ago remained a firm believer in nino (tree- and water-spirits) as well as in duwende, the goblins who live in ant-hills in the woods. One might say that the Holy Trinity and the genii loci had achieved a sort of Mexican stand-off, the degree of compromise being nicely illustrated by the fact that the goblins have a Spanish name.

There is no doubt that in the first enthusiastic decades of their presence the friars’ achievements were considerable, and they did promote some of the ideals of European humanism as well as literacy. But the years passed and the initial impetus flagged. There must have been several reasons for this, including the archipelago’s extreme remoteness from Europe and the likelihood that many of the friars were themselves lacklustre, if not actually barbarous. And not only the friars became lax. The Spanish military cannot have been quite on top of things, either, for during the Seven Years’ War the British occupied Manila from 1762 to 1764, only returning it (along with Havana) in exchange for Spanish Florida. During these two years many of the Sepoys the East India Company had brought with their military deserted, and even today there are said to be people in the nearby towns of Cainta and Taytay whose faces supposedly exhibit Indian features.

To return to the friars: well before the turn of the nineteenth century the friarocracy had fallen very far from its founders’ ideals. The various orders owned huge tracts of land and wielded absolute power over the indios as well as over the Spanish military and civil
governors. The Church bled the already impoverished peasants still further with tithes and taxes and indulgences. Many of the friars kept mistresses and had illegitimate children. Indeed, a large proportion of the mestizo blood in modern Filipinos’ veins (including, one should note, those of Imelda Marcos herself) comes from those avowedly celibate men of God. No matter that there had always been among the priests men of great saintliness, humanity and courage. Long before the nineteenth century’s revolutionary end there were popular revolts and uprisings against the brutality and hypocrisy of individual friars and their local regimes.

By then, though, other things were beginning to change. In the face of increasing economic pressures the Spanish authorities found themselves obliged to open the country to international trade. Even so, social practices and civil rights remained far behind the times. The first Filipino ilustrados, the educated middle-class boys who began trickling to Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, soon noticed two things that sharpened their nationalism. The first was the developmental gulf between the mother country and her Far Eastern colony that showed only too clearly what a backwater Spain had allowed the Philippines to become. And secondly, those who went on to France and Germany and Britain couldn’t help noticing how far Spain herself lagged behind northern Europe. They returned to Manila both thoughtful and angry. Nor was it only Filipinos who noticed the backwardness of their own country. Visiting entrepreneurs and travellers were equally astonished, half enchanted and half repelled. As late as the mid-1890s, an American visitor to Manila was amazed to be able to witness a public garrotting; a festive occasion well attended by an eager crowd that included dainty young mestiza ladies giggling in their Sunday best.4

Today’s visitor to the Philippines will find, in practically every town of the archipelago, a statue of the national hero, José Rizal. Viewed historically, Rizal was one of the great Asian nationalists of the same generation – he, Gandhi, Tagore and Sun Yat Sen were all born in the 1860s. Yet Rizal was unique, and would have been so in any country at any time. His middle-class provincial boyhood nurtured a great poetic sensibility, while his intellectual achievement when still a teenager turned out to be crucial to his country’s subsequent history. For it is a strange fact that despite his fellow ilustrados’ observations in Spain and elsewhere of the Filipinos’ backwardness, and despite the growing discontent of Juan de la Cruz, the Filipino ‘common man’, it seems that no one before Rizal had made the perceptual leap of blaming the friarocracy itself for this state of affairs. It is hard to believe, yet it is a measure of the absolute power the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown wielded over the minds of their Filipino flock. To query the actions of a friar was to question the Church itself; to question the Church was to doubt the legitimacy of the Spanish Crown. Thus any complaint against a wayward priest led logically to charges of sedition being brought against the plaintiff. Yet it was not the barbarities inflicted on those accused of treason that prevented thought, so much as the idea of rebelling against the mother country. This constituted an effective mental block to all except the adolescent Rizal, whose insight was that the abuses of individual friars were less important than that his country was ruled by foreigners. This notion was so radical and so taboo he initially dared not speak of it to his own conventionally minded parents for fear of offending them, though he did find a sympathetic ear and – later – a brave and loyal supporter in his elder brother Paciano.

Rizal was himself partly scared as well as excited by his own revolutionary conclusion, and there is reason to think that even when he died he was still torn between reformism and outright rebellion. Restlessly, and convinced his life would be short, he resolved to learn as much as he could about his country and its distant ‘motherland’. While qualifying as a doctor he twice went to Europe, a typical ilustrado who soon became a most untypical polymath, befriending scholars all over the continent and becoming fluent in several languages. At the same time he was writing and talking, above all to other Filipino exiles in Madrid, whose efforts at consciousness-raising constituted the propaganda wing of a proto-revolutionary movement. ‘One man opposing a society’/If properly misunderstood becomes a myth’ wrote Wallace Stevens acutely, and the misunderstanding and myth-making about Rizal started in this European period of the 1880s, not least in his close friendship with the young scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt in Germany, a sojourn that many years later was to give rise to the bizarre rumour that Adolf Hitler was Rizal’s illegitimate son.
By then, living on hardly any money, half-starved and half-frozen by European winters, Rizal had begun the novel that made him famous. More immediately, *Noli Me Tangere* was to make him infamous, with its pungent satire on the Church in the Philippines and its shocking details of friar abuses. He departed Europe leaving all who met him deeply impressed and moved by his brilliance and determination. He returned home more than ever certain that his country would never develop until it was free of Spain and the friars. He wanted nothing less than independence, a conviction that had been reinforced by having seen so much of Europe for himself. He was appalled at how far Manila lagged behind Madrid in terms of intellectual freedom. As he had his old scholar, Tasio, explain in *Noli*: 'We in the Philippines are at least three centuries behind the chariot of Progress; we are scarcely emerging from the Middle Ages. That is why the Jesuits, who in Europe are reactionaries, look like progressives to us ...' Even so, it needs to be pointed out that 'enlightened' Spain's colony was the only one in Asia to have had a university in the nineteenth century, whereas the supposedly 'enlightened, advanced imperial powers provided in the same Southeast Asian region [...] no real universities in French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, or British Malaya and Singapore until after World War Two.'

Rizal's second novel, *El Filibusterismo* (1891), contained a more nakedly revolutionary message which not only assured its young author notoriety among his own *ilustrado* class but made his writings central to the growing working-class revolutionary movement. Yet Rizal himself always dwelt back from calling publicly for revolution, and still more from advocating premature armed struggle. There are still Filipinos who consider he betrayed the revolution he had done so much to set in motion; but theirs is perhaps an ideological zeal too easily felt by non-participants from the safety of a century later. Not only that, it ignores the complexity of Rizal's youthful sensibility. He was above all an intellectual, a poet and radical thinker. The son of a comfortable *burgis* upbringing, he came to acknowledge himself as ill-adapted to the practicalities of overthrowing a state, even had he wanted to, and it is doubtful whether he ever managed to achieve a private reconciliation between what his intelligence told him was necessary to free the Philippines and an instinctive shying-away from the implied matricide of committing himself to the overthrow of *Inaäng España*, Mother Spain. Even after he had been banished by the Spanish authorities into internal exile in a remote part of Mindanao (1892–6), it seems likely he went on believing in an essential Spanish benevolence and good sense that could still make possible the Philippines' gradual transition from colony to independent state without bloody confrontation.

