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## **Bourdieu, Historical Forgetting, and the Problem of English in the Philippines**

T. Ruanni F. Tupas

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# Bourdieu, Historical Forgetting, and the Problem of English in the Philippines

This article explores the nature of historical forgetting in the Philippines through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of forgetting as misrecognition, which is invested with power and struggle. The notion is concretized in the context of Reynaldo Ileto's discussion of the Schurman Commission, which was tasked to gather information about the Philippines as part of the United States' pacification campaign. Because historical forgetting is rooted in the structure of society itself, policies concerning language and education are imbued with power and class dimensions. The necessity of change in consciousness is enmeshed in the broader politics of social change, which is thus the context of the debate on the critical role of English in the Philippines. The political imperative to forget is inherent in—and partly sustains—the fundamental structure of social relations in the Philippines.

**KEYWORDS: POLITICS OF LANGUAGE · ENGLISH IN THE PHILIPPINES · BOURDIEU · FORGETTING · MISRECOGNITION**

For the past forty years or so scholars in the Philippines have explored the notion of historical forgetting or amnesia as part of an anti-imperialist, decolonizing project such that it is now possible to have a “Filipino psychology” (Enriquez 1988; Enriquez and Protacio-Marcelino 1989), a “Philippine political economy” (e.g., Valencia 1981a, 1981b), a history from “the point-of-view of the Filipino people” (e.g., Constantino 1975), and a school “for the people” (Canieso-Doronila 1998). However, this has not been adequately explored in applied linguistics and related fields such as second (English) language education, language policy research, and MOI (medium of instruction) studies. That this is the case is not surprising because language, English in particular, as the subject of sociolinguistic inquiry could understandably be averse to a culture of criticism whose object is language itself. Perhaps applied linguistics and the sociolinguistics of English could be the last bastion of soporific colonialism among the many fields in the Philippines (but see Tollefson 1991, 1986; Villareal 2002; Lorente in press; Tupas 2000).

The purpose of this article is to explore the nature of historical forgetting in the Philippines through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of forgetting as misrecognition, clearly with class and power dimensions. To concretize this notion, I will pursue it in the context of Iletto’s (1999, 22) discussion of how the Schurman Commission, the first American commission tasked to gather information about the Philippines, became a part of the United States’ colonial mechanisms of “knowing, ordering and disciplining—the basic tools of pacification” in the country. I will then argue that policies concerning language and education are imbued with power and class dimensions, largely because historical forgetting undergirds much (academic, official, and popular) discussion and articulation of such policies.

Ideally, a study of structures of forgetting in the Philippines through the problem of English should not only focus on such early colonial mechanisms of control at the start of the twentieth century but must also demonstrate the durability of such structures across different periods and colonial practices, such as the legitimization of the power of English and American colonial education through the Board of Educational Survey (Monroe 1925). As will be argued later, this would demolish the artificial academic delinking of the “past” from the “present,” the “colonial” from the “postcolonial,” which has been assumed in much popular and academic posturing for the past few decades. However, because of space constraints, this article focuses on the Schurman Commission at the start of American colonization in the country,

without foreclosing the possibility of continuity between the ideological and structural contexts of this first American commission and the latter colonial workings in the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

This article has four parts. The first part discusses briefly the politics of forgetting in the Philippines, which leads to a discussion, in the second part, of some general theoretical considerations in the nature of historical forgetting in the country. The third part proceeds to discuss Bourdieu’s notion of forgetting as misrecognition, mentioning in particular its focus on power and class as constituting such a concept. The fourth part operationalizes the concept in the context of early American mechanisms of pacification in the Philippines.