Yet in the end there was no benevolence and even less good sense. Rizal's writings had freed too many others to think the unthinkable. The 'Propaganda Movement' that men like Marcelo del Pilar, Lopez Jaena and Rizal himself had organized in the 1880s had politicized thousands of Filipinos, by no means all of them of the *ilustrado* class. Some of these became dissatisfied with what they saw as little more than a reformism that merely allied itself with Spanish liberals in Europe, even though in a famous essay of 1890 (*Filipinos dentro de cien años*) Rizal foresaw that 'one fateful and inevitable day' the Philippines would have to declare independence and become a republic. By mid-1892 the Katipunan revolutionary movement was holding secret meetings under its leader, Andres Bonifacio - later to be known as the 'Great Plebeian'. (*Katipunan* means 'association' in Tagalog. The society's full name meant 'The Most Exalted and Most Honourable Association of the Sons of the Country'.) Bonifacio and his followers were irrevocably sworn to the armed overthrow of Spanish rule. In the critical years of Rizal's banishment to Mindanao, and in the absence of his restraining intellectual presence in Manila, the Katipunan movement became rapidly more powerful and its influence more extensive. It grew especially in the provinces to the north of Manila, the great agricultural heartland of vast haciendas and friar lands that was already a focus for peasant rebellion and which would remain so for the next century.

Eventually, with revolution in the air, the Spanish - by now panicicky and frustrated - laid vengeful hands on the person they ultimately blamed for all this. Rizal was arraigned for treason and condemned to death. The medical man of letters who had never so much as lifted a sword in anger (though he was an accomplished fencer) spent his last night in the condemned cell writing his most famous poem, *'Ultimo Adiós'*. Early next morning on 30 December 1896, José Rizal was led out to Manila's killing-ground of
Bagumbayan, in the Luneta Park. There, wearing an incongruous bowler hat and facing Manila Bay with his arms tied at the elbow behind him, he was shot in the back by a firing squad, a traitor’s death. He was thirty-five. His last words, clearly audible to bystanders, were ‘Consummatum est’, Christ’s own last words, a phrase that many have since taken as proof that Rizal had not repudiated the Mother Church, whatever he felt about Spain. Observers did notice that after the fusillade the squad of Filipino soldiers did not instantly raise the customary cheer of ‘Viva España!’. Instead, a strange and awkward silence fell – of shame or else in recognition of a deed that had irrevocably set something in motion whose outcome would dwarf all those present. Only then did the obligatory cheers ring out. It is anybody’s guess as to whether any of the firing squad knew that they had just helped bring to an end nearly four centuries of Spanish empire in the Philippines. From the Spanish point of view it turned out to be the worst thing they could have done; from Rizal’s it was his crowning achievement. In that instant he became a martyr; his suffering and sacrifice popularly likened to that of Christ. His words and ideas flew like wildfire. Local uprisings turned into mass revolt. In 1898 the brilliant Katipunan general, Emilio Aguinaldo, proclaimed independence from the balcony of his house in Kawit, Cavite (which is still standing), and by the year’s end the First Philippine Republic’s constitution had been adopted by the Revolutionary Congress in Malolos, Bulacan. Early the following year General Aguinaldo was sworn in as President of the First Philippine Republic.

If there really were such a thing as poetic justice, the poet Rizal’s story would have ended with the overthrow of the colonial administration and the creation of an independent Philippines. But fairytale endings are everywhere in short supply. This one was stillborn for a variety of reasons, the overwhelming one being that it had the fatal misfortune of coinciding with the Spanish–American War, which in turn proved to be the genesis of America’s overseas empire (her land empire having been secured by wresting it from its native peoples). Even without this unforeseen event that was destined to have such a profound effect on the Philippines, it is not clear that the First Philippine Republic would have lasted. The fact was that the Katipunan’s revolutionary forces were a loose amalgam that from a distance – or from a Spanish perspective – might have looked like a consolidated movement, but actually was riven with fractures. These fissures included many of the classic ones of revolutionary movements: leaders who were ambitious for personal power (Andres Bonifacio, ‘the Father of the Revolution’ was executed for ‘treason’ by General Aguinaldo’s revolutionary government); difficult lines of communication that resulted in a geographical patchiness where organized cadres were concerned; vast disparities in education and understanding of the ideology at stake; similar disparities in military skills and provisioning; the presence of charismatic local religious leaders whose devout peasant followers often expected divine visitations to drop from the sky to their aid; and deep divergences along class lines between what the small but powerful middle class wanted from Spain’s departure and what the peasant masses were expecting of the revolution.

In any case, the First Philippine Republic collapsed as the Americans took a hand in the making of the country’s history. In the United States the westward push of settlers had reached the shores of the Pacific by the 1850s. There was only one way to go, but that would require a powerful – even global – maritime presence such as Britain had established to maintain her own empire. By the mid-1890s, following the depression of 1893, American domestic disquiet suggested a decisive foreign adventure would be a useful way of easing the pressure. To President McKinley his country’s manifest destiny was clear: it lay in an overseas empire. The only problem was finding someone to fight. It sounds cynical to say that America in the 1890s needed a war, but it did. Fortunately, as Gore Vidal remarks, ‘Cuba wanted to be free of Spain; and so the United States, a Goliath posing as David, struck down Spain, a David hardly able to pose at all, and thus Cuba was freed to become a client state, the Philippines conquered and occupied, and westward the course of empire flowed.’ At the time, Senator Albert J. Beveridge usefully cleared up a few points for any ideologically challenged American democrats:

God has been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years [to be] master organizers of the world. He has made us adepts in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples.
the sometime lawyer and poet (or maybe sometime poet and lawyer) struck the right note of chirpy triumphalism in his ‘Manila’:

Oh, dewy was the morning, upon the first of May,
And Dewey was the admiral, down in Manila Bay;
And dewy were the Regent’s eyes, them royal orbs of blue,
And do we feel discouraged? We do not think we do!

Meanwhile, an extraordinary deal was done between the Americans and the Spanish. In order that the latter should not have to resist a full US–Filipino assault on their remaining forces, they sued for peace but in a manner that had to do with face-saving on both sides. The Spanish insisted they should be financially compensated for gracefully yielding up their territory to force majeure, while the Americans, who had clearly always intended to hang onto the Philippines regardless of any deal they had done with Bonifacio’s forces, salvaged their conscience by turning themselves into simple purchasers, and paid. In this fashion the Philippine Islands and their entire freight of souls changed hands like any piece of real estate for $20 million, made over at the Treaty of Paris in December 1898.