### **The Politics of Forgetting in the Philippines**

“Within standard historical accounts,” argues Tiongson (2006, 2), “Filipinos have all but disappeared, as evidenced by the erasure of the Philippine-American War and Filipino insurgency against U.S. imperial rule; if Filipinos appear at all, it is usually as objects of derision—savages unfit for self-government, economic threats displacing white labor, sexual deviants obsessed with white women, or ungrateful recipients of U.S. beneficence.” Indeed in much of educational, official, and popular discourse in the Philippines, and this includes the periods of American occupation and after, the dominant rhetoric guiding the rationalization of the establishment of an American system of education in the Philippines as well as the introduction of English as the main language of the country has been that of Americans “coming” to or “taking over” the Philippines (e.g., see Frei 1949, 1950; Fullante 1983). Language policy making, both in political (e.g., the Philippine congress) and academic (research/applied linguistics) terms would take on the same rhetoric to justify the dominant role of English in the Philippines. One wonders whether the power configuration of languages in the country would have been altered had this rhetoric been supplanted by a realistic depiction (of how the United States “came” to the Philippines), both in educational and language policy making as well as in popular discourse (Tupas 2003).

### **Forgetting and Rediscovering the Filipino-American War**

In a 1902 Senate committee tasked to investigate early American atrocities in the Philippines, the following cross-examination of Gen. Robert Hughes by Sen. Joseph F. Rawlins would concretely reveal war brutality (Graf 1969, 64–65):

Sen. Rawlins: . . . (I)n burning towns, what would you do? Would the entire town be destroyed by fire or would only offending portions of the town be burned?

Gen. Hughes: I do not know that we ever had a case of burning what you would call a town in this country, but probably a *barrio* or a *sitio*; probably a half a dozen houses, native shacks, where the *insurrectos* would go in and be concealed, and if they caught a detachment passing they would kill some of them.

Sen. Rawlins: What did I understand you to say would be the consequences of that?

Gen. Hughes: They usually burned the village.

Sen. Rawlins: All of the houses in the village?

Sen. Hughes: Yes; everyone of them.

. . . .

Sen. Rawlins: If these shacks were of no consequence what was the utility of their destruction?

Gen. Hughes: The destruction was a punishment. They [inhabitants] permitted these people to come in there and conceal themselves and they gave no sign. It is always—

Sen. Rawlins: The punishment in that case would fall, not upon the men, who could go elsewhere, but mainly upon the women and little children.

Gen. Hughes: The women and children are part of the family, and where you wish to inflict punishment you can punish the man probably worse in that way than in any other.

Sen. Rawlins: But is that within the ordinary rules of civilized warfare?

Gen. Hughes: No; I think it is not.

The context of the atrocities described above was the Filipino-American War of 1899–1902, the period when the Americans were deemed to have “come” or “arrived” in the Philippines, and the same period which Filipino scholars “rediscovered” in the 1960s “in part because the needs of new nationalism required a critical redefinition of Filipino-American relations and in part because the trauma of the Vietnam War resurrected antecedents in America’s ‘imperial adventure’ in the Philippines” (Mojares 1999, 1).

In his autobiography Adm. George Dewey, commander of the American fleet that, along with Aguinaldo’s forces, caused the surrender of Spain in the

Philippines, would write about the “growing anger of the natives [which] had broken into flame. Now after paying twenty million for the islands, we must establish our authority by force against the very wishes of the people whom we sought to benefit” (quoted in Lopez 1966, 14). The same observation was conceded by Barrows (1907, 300), one of the early prime movers of American colonial education in the Philippines: “The spirit of resistance was prominent at first only among the Tagalogs, but gradually nearly all the Christianized population was united in resistance to the American occupation.” The war thus became “one of the longest and bloodiest wars in the sorry history of imperial aggression” (Schirmer and Shalom 1987, 10) and would become the “essential starting point of US-Philippine relations in modern times” (*ibid.*, 7).

### Forgetting the Empire and American Colonial Education

During the years of military aggression and of American colonial governance thereafter, a new system of education was put in place precisely to take on the responsibility of inculcating in the Filipino masses a culture of so-called democratic ideals and practices, which would allegedly prepare them for self-governance. The question is not about the sincerity of individual Americans who came to the Philippines. For example, many first American teachers came to the Philippines with a high resolve to “educate” Filipinos (Alzona 1932) and were consciously distancing themselves from the disastrous consequences of imperialism. The question is rather about the larger issue of imperialism itself and the motivations behind it within which the American teachers, whether they liked it or not, functioned (see Spivak 1998).