Spain’s three-and-a-half centuries’ hegemony was finished at last; yet the Filipinos who had fought so decisively to help the Americans rid them of their mutual enemy were astonished to discover that their new allies had no intention of leaving after all. Washington’s imperial expansionists were viewing the Philippines as an essential stepping-stone (how history repeats itself!) for American exporters with an eye on the ‘Great China Market’ (then as now!). This was, of course, the same motive that had led the British to acquire their foothold in Hong Kong back in 1842. However, so bald an act over half a century later merited an official explanation. No sooner was the annexation of the Philippines a fait accompli than Washington’s rewriting of motives and events began until a disinterested observer might have been excused for thinking that the entire Filipino people had, as one, fallen to its knees to beg for American rule. Certainly the very first clause of the Jones Bill (enacted in 1916), drafted to clarify US intentions vis-à-vis questions of Philippine independence, was to read:

Even so, the idea of a country founded on principles of freedom and democracy deliberately picking a fight with another country just to acquire an empire did not sit easily with the American people. Indeed, until four months before the Spanish–American War, President McKinley himself was assuring Congress that the United States would never annex Cuba since ‘it would go against the American code of morality and it would be an act of criminal aggression’. To help reverse this sort of attitude a press campaign began, with Joseph Pulitzer’s *World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *Journal* printing articles about the economic benefits for everyone, conquerors and conquered alike, should America ever find itself reluctantly obliged to gain an empire. It was an early instance of a supposedly free press being used by the government to sway mass opinion in favour of an adventurist policy that went violently against both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. (More than sixty years later the same device would be used, for a while successfully, to ensure public backing for the undeclared war in Vietnam.)

The ensuing Spanish–American War was to last a scant eight months, and in its victory and timeliness was viewed by US Secretary of State John Hay as a ‘Splendid little war’. It was just cruel luck that in 1898 the Philippines’ struggle for independence should have coincided with this righteous imperialism. The Americans spotted their advantage at once. The Spanish were far from home, their ships were old, their credibility was lost among their former Filipino subjects, their forces were occupied with a growing popular insurrection. The Americans contacted the Filipino nationalist forces and offered them a deal. In exchange for their help in routing the Spanish from the archipelago, they said, the United States would ensure the Philippines’ independence. There was much debate among the *Katipúneros*, who by that time had effectively bottled up the Spanish High Command in Intramuros, the walled citadel in Manila. Many of them considered they could manage quite well without American help, having come so far on their own, and were loath to enter into pacts with any more foreigners over the future of their country. But they were overruled and the deal was done. Barely two years after Rizal’s execution, Commodore Dewey sank the decrepit Spanish fleet in Manila Bay over breakfast. Eugene Fitch Ware,
Whereas it was never the intention of the people of the United States in the incipiency of the War with Spain to make it a war of conquest or for territorial aggrandizement; 

Unfortunately for Washington it seemed a great many Filipinos had indeed misunderstood its lofty motivation. Once the deed was done and the Spanish had left, the Americans had to turn their attention to defeating their former comrades-in-arms whom they now labelled ‘insurgents’. As soon as these political realities were made plain, the incredulous President of the First Philippine Republic and his newly appointed government found themselves having to repel the interlopers they had recently welcomed as allies. Their military opposition, though inventive and often heroic, was—like the Republic itself—doomed from the moment when President (still General) Aguinaldo was captured in 1901. At this point the class divisions in Filipino society took on a real importance. A mestizo middle class had been slowly building itself for years, founded on Filipinos with a better-than-average education who had patiently learned how to make themselves indispensable to the overstretched Spanish administration. The canniest ones had wangled themselves clerical jobs in the offices governing friar lands, those vast haciendas and tracts of prime agricultural land that the Church had annexed over the centuries. Gradually, the odd hectare became ‘lost’ in redrawing a map, a clause was ‘overlooked’ in copying a land title, and the foundations of a new landed elite were stealthily fashioned. Towards the end of the Spanish period there were mestizo hacienda owners whose children were the ilustrados who went abroad to complete their education. After 1898, in the power vacuum that formed in the wake of the defeated Spanish, a proportion of these middle-class Filipinos made it clear they would vastly prefer representatives of an ‘advanced’ society like America to fill it rather than what they saw as illiterate, rag-tag revolutionaries, no matter how patriotic their rhetoric. The new gentry had no desire to live in a country governed by people like their own estate workers. One of the more perceptive American administrators of the day spotted the outer fringes of a quicksand of social dynamics:

Neither Congress nor the [Philippine] Commission reckoned with the ignorance of the common people nor with the opposition to the acquisition of land by poor Filipinos ... on the part of their richer and more intelligent fellow-countrymen ... The cacique does not wish his labourers to acquire land in their own right, for he well knows that if they did so they would become self-supporting, and it would cease to be possible for him to hold them as peons, as is commonly done at present ... 10

(Plus ça change. The dawdling process of land reform, still very far from complete a hundred years later, testifies to the accuracy of this observation.)

The war that ensued between the new American colonials and their cacique supporters on the one hand, and the Filipino guerrillas and freedom fighters on the other was protracted and bitter. Although the dates of this Philippine-American War are usually given as 1899–1902, it actually lasted until at least 1906 and guerrilla encounters went on throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. By the end, over 4,000 American and 16,000 Filipino troops had lost their lives, but the overwhelming casualties were civilian. Modern scholars estimate that almost a million non-combatant children, women and men died, mainly of disease and starvation. It arguably remains the United States’ least-known war. In certain respects it was to be revenged more than sixty years later in Vietnam, where not only strategies such as ‘hamleting’ had been pioneered in the Philippine-American War, but even vocabulary (‘gook’).

If this was a time of anguish and betrayal for many Filipinos, it was the beginning of a badly muddled period for the United States as a champion of democracy. Plenty of thinking Americans had the gravest misgivings about their already vast country’s adventuring in quest of a new imperium. It seemed after all that Uncle Sam was behaving no better than George III had. Mark Twain, for one, was deeply ashamed and outspoken, saying after Dewey’s walkover victory in Manila Bay that the stars and stripes of the American flag ought to be replaced with a skull and crossbones. ‘We cannot maintain an empire in the Orient and maintain a republic in America,’ he said simply. Theodore Roosevelt, who became President in 1901 after McKinley’s assassination, was equally though differently unequivocal from the depths of the war with the Filipino ‘insurgents’:
Every argument that can be made for the Filipinos could be made for the Apaches. And every word that can be said for [President] Aguinaldo could be said for Sitting Bull. As peace, order and prosperity followed our expansion over the land of the Indians, so they will follow us in the Philippines.

But it was not only Americans themselves who were divided over this business of a democratic republic suddenly finding itself becoming imperial. The very ideology of their Constitution was put under extraordinary pressure. One mark of this was official uncertainty about which governmental department in Washington ought to administer the Philippines, since no one could bring himself to come right out and copy Britain's example by setting up a full-blown Colonial Office. The name alone was far too indiscreet. A Filipino historian put this dilemma well as he described the Americans tacitly approving the new imperialism while refusing to face its implications:

Proof of this reluctance, of course, abounded. For one thing the imperialists had to sugar-coat the economic basis of imperialism with such idealistic phrases as 'mission', altruism, destiny... Americans could not bring themselves to admit the reality of their empire or to refuse outright the erection of an imperial structure commensurate with their new role. [...] The political leadership failed to recognize the need for an additional agency to promote efficiency and centralization. This administrative blindness was most disconcerting to the imperialists; hence they satisfied themselves by establishing an inconspicuous bureau [the Bureau of Insular Affairs] buried among the divisions and offices of the War Department.

Thus it was that the US administered the Philippines through the Bureau of Insular Affairs for thirty-six years, doing its utmost to ensure that the dread words 'colony' and 'colonial' were never used. As for the sugar-coating Cruz refers to, some prime examples were produced by Lt-Col. Clarence R. Edwards, the BIA's head in the early days (his parents were friends of President McKinley's), who was positively lyrical when in full flight. To him, the Philippine venture was 'the grandest altruistic work ever attempted by man... Call it destiny, if you will, say that it was Providence, if you prefer, but a humanly unpreventable tide swept the Philippines into the protection of the United States.'

Like the Spanish before them, the Americans found they had inherited a daunting territory. Troops and administrators alike found themselves balked by densely jungled mountains slashed by deep ravines, as well as by thousands of scattered islands where communication was dependent on boats, which in turn were subject to availability and weather. Even today it is easy to imagine the problems they faced. The jungles may have receded but the mountains and ravines, the sea and the weather remain unchanged. And if today the capital still feels remote to most people living in the provinces, Manila at the turn of the century actually and unironically was an imperium in imperio, a sort of lightning conductor through which awesome American power fizzed and crackled while the bemused provincianos looked on from a distance as at a storm on a far horizon that was destined, sooner or later, to break over every last head in the country. Yet even as the Americans' 'pacification' of the indios went on, so did the arguments back in Washington. The Democratic Party's platform was for the Philippines' immediate independence. Thoughtful and articulate people said bluntly that it was ludicrous hypocrisy to preach 'little brown brother's' freedom even as he was being rounded up and his village burned, just as it was to talk about his 'prosperity' while American entrepreneurs were being doled out thousands of hectares of valuable friar lands.

The Republican Roosevelt resisted such arguments with fresh rhetoric; but the fact that issues of principle were being debated which went to the heart of the United States' Constitution was symptomatic of deep American ambivalence over the whole venture, which by now included other ex-Spanish possessions such as Cuba. The American conscience having thus been pricked, it resulted in an irony that connoisseurs of history's cynicism will savour. One of the ways in which Washington contrived to present itself as a liberator was by making sure that the perfidy of the Spanish friars in the Philippines was well known. The reaction to nightmare stories of mediaeval repression and abuses was, predictably, a wave of Protestant sympathy that culminated in a missionary and educational movement to put Filipino souls back on
course after centuries of perversion. Having been mis-missionized the first time, they now needed corrective re-missionizing. One result, apart from a good few Protestant zealots descending on the archipelago, was more than a thousand idealistic young Americans who responded to a Presidential appeal for volunteers to help set up a free public educational system in the Philippines. These became known in the islands as 'Thomasites' after the USS Thomas, the converted cattle boat that brought the first 600 to Manila in 1901. Hartzell Spence, in his 1964 Marcos hagiography, summarized their pedagogical achievements with his usual felicitous partiality:

The Thomasites gave the Filipinos in one generation the highest percentage of literacy in Asia. They taught in English from American texts which emphasized political freedom and democratic institutions. Students learned by rote the Gettysburg Address and Washington's farewell to the troops along with sections of Hiawatha. . . . The acceptance of democracy, the respect for learning and for educators characteristic of Filipinos today, was a labor of love which the Thomasites bequeathed to the Philippine peoples.15

A Filipino writer, Florentino Dauz, viewed the Thomasites' as well as the American missionaries' reading lists rather differently. Taking Malcolm X's distinction between the 'field Negro' and the 'house Negro' he wrote:

Your missionaries, their teachings enforced by physical violence against school children, forced us to read the life of Booker T. Washington, a house Negro . . . * God Bless America. The Gettysburg Address. Patrick Henry. Jefferson. The Grand Central. J. P. Morgan. Jay Gould. John D. Rockefeller. This catechism was meant precisely to condition the tympanic membrane to hear the same things, and dull the senses in preparation for the ultimate teachings which were yet to come.16

* Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) was a Black American teacher and reformer whose civil rights campaigning earned official approval since he advocated industrial education rather than political agitation.

The inclusion of Longfellow in the Thomasites' curriculum showed real wit. Hiawatha had become pretty much the best-known figure in American frontier literature since Natty Bumppo and Uncas had done their stuff in The Last of the Mohicans. This sentimentalized portrait of a Native American evidently struck the Thomasites as the perfect model for inducing the right attitude in a fresh supply of indio tribespeople. The literary preferences of these early teachers lives on in a way that would have given them great satisfaction. One day in the middle-eighties I wandered into Kansulay's little school when classes were out and found the 'Thought for Today' written up neatly on the blackboard in pink chalk. Normally this would have been a pitifully edifying phrase such as 'A cat may look at a king.' Today it was a slab of dear old Longfellow on the gender question:

As unto the bow the cord is,  
So unto the man is woman,  
Though she bends him, she obeys him,  
Though she draws him, yet she follows,  
Useless each without the other!

This had been popular with Malacañang Palace's image-makers a few years previously when someone, probably leafing idly through a book of quotations for fresh inspiration on how to counteract widespread rumours of Marcos marital shenanigans, had hit on this as a perfect expression of the First Dyad's relationship: Ferdinand and Imelda going inseparably together like, well, a horse and carriage. In any case it was pretty innocuous since Kansulay's ten year olds understood practically no English.

Back in 1901 the average Filipino must have been deeply baffled. What had started out as a long-overdue campaign to oust the Spanish friars had led, via José Rizal's martyrdom in the name of his country, to a second occupation by aliens and a bloody war. But were the Americans liberators or the new enslavers? Were the Filipinos themselves going to turn out to be beneficiaries or losers? It is perfectly true that many Filipinos, then as now, were not nationalists at all, and yearned only for the day when the United States would confer statehood on their archipelago, absorbing it once and for all. (If Hawaii, they were to argue later, why not the
Philippines?) Others, the principled as well as the disaffected, brooded uneasily on McKinley's notion of 'benevolent assimilation' as well as on the implications of 'manifest destiny.' American uneasiness alone would be enough to guarantee the Philippines' remaining forever outside the Union. No amount of triumphalism could ever blot out Mark Twain's feelings of shame. In one way or another this ambivalence has dogged both countries ever since. A historian's conclusion makes a sad postscript to a venture that has so deeply affected two nations: 'Before long everyone, even Theodore Roosevelt (who had been influential in bringing about their annexation), agreed that the Philippines were an expensive nuisance and their conquest had been a mistake.'

Once the natives had been pacified, the new colonizers made considerable investments in the country's infrastructure and institutions, some of which survive to this day. The Philippine National Bank, for instance, was created in 1916 in the days of Governor-General F. B. Harrison (whose own name lives on in a Manila shopping centre, Harrison Plaza). The fledgling PNB seemed from the start to set an unfortunate precedent. After several untrained Americans had been the Bank's presidents, including a Mr Samuel Ferguson whose 'ignorance of banking was inclusive', circumstances 'came to mean that an organization containing not a single trained banker, not one single man familiar with bank detail, was handling and investing $150,000,000 of values. And, there being no bank examiners, no one was keeping check.'