The new educational system would penetrate much of the boondocks, hinterlands, and islands of the country to allegedly “elevate” the people from ignorance, ethnic schisms, superstition, economic deprivation, irrationality, and emotionalism, and to open to them the enlightenment of the “new modern world” (Schirmer and Shalom 1987). English would take a crucial role in these colonial agenda because it would purportedly serve as a unifying language for a people who were described as perpetually engaged in political anarchy and ethnic skirmishes due to the many dialects and languages of the country. (There was, of course, never a time when English united all of the Philippines.) This insinuation of linguistic diversity as a problem, which could only be solved through the teaching of English, would be a recurring ideological assumption of many educational and English language works in the succeeding decades

before and after “independence” in 1946, thus paving the way for an unqualified and uncritical acceptance of English in the schools (Tupas 2003).

In his book *The Philippine Educational System* Isidro (1949, 28) would refer to the new system of education as a product of America’s “enlightened policy,” which would include the development of English as the national language of Filipinos. It was a decision “based upon the assumption that possession of a common language was essential to the success of democracy in the Philippines” (ibid., 5). These assumptions also form the ideological matrix of Alzona’s (1932) pioneering book, *A History of Education in the Philippines, 1565–1930*, and of the Philippine government’s celebration of the “Golden Jubilee of Philippine Education” in 1961 (see UNESCO-Philippine Educational Foundation 1953). Notice the silences about—indeed the forgetting of—the military aggression and Filipino resistance that accompanied the introduction of American-sponsored education. The forgetting of empire is the foundation of colonial discourse in education.

### Forgetting the Colonial Moorings of English

In his testimony delivered before the Senate Committee on the Philippines in 1902, William Howard Taft, the first civil governor of the Philippines, spoke clearly of the relationship between English and colonial education policy (Graf 1969, 42):

The (Filipinos) would never learn individual liberty or the power of asserting it, and I am afraid they would continue separated from each other, shut out from the light of civilization by a continuance of knowledge of the dialects only and knowledge of no common language, which would prevent their taking in modern ideas of popular government and individual liberty.

One of our great hopes in elevating those people is to give them a common language and that language is English, because through the English language certainly, by reading its literature, by becoming aware of the history of the English race, they will breathe in the spirit of Anglo-Saxon individualism . . . .

This objective of the American education system served (and still does to a large extent) as the ideological foundation, whether directly stated or not, of much of the educational and English language research in the country

across generations (Tupas 2003). The context of empire (e.g., military and economic impetus of imperialism cloaked in a messianic vision of American destiny and the subsequent forcible annexation of the Philippines within a war resisted by Filipinos) within which the new system of education was put in place was, at best, mentioned but subordinated in discussion and analysis, or, at worst, completely ignored.

This glossing over of such an important political and ideological element in the introduction of American education in the Philippines would also have severe ramifications for the way many Filipinos would locate the role of education in their lives and, specifically, in the way they would perpetuate problematic views of the English language in the country. Filipinos, Dewey once said in 1902, “looked on us as their liberators” (Graf 1969, 10) and in varying shades and degrees this would indeed be the case among many Filipinos then and now, as revealed in the groundbreaking educational survey conducted by Canieso-Doronila (1989) among Filipino pupils, and in content analyses of social science textbooks (Mulder 1999; Constantino 1982). Filipino children said that, if given a choice, they would fight other people’s wars, that of the United States especially, rather than their own (Canieso-Doronila 1989).

In this light English and education in the country are complexly embroiled in the politics of the Filipino-American War itself and, in general, of historical imperial forgetting:

To understand the Filipino-American War is to understand a large part of the groundwork of contemporary Philippine society. Yet, despite much scholarship in this area in the past two decades, this war remains marginal to popular consciousness. A war we ambiguously lost, it is not as much a remembered event as the war against the Japanese, one we ambiguously won. This is not just a matter of temporal distance, it is also a question of colonial memory. (Mojares 1999, 1)

### The Nature of Historical Forgetting: Some General Considerations

#### Forgetting as Collective

Several assumptions emerge from the discussion of historical forgetting thus far. The first assumption is that forgetting is a collective undertaking

that saturates the consciousness of a people. Of course, this does not mean that everyone thinks in exactly the same manner; rather, a conceptual map of forgetting (e.g., of how in general we think about the past) is actually possible, although this is not static in the sense that individuals both respond to it and actualize it in various ways depending on a variety of factors, including their social status, educational attainment, practical experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and so on.

Historicizing forgetting (or, simply, exploring the question *why do we forget?*) may be a difficult social project as it will expose, almost surely, the social inequities that undergird such forgetting, and which understandably may prove undesirable to many people. Bourdieu (2000, 47) is helpful on this point: “resistance to historicization is rooted not only in the habits of thought of a whole corporation, acquired and reinforced by the routine teaching and exercises of ritualized practice, but also in the interests attached to a social position.”

### Forgetting as Structured

It follows that historical forgetting is a structured forgetting. That is, it is deployed across structures of inequity, including unequal relations of power, resulting from overlapping and clashing historical and social contingencies or circumstances. For example, who wrote colonial history textbooks that would then serve as the basis of standard, official history in Philippine schools? If English is a power resource that has strong class dimensions, who will keep—or lose—such resource if we choose to forget—or to remember?

### Forgetting as Socially Practiced

Historical forgetting is also a set of social practices that goes back to the time when the history meant to be forgotten began with the onslaught of colonialism itself. The efficacy of colonialism, in other words, was assured as soon as forgetting crept in. What we are dealing with here, in Bourdieu’s (1990b, 56) words, is “the forgetting of history which history itself forgets”; the “unconscious” or forgetting prevents us from drawing connections between past and present conditions. It also prevents us from historicizing the present. In other words, disconnecting the present from the past is itself a social practice. In so doing, the unconscious when exposed reveals its structural dimensions as well as possibilities of the future for those who initially did not see the beginnings of their own positions and identities. This is not

to say, as I have argued elsewhere (Tupas 2003), that all forgetting is bad and all remembering is good (see Ricoeur 1999). However, in the context of forgetting particular colonial configurations of our past, it is crucial that such forgetting has had ideological connections with how we continue to live the present and chart our future.

To summarize thus far: historical forgetting as it emerges from our discussion above has at least three major dimensions. It is collective, structural, and socially practiced. What I hope is clear by now is the argument that forgetting is located within broad structures of relations whose continuities expose the permeability of the colonial/postcolonial dichotomy. However, what is still lacking in this theoretical design is a conceptual explanation of how such continuities of unequal relations of power persist. How are inequities sustained? Is historical forgetting a subtle mode of legitimization?

In this context Bourdieu’s notions of misrecognition and other related terms help fill in the conceptual gap. He develops such notions through his preoccupation with symbolic forms of violence—the domination of one group of people by another through subtle, hidden mechanisms—which are themselves ways to understand the nature of socially hierarchized societies (e.g., Bourdieu 1990a,b; 1996).

### Bourdieu’s Misrecognition

David Swartz (1990, 6) asserts that Bourdieu’s main concern with enduring social hierarchies is what defines his work in general: “Whether he is studying Algerian peasant, university professors and students, writers and artists, or the church, a central underlying preoccupation emerges: the question of how stratified social systems of hierarchy and domination persist and reproduce intergenerationally without powerful resistance and without the conscious recognition of their numbers.” Bourdieu’s notion of historical forgetting as misrecognition, thus, is grounded in this general preoccupation with social inequities and how they are sustained. In the words of Murphy and Jung (1997, 111), misrecognition helps us unmask the “metaphysics of domination.”

### The Forgetting-Misrecognition Connection

Simply put, misrecognition according to Bourdieu (1990b) is a kind of forgetting that creates the “reality” of society; what society is to us is a misrecognized reality. Through various ways of misrecognition the “real” soci-



ety—that which is characterized by an unequal distribution of rare goods and a struggle for power to classify or represent (ibid., 140–41)—remains hidden from the reality of people inhabiting it. Thus, by creating the “veil of symbolic relations” misrecognition becomes an integral part of society: the “misrecognition of the reality of class relations is an integral part of the reality of those relations” (ibid., 136).