They [the Filipino politicos] were like a child with a new toy. They laughed and cried over it, hugged it and kissed it, fondled it, rocked it to sleep and then woke it up and jumped on it, banged it with a club, ripped it open and pulled the stuffing out.

A phrase popularized by the Democrat journalist John L. O'Sullivan. In 1845 he wrote that it was America's 'manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions'. At the time, 'manifest destiny' was seen as justifying the possession of Texas (1845), California (1850), Oregon (1859) and Canada (postponed sine die). As time went by, the phrase's implications, like US ambitions, were expanded to cover the acquisition of an overseas empire at the century's end.

The New York accountants Haskins and Sells were employed by the Wood-Forbes fact-finding Commission in 1921 to audit what was by then a banking disaster. 'The investment made by the Philippine Government in the capital stock of the Philippine National Bank has been completely lost... and the bank has operated... in violation of every principle which prudence, intelligence or even honesty could dictate.' This report of 19 May 1921 set the PNB's main losses at $37,544,500, a prodigious sum for it to have mislaid in fewer than five years. Haskins and Sells' report went on: 'The foreign department [of the PNB] operated under the supervision of the Vice-President (M. S. Concepcion, son of the Bank's president) and was found to be conducted very inefficiently and dishonestly, necessitating criminal action against the heads of the department... The accounting of the bank generally has been extremely bad. Even where proper records had been devised they were generally carelessly and inaccurately kept. There was no record to show the total liability of any customer...'

This sort of thing would never for a moment have been tolerated in the United States. Why, then, was it allowed to go on under an American administration abroad, if not because there was at the heart of the whole American enterprise in the Philippines a deep ambivalence, a repressed uneasiness with its own motives that cashed out as an unwillingness to make a real effort? It was as though by not calling the Philippines a colony the United States could avoid a thoroughgoing colonial responsibility for what went on there, and could even reassure its critics that it was, as much as possible, allowing Filipinos to run things in their own fashion.

However, there is no question that the Philippines—an 'expensive nuisance' and a colony by any other name—did profit greatly from American tutelage. The sundry American administrators, bureaucrats, advisers, business people, teachers, doctors and missionaries in the Philippines included the usual proportion of people of goodwill and good faith, often intensely idealistic and eager to counteract any lingering suggestion that their presence was unwelcome by demonstrating the advantages of American liberal democracy. From 1910 or so (by which time military 'pacification' had long been achieved) until the outbreak of the Second World War, Washington spent enormous sums of money on infrastructural projects. Schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, airstrips and ports
all came into being; but just as important as the buildings themselves were the ideas they embodied of a public right. Schools especially, once they no longer functioned as an arm of the Catholic Church, began slowly spreading a novel degree of literacy as well as new liberal ideas among the younger population. It was a system that disseminated its own propaganda too, of course, in the shape of allegiance to a new mother country and a new flag; but it did so by means of a cheerful dynamism that was much more to Filipino taste than had been the dour beatings and pronouncements of the friar schools.

In these same two decades many businesses were set up by American entrepreneurs, eager to take advantage of the almost free hand on offer. Great empires came into being in such sectors as mining (gold in Benguet, for instance) and agriculture (copra, tobacco and – most notably – Del Monte’s pineapple estates). Many Americans became very rich; but so did many Filipinos, especially those of the cacique class who had got off to a head start in terms of accommodations with the new order. In a sense, installing US-style business practice was the easy part. Somewhat harder to implement was Washington’s plan to set up a US-style governmental system so that as much administration and responsibility as possible might devolve on Filipinos themselves. Behind the ringing phrases about democracy was the usual dream of every colonial power: of a peaceful, industrious satellite nation ruled by locals who knew where their best interests lay, beavering away beneath the indulgent eye of a Governor-General while the colony’s wealth flowed in a steady stream back to the mother country. To this end, the Americans began nurturing certain home-grown politicians who had emerged at the top of the heap from the turmoil of the failed revolution: men like Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña.

The case of Manuel Quezon nicely illustrates the extraordinary ambiguity of relationship between a native politician and an occupying power, not least in Quezon’s friendship with the MacArthur family that was destined to have such weighty historical consequences. Quezon was nothing if not a committed Philippine patriot. He had fought with General (and President) Aguinaldo to resist the American invaders. Having been appointed in early 1900, General Arthur MacArthur was the Philippines’ military governor at the time of Aguinaldo’s capture. Six years later Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña were both members of the Immediate Independence Party, whose name proclaimed its patriotic aim even as its tolerated existence testified to a democratic rather than a revolutionary agenda. Quezon, already distinguished by his political dexterity as well as by intelligence and cacique breeding, was exactly the sort of local boy the Americans were eager to groom for government. In 1909 he was appointed Philippine Resident Commissioner in Washington, returning to Manila in 1916 to take up the Senate presidency.

Meanwhile, General Arthur MacArthur’s son Douglas had served for a while in the Philippines as a young officer, in 1905 accompanying his father as his aide to Tokyo. Thereafter he enjoyed a distinguished military career, being much decorated in France in the First World War. In 1930 Douglas MacArthur was appointed US Army Chief of Staff. He was in many ways a strange, even romantic figure for a chief military bureaucrat in a gritty and competitive capital like Washington. He yearned for the relaxed days of his youth in the Philippines on the yonder side of the horrors of trench warfare in France. He must have looked back to a nearly Edenic time in a tropical paradise where the part of his life that had not been spent winning the country for America was very gracious and easy-going indeed, full of mansions and servants. As a patrician Republican Douglas MacArthur felt himself completely out of step with the ‘New Deal’ Democrat Roosevelt, who won the US Presidency in 1932 – an incompatibility that was mutual.

In Manila, despite years of assimilation and Americanization, the old Rizalian ideal of a fully independent Filipino republic had never completely faded, neither at grassroots level nor in the hearts of men like Manuel Quezon. By 1934 modern Filipino history had reached a crucial point when, following intensive nationalist lobbying in Washington, the Tydings-McDuffie Act was passed which provided for the creation of a Philippine Commonwealth for a ten-year transitional period, after which complete independence would be automatic. In 1935 the Commonwealth duly came into being with the election of an all-Filipino administration that in terms of domestic affairs was largely autonomous. The US Governor-General in Manila at the time, Frank Murphy, might have represented the real power behind the throne, but it was a power exercised for the most part in a discreetly ‘hands off’ manner.
Thus it was that Manuel Quezon was elected President, his Vice-President being Sergio Osmeña. Together they presided over a US-style Congress of two Houses. In 1934, on learning that over in the United States Arthur MacArthur's boy Douglas was coming up for retirement as Army Chief of Staff, and anxious about the military threat he believed Japan was beginning to pose to the Philippines, Quezon had gone to Washington to ask for MacArthur's services as a strategist. Washington was happy to oblige. For his own part, MacArthur was only too pleased to escape Washington and the prospects of imminent retirement to take up a glamorous posting in Manila as his old friend President Quezon's proconsul. Once there, he soon persuaded Quezon to create a new title for him (since Roosevelt had refused to do any better than 'Military Adviser to the Commonwealth'): Field Marshal of the Philippines. He even designed his own uniform: 'black trousers, white tunic, and a braided cap, the whole costume spangled with medals, stars and gold cord like a matador's suit-of-lights'20 His own patrician background made close friendship with the old colonial oligarchy far more congenial to him than Washington's political minefields had ever been, and he and Quezon became very close. He much admired the intelligence with which the new President steered a course between the dictates of his fervent Filipino nationalism and those of the pragmatic cohabitation with Washington necessary for these last ten years of US tutelage. Quezon was also an excellent organizer and commander, and it was maybe this that gave his new Field Marshal the mistaken impression that his own job was something of a sinecure. At all events MacArthur clearly spent more time on social rounds in his Rutarian finery than he did in efficiently organizing the defence of the Philippines.