### Misrecognition as an Exercise of Power

Misrecognition is infused with notions of power, struggle, and domination. It requires modes of legitimization in the exercise of power (Bourdieu 1996, 1990b), meaning that power structures in society function as such because they are misrecognized as disinterested activities and practices, devoid of economic and/or political foundations or self-interests. Bourdieu’s point is that all social practice is inescapably interested, but such interestedness is not transparent. Misrecognition, thus, assumes the status of a social strategy to sustain/maintain/generate the social structures that precisely make possible the perpetuation of different kinds of social domination. Although self-interested practices are perceived otherwise, their misrecognized character is recognized as legitimate. Power relations, in this sense, derive their legitimacy from the power of practices of recognition and misrecognition.

### Misrecognition as a Symbolic Practice of Violence

This is where violence comes in, only that misrecognition as a symbolic practice of violence attains efficacy through subtle legitimization. The nature of misrecognition, in other words, precisely because it helps sustain unequal power relations through social practices recognized as natural and/or legitimate, inescapably incorporates into its analytical core a character of violence, of silent aggression wrought upon one group of people by another. Moreover, such violence is achieved through complicity because “(a)ll successful socialization tends to get agents to act as accomplices in their own destiny” (Bourdieu 1996, 45). These conceptual interrelations may be summed up succinctly in this way: “symbolic violence, invisible violence, unrecognized as such” (Bourdieu 1990b, 127). From this conceptualization of misrecognition we get to see a picture of historical forgetting in the Philippines: the forgetting of (American) empire as misrecognition is wrought with symbolic violence and achieved through complicity.

### Misrecognition as (also) a Sociocognitive Scheme

What needs further emphasis is the sociocognitive dimension of misrecognition. There are, in Bourdieu’s words, “acts of cognition that are implied in misrecognition and recognition” (ibid., 122). These acts are mainly practices of classification and representation, which constitute themselves into mental schemes or perceiving social relations but whose power to influence reality is tied with social distributional processes where various classes of people, occupying various positions in the social hierarchy, struggle for the legitimacy of their own sociocognitive schemes through symbolic violence. Such struggle, being essentially class-based, necessarily favors those upon whom society, in the first place, has conferred to have the power to impose their own schemes of perception upon those devoid of such similar power. Misrecognition, therefore, is also “mis-cognition” (ibid., 141).

The sociocognitive elements of misrecognition are essential in understanding the continuities between past and present conditions of forgetting in the Philippines. The ideological structure of forgetting cuts across the unstable boundaries of past/present and colonial/postcolonial Philippines, but such structure does not remain afloat; in fact, it is grounded in what was earlier referred to as social distributional processes.

A critical point to highlight in mis-cognition, or simply sociocognitive elements of misrecognition, is the mediating role of education as a medium through which social cognitions and social structures help generate each other, keeping such relations away from conscious interrogation and, thus, making society function the way it wants itself to function (cf. Bourdieu 1973). Educational institutions develop cognitive frameworks and operating classifications that appear “apparently completely neutral” but actually “reproduce pre-existing social classifications” (Bourdieu 1996, 52).

This is one of Bourdieu’s (1998) key points in *Homo Academicus* where he essentially demonstrates the politics of academic life through the mapping out of fractions of class among practitioners and researchers, as well as professors in the various disciplines, through the various lenses of social class and other symbolic and structural sources of relative power. Agents of power in school, he argues, are able to affirm the status quo in all its forms because the academic classifications and criteria used to generate such affirmation are actually internalized social classifications and criteria. A salient point is that not only is there a “correspondence between objective structures and personally internalized structures” (ibid., 182) but these “objective struc-

tures *have become* mental structures” (ibid., 207, italics added). This is why scholars like Constantino and Canieso-Doronila point to education as the key generator of colonial frames through which Filipino students see their “world.” These frames generate class relations through, to give one example, the justification of English on similar colonial assumptions.

To summarize: historical forgetting in Bourdieu’s sense is a kind of misrecognition, which is (a) an exercise of power, (b) a symbolic practice of violence, and (c) a sociocognitive scheme. Put together, forgetting as a misrecognition of the past is one’s exercise of power over another through the subtle/symbolic use of violence and the deployment of sociocognitive frames and classifications produced largely by educational institutions. Such is a more coherent articulation of the nature of historical forgetting that now incorporates our earlier and more general discussion of it as collective, structured, and socially practiced. But, above all, Bourdieu’s historical forgetting as misrecognition demolishes the shaky demarcation line between colonial and postcolonial conditions because it is primarily grounded in class-based relations, which also cut across lines allegedly separating the past from the present.