Historians have blamed General Douglas MacArthur for not taking full advantage, in late 1941, of the ten hours' warning he was given after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Certainly the Japanese caught his small air force unprepared and on the ground. They landed along the western coasts of Zambales and Pangasinan (in the Gulf of Lingayen, the place of the lingam) and the Bataan peninsula soon fell. The surviving American troops, most of whom were Filipino conscripts, were walked in the notorious 237-kilometre Death March to concentration camps in Tarlac province. Thousands died in terrible circumstances in the first months of the war. General MacArthur fled his stronghold on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay, vowing famously to return. By early 1942 the Philippines once again found itself subject to a new foreign government, yet another colonial power.

The fact that Filipinos were now caught up in the Second World War merely gave a painful urgency to old and unresolved issues. Now whose side were they on? American promises for the Philippines' full independence, the transition period for which had begun in 1935, were now on indefinite hold. So would the Filipino best serve his country's interests by collaborating with these new Japanese masters, or by resisting them? Was the patriotic Filipino a quasi-American or - at some deeper level - a patriot of a nation that so far existed only in dreams? It was a profound moral dilemma. By this time the country's Americanization was quite marked, not only by the way in which the English language had supplanted Spanish but because so many young Filipinos had spent years in the United States at university or military colleges like West Point. Everything in the previous forty-four years, including The Song of Hiawatha, had confirmed their belief in the supremacy of American power, both economic and military. Yet in the space of a few weeks, beginning with Pearl Harbor, Americans had been routed from their possessions all over the Far East and Pacific and seemed to be in full retreat. Filipinos had noted the equal routing of the British from their strongholds like Singapore and Burma and wondered whether this might in fact be the end of Western imperialism in the East. With the easy Japanese defeat of MacArthur and his abandonment of the Philippines to its fate, some element akin to awe in the attitude of Filipinos towards the Americans died, never to be resuscitated. The Japanese expertly played on these suspicions that the Statue of Liberty actually had feet of clay. Cannily - as they integrated the Philippines into the rapidly expanding Japanese empire, the so-called 'Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' - they claimed that their troops had finally freed the Philippines from the colonial domination of Westerners. Filipinos were true Easterners, like the Japanese. It was a deep alliance of the blood that in no amount of indoctrination by foreigners could efface. And once again, many Filipinos were responsive to this fresh rhetoric of liberation.
Besides, there were pressing matters of everyday pragmatism, of pakikisama— that highly valued Filipino virtue of being able to get along with people in a smooth and unruffled manner. The thing about the Americans was that they were no longer here, whereas the Japanese most certainly were. Therefore one had to get along with them as painlessly as possible. This was less collaboration than common sense.

It would be naive to think today, nearly sixty years later, that these issues are long dead and academic. (One need only look at France and Switzerland, where the question of who collaborated with the Nazis is still very much alive.) National traumas have a habit of living on, even when there are few left alive with any direct memory of them. It is hard to understand the precise mechanism by which this happens. In some mysterious way a people’s hurt evokes a defensive strategy, which in turn becomes a national attitude and ends by being an aspect of the culture. In present-day Filipino public life it is possible to read, in the right historical light, a long succession of injuries and their scar tissue. It is like a palimpsest, a document many times erased and written over, the traces of whose earlier versions may still be glimpsed by those so inclined. The less patient will simply reach for the nearest moral judgement.

In the Second World War, the division of Filipinos into at least two minds was reflected by the widespread resistance to the Japanese occupation. Many took to the hills and joined up with fighting units, as the young Ferdinand Marcos did in Northern Luzon. Some of their older compatriots already had guerrilla experience. In the thirties, peasant protest at worsening relations between landowners and their tenants, as well as over increasing hardship, had led to the formation of labourers’ organizations and to occasional violent acts such as crop-burning. These unions, intimately connected as they were with the local terrain, were nodes of invaluable experience around which a more general struggle could be organized. A guerrilla organization was formed known as the Hukbalahap, a composite name which translated as the People’s Anti-Japanese Army. The ensuing warfare threw up the usual extreme cruelties and exposed all the predictable heroisms and villainies of family loyalties, private fidelities, concealed class warfare, old scores, betrayals, turncoatism and collaboration.

It is safe to say that, of all the traumas Filipinos had collectively undergone since the moment Magellan landed, the Second World War was by far the worst. In 1945 General MacArthur did return, landing in Leyte to fight his way back across the archipelago—some scholars now say quite unnecessarily given the inevitability by then of Japanese defeat. Yet the Japanese put up an extraordinary resistance, none more so than those units in Manila. There are those who take this as simply a measure of their extreme loyalty to the Emperor, citing diehards like Lt. Onoda Hiroo, the last known ‘straggler’ who went on obeying his orders in the jungles of Lubang Island scarcely fifty miles from Manila until 1971 (he was finally induced to surrender by the Japanese Ambassador hovering above him in a helicopter, assuring him over a loud-hailer that the war was over and he had the Emperor’s assurance that it was OK to stand down. A similar diehard, Shoichi Yokoi, was to surrender the following year in the jungles of Guam, having made his clothes out of tree bark for twenty-seven years. He returned to Japan saying ‘Shamefully I have come back home alive’ and died in 1997). Other historians claim there was a darker reason for the Japanese stand in Manila, which was that by concentrating the Americans’ efforts it bought time for special units to hide the last of Yamashita’s treasure elsewhere in the islands.

One might as well deal with this business of the Yamashita treasure here and now and get it out of the way. There are as many versions of it as there are interested parties, but as far as one can gather the theory goes roughly as follows: Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, using as a pretext the so-called Mukden Incident—an explosion on the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway. Thereafter, its military conquest of East Asia continued with the gradual occupation of strategic areas of China. The pace of conquest accelerated with the taking of Laos in 1941, Japanese forces then moving swiftly to occupy as much territory as they could including, of course, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines and all Indonesia. On the way they raided the national banks and treasuries, stealing any private wealth they could find and creaming off the profits of the different black market gangs and triads they encountered. By the time the Philippines had fallen in 1942 they had allegedly amassed a vast ‘snowball’ of gold bullion, coins, pearls, diamonds and all manner of wealth. One would have
thought that, until the Americans had recovered from Pearl Harbor
enough for their warships to begin making the oceans unsafe for
Japanese shipping, much of this wealth could easily have been sent
back to Japan in instalments, making an accrued treasure unneces-
sary; but this is too cheerless a prospect for treasure freaks. In one
way or another, therefore, this giant snowball of loot was appar-
ently trundled into the Philippines, where the Japanese
considerably added to it by ransacking gold mines such as those at
Benguet as well as whatever Douglas MacArthur and President
Quezon had left in the Central Bank.

When in due course it became clear that the Japanese were losing
the war they apparently took the decision that, whereas they could
be induced to relinquish all their other conquests, they were deter-
mined at all costs to hang onto the Philippines. General Yamashita
was then posted to Manila to supervise the archipelago’s defence.
This soldier had had an odd war, having made a brilliant start by
becoming known as the ‘Tiger of Malaya’ for leading his 30,000
men down Malaya, across the Strait of Johore and on to Singapore,
where he faced down Lt.-Gen. A. E. Percival with his 80,000 men. In
a dazzling piece of psychological warfare, Yamashita had sat down
with Percival and, with a mixture of bullying and complete bluff,
induced Percival with his vastly superior forces to surrender. The
fall of Singapore made Yamashita a great popular hero in Japan,
although he was never allowed a triumphant return to Tokyo.
Years before, he had fallen out with the Prime Minister, General Tojo,
and now found himself transferred thousands of miles north to
Manchuria and relegated to an obscure outpost there until 1944. By
then Tojo and his Cabinet had resigned, and with the war going
badly for Japan the Tiger of Malaya was recalled and posted to
Manila, where he took control of the Fourteenth Army. It was there-
fore while he was in command of the Japanese forces in the
Philippines during the closing months of the war that a decision
was taken to divide up the supposedly incalculable quantities of
Asian treasure and hide it in secret caches spread throughout the
archipelago. (This, of course, is an obvious congruence with that
sixteenth-century pirate, Lim Ah Hong.) General Yamashita was
not personally involved in this: the ‘Yamashita treasure’ only bears
his name because it was hidden largely during the months of his
command.

Whether the Japanese fought the Battle of Manila partly as a
delaying tactic is still not clear; but according to one theory it did
buy enough time (while concentrating the Americans’ efforts on the
city) for dedicated bands of Japanese officers to be able to supervise
the hurried digging of pits and tunnels elsewhere in Luzon in
which gold bars and barrels of jewels could be stashed. The various
hiding places were apparently constructed with great craftiness,
protected by every sort of trickery: false maps, blind tunnels, a few
gold bars left as decoys, shafts that flooded when a baulk of timber
was removed, and poison gas or explosives to be triggered by an
unwary searcher. There is an account of such things, plus a descrip-
tion of a treasure-hunt in the late 1980s on Corregidor Island and in
Fort Santiago, in Charles C. McDougald’s book Asian Loot (San
Francisco, 1993) which one can wholeheartedly recommend to
treasure enthusiasts. It is set firmly in that charmed world of old
maps and characters of such transparent shadiness their word can
only be accorded absolute trust. Another author, Dick Russell,
wrote in The Man Who Knew Too Much: ‘As late as 1986, a team of
high-ranking US military personnel was reportedly in the
Philippines in search of the buried bullion. One of these was
General John Singlaub, the CIA’s deputy chief in South Korea
during the Korean War and later tied into the Iran–Contra scan-
dal.’ Obviously, there must be something in it.

At the end of the war, all this would have been neither here nor
there to the wretched Manileños trapped in the city. Admiral Sanji
Iwabuchi’s Manila Naval Defence Force received and wholeheart-
edly implemented the following orders for the period 23 December
1944 – 14 February 1945:

When Filipinos are to be killed they must be assembled in one
place and disposed of, with the proviso that ammunition and
manpower must not be wasted. Because the disposal of dead
bodies is a troublesome task, they should be collected together in
houses scheduled for burning or demolition. They should also be
thrown into the river.21

In early 1945 the Japanese marines, faced with defeat, ‘went on an
orgy, raping, shooting, bayonetting, beheading and burning alive
tens of thousands of unarmed Filipino citizens’.22 It is from this
period that stories abound of babies being thrown into the air and impaled on bayonets as a game played by Japanese soldiers. Meanwhile, those Manileños who escaped the attentions of the Japanese were being bombed and strafed from the air by the Americans. The battle left the city of Manila virtually destroyed, while the last of the Japanese high command surrendered up north in Baguio. If the Americans saw themselves as saviours, then it was perhaps in the same sense that a US Army major in 1968, speaking of the smoking ruins of Ben Tre, a town in South Vietnam he was fighting to defend, famously said to a reporter: 'It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.'

With salvation like this, who needs perdition? – a question that must have been asked by Filipino survivors not just of the Battle of Manila but of the entire war. By the end, it is probable there remained not a single family anywhere in the country that had not known loss, while thousands of families had vanished entirely. And once again, history was about to repeat itself. The post-war world was shaking down into new power blocs. The Americans and the rest of the Allies found themselves squaring off to the Soviet Union, until lately their comrade-in-arms against the Axis powers. In the Philippines the Huk guerrillas, who throughout the occupation had fought heroically from the inside after the Americans had fled, now found themselves labelled by the returning Americans as ‘Communist insurgents’. Even as full independence was finally granted in 1946 an American-backed Philippine military campaign began, aimed at mopping up the guerrillas in the hills who had outlived their usefulness and had suddenly turned from being gallant allies into the enemies of freedom and democracy. It is not clear if most Filipinos, including the first President of the (independent) Republic of the Philippines, Manuel Roxas, fully comprehended the extent to which they were hostages to a power-play that was truly global, just as they had been in 1898. After China went Communist in 1949 the Philippines was for the moment less valuable to the Americans as a stepping-stone to the vast potential market of the mainland than as a strategic base for US forces, a vital link in a chain of such bases designed to run entirely around the Communist world like a cordon sanitaire that would contain it as well as guaranteeing no part of that world was in theory unreachable by the bombers of Strategic Air Command. Probably few Filipinos perceived the political realities as clearly as did the ex-Huks now being chivvied through the hills. Exhausted and decimated as they were by years of jungle-living and skirmishing with the Japanese, there can have been few of them with the energy to espouse Communist ideology with a view to continuing the struggle for a fresh objective. On the other hand, most of them must have been properly sceptical about what Philippine independence (officially declared in 1946) could possibly mean in circumstances that made it clear the Americans still called the shots from the huge bases they retained in Olongapo, Subic Bay and Angeles, Pampanga. They certainly appeared to regard President Roxas as no more than a puppet.