### **Bourdieu in (Philippine) Context**

In this last section of the article, I recontextualize our understanding of historical forgetting in the Philippines within the conceptual framework of Bourdieu’s misrecognition. My purpose is not to provide new evidence of historical—specifically, imperial—forgetting in the Philippines, but to argue that this issue is not a mere “historical” issue that can be dispensed with because it deals with the past. Among those who espouse agenda for the Philippines that are developmentalist/economic rationalist/globalist—and for Philippine education specifically—the argument goes that we must forget the past to embrace the present and the future (e.g., Sibayan and Gonzalez 1996; Sta. Maria 1999; Gonzalez 1994). However, in the light of the earlier discussion, we know that forgetting is invested with power and struggle, and the structure of such consciousness is rooted in the structure of society itself. The necessity of change in consciousness is enmeshed in the broader politics of social change (cf. Freire and Shor 1987, 134). In the context of language politics, an ideological shift in the debate on the critical role of English in the Philippines is embroiled likewise in the same politics of social transformation. To put it in another way, the political imperative to forget is

inherent in—and partly sustains—the fundamental structure of social relations in the Philippines.

### **Collaboration, Education, and the Schurman Commission**

“Conquest”, according to Iletto (1999, 22), “involved the imagining of and desire for an altered social order in the new possession. To implement these dreams, it was necessary to deploy techniques of knowing, ordering and disciplining—the basic tools of pacification.” The Americans were largely ignorant about the Philippines even during the time of the Treaty of Paris in December 1898. While assuming sovereignty over the Philippines, the United States nevertheless was unsure about how to conduct its colonizing missions because of its lack of knowledge about Filipinos, their culture, geography, languages, aspirations, leaders, and so on (e.g., see Lusk 1898). With the Spaniards gone, who would the Americans draw upon to exercise their power over the islands? They initially saw “no one through whom they could channel their gift of civilization” (ibid., 23). How could pacification take place when they did not know whom to pacify in the first place? To address these inadequacies of knowledge about the Philippines, which they wanted to “civilize,” President McKinley appointed an investigating body called the Schurman Commission precisely to explore all possible facets of Philippine society, history, culture, and politics (see Benitez 1926).

The commission, upon arriving in Manila on 4 March 1899 amid the intensifying war that had just broken out between Filipinos and Americans barely a month earlier, decided to consult some educated Filipinos who were professionals and members of the *ilustrado* sector of Manila’s society. The questions they were asked, according to Iletto (1999), revolved around three main topics: Philippine social structure; the nature and motivations behind the Filipino revolt against Spain; and the nature of Filipino resistance against the United States and how it could be quelled. Through these interviews members of the commission were given a social portrait of a divided people always seeking peace but duped into fighting the Americans by revolutionary leaders who were motivated more by personal ambitions than a genuine desire to serve the people and help the country move forward toward reconciliation and harmony. The commission reached one hasty generalization: the masses did not desire independence. And a recommendation: the United States must flex its powerful muscles to subdue anyone who would oppose its rule in the Philippines. It had to do this lest personal



ambitions would triumph over the American desire to teach Filipinos good governance and a sense of national pride. Iletto (ibid., 24–25) says he was “struck by the extent to which American knowledge of the Philippines was almost totally shaped by their contact with the witnesses who testified before the Schurman Commission. These were members of the *ilustrado* elite, some of whom had earlier served in the revolutionary government.”

The Americans, Iletto (ibid., 24) likewise says, saw in the *ilustrados* “mirror-images of their rational and liberal selves.” The local elite were largely mestizos (Chinese or European), so the commission indeed found itself comfortable dealing with them. This relationship between Americans and the local elite would anticipate the dominant colonial social structure that would have powerful ramifications for the way Filipinos would later conduct their social and political lives: “the Americans would be at the apex of a pyramidal structure of person-to-person ties reaching down, via the *ilustrados* and other elites, to the village and the ordinary *tao*” (ibid.). The picture is that of a local elite who desired peace, and Filipino masses who were deceived into fighting the new colonizers because of their inherent passivity toward their leaders, who were drawn mainly from ranks of writers and clerks and who, as earlier mentioned, were really fighting for their own self-interests. At this point, it was almost clear to the Americans that there was a *leading class* through which they could implement their pacification campaign and clear the way for their imperialist agenda in the country and the Pacific. “What emerged” then, Iletto asserts, “was a representation of Philippine society that reflected the desires of both the Americans and the *ilustrados*” (ibid.). But was the representation reliable?