A resistance to the new status quo lingered on throughout the fifties in the form of guerrilla activity which brought whole towns temporarily under Huk control, moving closer and closer to Manila. This had the effect of frightening people off the land and into the capital. It also brought direct CIA intervention which became a major factor during Magsaysay’s presidency. This sort of destabilizing skirmishing continued into the sixties when a worsening domestic economy in the hands of the new Filipino oligarchy coincided with Mao’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–8). By now the Huks as such were no more, given that their very name was no longer applicable; but their Communist successors, as the New People’s Army, were very much in existence up in the hills or in the rustling canefields of the vast sugar estates of Negros. They, at least, recognized that the United States had lost interest in Filipino democracy – had, in fact, lost interest in the Philippines except as an essential military foothold off Southeast Asia and as a lucrative arena for American business (Del Monte’s vast pineapple estates, for instance, had been acquired even before the turn of the century when, following an opportunistic enquiry, the American Governor-General in Manila elected to ignore the statute limiting landholding to 1,024 hectares and made over a large area of Philippine public land to the US Navy, then ordered the Navy to sublet 20,000 hectares to Del Monte. This was not dissimilar to Dole Pineapple’s helping to end the monarchy in Hawaii, declaring a republic, and then insisting that the United States annex the islands – which it did in 1898. Men like Sanford Dole were the true kings of the banana republics of the future).
In fact the NPA guerrillas commanded a good deal of sympathy if not actual assistance from many educated Filipinos, including the more radical clergy, whose moral support ran from expressions of nationalist sentiment to revolutionary zealotry. This was the time of Marcos’s first term as President (1965–9), when quite a few well-brought-up middle-class students abandoned their degree courses and went off to join the NPAs. A good proportion of them were not Communist at all but merely youthful idealists who identified with Juan de la Cruz in his sufferings at the hands of a still feudally minded élite. They, too, were under no illusions about the Americans having ceded their power to an independent Philippine government. Indeed, to the present day it is still commonly understood that no Philippine administration or chief executive has ever taken office without Washington’s approval and active connivance.

Certainly it is open to anyone to query matters of emphasis in so brief a résumé of Philippine history. What cannot be disputed, however, is the relevance of this anguished past to every aspect of today’s country. Whether or not the threat of Maoist Communism was ever as real as Washington and Manila claimed, when Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972 he did so with Washington’s express approval. This was in order to give himself the extraordinary powers he said he needed to put an end to Communist-led subversion. It can scarcely have been irrelevant to his decision that it empowered him to remain in office indefinitely. Once again Filipino guerrillas and Filipino armed forces skirmished bloodily in the hills, and once again historic questions were raised. The country that had been known as ‘the showcase of democracy’ lived for over eight years under American-backed martial law, with its suppression of habeas corpus and human rights, its electoral fraud, constitutional tinkering, censorship, jailings and torturings. These years between 1972 and 1981 left a deep mark on an already scarred national psyche, a wound which the ‘EDSA Revolution’ of 1986 did nothing to heal. Twelve years later, many Filipinos argue that the revolt which sent the Marcoses into exile had a parallel with the 1896 Katipunan Revolution in that both were essentially led by the ilustrado class, and both leaderships soon sold out their own radical element in order to maintain the status quo. To such critics, the ‘People Power’ that heroically stopped Marcos’s tanks was more of a middle-class revolt led by liberals and bankers fed up with the mortally ill Marcos’s mismanagement of the economy and the consequent devaluation of their assets.

The old questions remained. What was democracy really about? Come to that, what was a Filipino? Who owned the nation’s flag to which one’s children daily pledged their loyalty at school? Did the chain of command end at the President’s desk in Malacañang Palace, or did the buck not stop until it had reached the President’s desk in the Oval Office of the White House? How could the urgent importance to the United States of its military bases in the Philippines be ignored, both in the Vietnam War and in the larger context of containing Communism? In which case, what did Philippine independence mean? And aside from that, was the country really being run in order to make it a better place for Juan de la Cruz and his wife to bring up their children in peace and a smattering of prosperity?

Even if Juan de la Cruz did not actually voice such questions each day they formed, and still form, a vital part of his awareness. They arise directly from a grievous past, much of which is too recent to be ignored, too painful to be forgotten. If this chapter has sounded a polemical note, dwelling on the more glaring abuses of Spanish, American and Japanese imperialism alike, it is for the sole purpose of trying to represent something which few historians seem prepared to talk about: the sheer confusion that successive generations of Filipinos have felt when confronting the latest invaders with their fresh protestations of altruism that scarcely concealed naked self-interest. One does not for a moment discount the advances and benefits these invaders brought, any more than one wishes to deny that great numbers of individual foreigners have been utterly genuine in their love of the Philippines and the Filipino people and have wished them nothing but well. For every awful tale there are abundant stories of deep friendships and sacrifice on both sides, of inter-marriage and all sorts of alliances and relationships, often forged in the teeth of doctrinaire opposition or outright danger. Even obscure Kansulay has its mixed memories. There was wartime horror when three men from a town a few miles down the coast were rounded up by the Japanese for allegedly having given succour to Huk guerrillas. On Christmas Day 1942...
they were paraded around the little grid of streets wearing ‘confessional’ placards around their necks, made to dig their own graves and executed. It shocked the province and has not been forgotten to this day. Yet neither has the friendly and religious Captain Takimoto, the Japanese provincial commander who, for too short an incumbency in the capital town, took an interest in local customs and beliefs and made his officers return all the religious statues and little treasures they had looted from churches and houses.

The point is that it is precisely this bewildering conflict of emotions that has left its indelible mark on an entire population. Had Filipino history been one long catalogue of monstrous and unrelieved tyranny it might arguably have been less muddling and complex in its psychic legacy. As it is, though, a largely non-literate people with an array of animist and other beliefs was suddenly subjected to waves of foreigners preaching a God of Love even as they whipped and garrotted, announcing democracy and liberty even as they reneged on a pact and declared war, and claiming Asian blood-brotherhood even as they turned the country into a prison camp. Nevertheless, this tends not to be spoken about as constituting a national problem, even though, if this were the case-history of an individual, a reasonable modern person would think it unlikely that any child could have undergone such a background of betrayal and rejection and still have grown up at ease with itself and its position in the world.

After such a necessarily crude overview of Philippine history, it might be useful at this point to have an even bolder biographical outline of the man who became President in 1965 – Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

Born 1917, law graduate with top Bar honours 1940, briefly interned by the Japanese 1942, subsequently getting by until 1945. Congressman 1949, Senator 1959, President of the Philippines 1965–86. His first term of office was marked by a ‘technocratic’ style of government that concentrated on building roads, schools, hospitals and other neglected areas of the infrastructure. Re-elected 1969. In 1972, in response to leftist dissent much influenced by Mao’s Cultural Revolution (1966–8) as well as to more general lawlessness, he declared martial law with the full support of Washington. At first this probably had the support of a majority of Filipinos as well. The law and order situation improved dramatically for a while even though Marcos’s martial law regime, despite its brutalities, was a good deal more liberal than other Asian equivalents. This period also saw the launch of his new political party, the KBL, which embodied his ideological vision of a New Society. But as martial law wore on for almost nine years, becoming increasingly unpopular, the New Society seemed to most people more and more to resemble the old. Marcos’s Constitutional Convention, which effectively rewrote the Constitution to give Marcos virtually unlimited power