The witnesses interviewed, Iletto continues, were no longer in regular contact with their erstwhile local communities and therefore could not amply capture the sentiments and emotions of those they thought they knew and controlled. These *ilustrados* simply wanted to give the impression that they had the right to govern because they would do so with reason, and not with passion; the revolutionary leaders were called bandits, sorcerers, rebels, vagabonds, and so on (see Schirmer and Shalom 1987; Constantino 1975). The *ilustrados* might have been wealthy and educated at the time their experience and knowledge were sought by the commission, but it was no longer clear if they still held power over their constituencies. The *ilustrados* dreamt of a social order where they would be the rightful leaders of the passive and ignorant masses, but this would not happen, they added, if the situation were

not stabilized, or freed from sporadic disturbances created by those who were ruled by passion, ignorance, and irrationality. The Americans, on the other hand, were already content with such portrayal of Philippine society. They started to work toward the realization of the dreams and aspirations of the Filipino people as seen from the eyes of a few Filipino elite. They took the *ilustrados* seriously and believed that, indeed, the mestizos whence the *ilustrado* sector came were the rightful leaders of the country. The most logical way to govern the Philippines then was through the *ilustrados*.

The Americans refused to seek alternative views of Philippine society, which was not composed merely of “big men and little people,” but “a complex scene of competing definitions or proper leadership, as well as a multiplicity of sites where this was manifested” (Iletto 1999, 29). Bound by a reductive elite description of social order, the Americans failed to appreciate the fluidity of power that flowed in and out of centers of towns and municipalities all over the country, where recognized leaders would take as their sites of power both the *pueblos* (the town center where the church, the school, the municipal office, and other centralizing institutions were found) and the peripheral villages whose inhabitants would not be within hearing distance of the church bells, thus outside the normal reach of religious and political influence. In its brutal pacification campaign the United States refused to recognize people in the peripheries who lived rather independently of the centralizing religious and political institutions because they could not fall within the “rational” sphere of categories as expressed by the *ilustrados*. Calling them bandits, the Americans, after much effort, would exterminate them in the course of the war and the early years of the “benevolent” campaign through education. Iletto (ibid., 26) aptly captures the political and social climate of the time:

In the spirit of establishing what the Filipinos really wanted (as articulated by their *ilustrado* informants), U.S. Army volunteers in captured territory quickly organized town administrations, established schools and implemented sanitation programs. Indeed, their efforts seemed to be met with success. But by the following year (1900), there was more and more talk of the “duplicity” of the native. What frustrated the Americans most were the lack of fit between Filipino appearance and intention, the switching of identities, and the haziness of what lay beyond the garrisoned town-centers. The only people they

could deal with, and talk to in Spanish, were the few *principales*, who had proclaimed themselves *Americanistas*.

## Enter English

Given the means by which, under military rule, the first commission gathered information about the Philippines and made recommendations based on such information, and likewise given an understanding of historical forgetting as an issue of power, it is not difficult to fathom the underlying motivations for the commission's recommendation to impose English upon the people through free primary education. American "tutelage" was implicated because Filipinos were not only ignorant and irrational but were also (thus) incapable of governing themselves. The *ilustrados* were "helpful" in this regard: they pictured themselves as the embodiment of reason and as the natural leaders of the masses. The masses, in turn, were largely sympathetic to their revolutionary "rebel" leaders because they could easily be duped into believing anything as a result of their ignorance. Universal education was needed and, through English, the masses would be taught the virtues of democracy and governance. Consequently, the discordant Philippine society could be disciplined through a common language imposed from the outside to allow for interethnic and interisland communication. In short, Filipinos had to "earn" their independence first by going to school and be Americanized.

Broadly speaking then, colonial officials found an ally among the elite to advance their economic and military interests in the Pacific through the use of education as a means of pacification and assimilation. For their part the local elite—or, at least, many of them—found in the new colonizers the opportunity to preserve and consolidate both their wealth and properties which they brought with them from the Spanish era, as well as dreams of becoming the future leaders of the fragile country. They had no reason to reject America's offer of free education. After all, access to education had already been one of the centerpiece policies of the Philippine revolutionary government, which was established against Spanish control of the country.

## Conclusion

The influence of the first commission and its views on English and education cannot be underestimated, especially if viewed in the context of subsequent colonial pronouncements. The earlier articulations of imperial forgetting

through certain mechanisms of knowing, such as the Schurman commission, were never random and disparate but products of the combined power of empire and elite collusion, which would constitute and sustain the structure of social relations in the Philippines throughout the twentieth century. In fact the second commission, which arrived in the Philippines on 3 June 1900, would now take the Schurman group's views on English and education as "truths," constituting the given assumption of the second commission's task to organize a public school system. McKinley's (1900) famous instructions to the second commission would echo much of what the first commission had to say about English and education, which as earlier argued could be traced back to colonial structures of control and complicity:

It will be the duty of the commission to promote and extend and, as they find occasion, to improve the system of education already inaugurated by the military authorities. In doing this they should regard as of first importance the extension of a system of primary education which shall be free to all, and which shall tend to fit the people for the duties of citizenship and for the ordinary avocations of a civilized community. This instruction should be given, in the first instance, in every part of the islands in the language of the people. In view of the great number of languages spoken by the different tribes, it is especially important to the prosperity of the islands that a common medium of communication may be established, and it is obviously desirable that this medium should be the English language. Especial attention should at once be given to affording full opportunity to all the people of the islands to acquire the use of the English language.

It is crucial to emphasize that official, academic, and popular discourses on English, education, and American colonialism would be firmly established in the ideological and political matrix provided for by such a colonial pronouncement. Without scrutinizing the broad structural context within which it was produced, historical forgetting that has undergirded education and language policies in the Philippines has remained largely unquestioned. The politics of forgetting, although much discussed in other academic and political avenues then and now (Hau 1998; San Juan 1998; Mojares 1999; Schirmer and Shalom 1987; Constantino 1970), remains a national problem and will remain to be so for as long as the structural roots of inequality

continue to bedevil Philippine society. Forgetting in our sense is structured forgetting that is durable and enduring; however, it does not foreclose the possibility of “the critical moment,” which “interrupts automatic acceptance of the unquestioned truths of the status quo” (Bourdieu 1988, 185). The point simply is that “it takes more than changing words to change the world” (Peet 1998, 161). To *not* forget, in other words, is to be implicated in the broader politics of change in the midst of “historical unfreedom and existential finitude” (Hau 1998, 21). The problem of English in this sense is very much a problem of structures of forgetting.

## Notes

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- 1 Such continuity is demonstrated in my earlier work on historical forgetting (although in less theoretical fashion) involving the Monroe Survey and early education research (Tupas 2003); applied linguistic work, including language policy making (Tupas 2004; Tollefson 1991, 1986); and the ELT (English language teaching) enterprise in the country (Tupas 2002; cf. Pennycook 1992). In a few papers, I have likewise discussed the changing contexts of such historical forgetting, especially in the midst of rapid neoliberal globalization, which has provided some people—the Philippine state especially—more ammunition to affirm the symbolic and structural power of English in the Philippines through the export of human labor (e.g., Lorente and Tupas 2002) and linguistic imperialist practices (e.g., Tupas 2001; cf. Phillipson 1992).

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**T. Ruanni F. Tupas** is lecturer at the Centre for English Language Communication, National University of Singapore, 10 Architecture Drive, Singapore 117511. He is the chief editor of the Centre's peer-reviewed journal, *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, and the current vice president of the Singapore Tertiary English Teachers' Society. Until 1999 he taught as assistant professor at the University of the Philippines, Diliman; during 1996–1997 he served as a visiting scholar and instructor of English at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. <elctr@nus.edu.sg>