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## **Gabriel L. Kaplan and U.S. Involvement in Philippine Electoral Democracy: A Tale of Two Democracies**

Nakano Satoshi

*Asking why Gabriel L. Kaplan, a New York Republican politician-turned CIA agent, could have been so successfully involved in Philippine politics in the 1950s, this article explores colonial/postcolonial encounters between electoral democracies in the United States and the Philippines. Emphasis is laid not only on similarities between the two countries in terms of their election laws, but also on progressive notions that are simultaneously introduced in the United States and the Philippines in the hope of cutting off relationships between political bosses and the electorate via the secret ballot. The article also deals with a pattern of colonial/postcolonial American officials' reliance on "emerging new elites" and criticism of "traditional political elites."*

**KEYWORDS:** *democracy, secret ballot, election fraud, cold war, political elites*

Misconceptions, innocence, and illusions: these are the familiar words in the literature of American Cold War historians, who have been humbly exploring causes of shortcomings and failures, rather than of triumphs, in America's Cold War endeavors during the late twentieth century. With the best of intentions for balanced history and self-criticism, they have asked why U.S. government officials failed to understand the world of others and avoid such unnecessary tragedies as the Vietnam War. The long history of U.S. involvement in Philippine politics is considered a "lamentable failure" as well, in spite of its ostensible success in preventing the country from falling into the communist orbit (Smith 1994, 37–59).

The Philippine election of November 1953 has been one of the most well-known Cold War episodes narrated in this context. The election is known to have had an aspect of political maneuvering engineered by U.S. agencies, including the CIA, military, and the U.S. Embassy, to replace President Elpidio Quirino and his Liberal Party administration, which was discredited by them as incapable, unpopular, corrupt, and difficult (hard to handle). The “guy” they found as savior of Philippine democracy was the opposition Nationalista Party candidate and former Secretary of Defense Ramon Magsaysay. Amid election fervor, he won a landslide victory, while the communist-led Huk rebellion in central Luzon provinces lost its momentum and was soon suppressed.<sup>1</sup>

Historians note, however, that these euphoric experiences blinded U.S. officials to the social crisis in the Philippines that they would still have to tackle (McMahon 1999, 59), giving them erroneous confidence that they could solve social problems elsewhere in the world with the same American way of democracy. After his legendary success in the Philippines, Edward G. Lansdale was dispatched to South Vietnam in the hope of duplicating his triumph, only to end up in a fiasco (Hunt 1996, 15–18). Historians thus refer to the 1953 Philippine election as an episode preceding the gravest failure of America’s Cold War, i.e., the Vietnam War, which revealed America’s innocence and misconceptions about Third World realities.

This article reverses the question and asks why the Americans could make such a remarkable “success” in the Philippines in the 1950s despite what they did and did not know about the realities in Philippine society. To answer this question, it examines the experiences of American “Cold Warriors” in the Philippines, especially Gabriel Luis Kaplan (1901–1968), a New York Republican politician who went to the Philippines without any particular background knowledge of the country. By asking why a person like Kaplan could be so successfully involved in Philippine politics of the 1950s, this article portrays such experiences as not so much a Cold War episode but as one chapter in the tale of two democracies, the Philippines and the United States, entangled with each other through both colonial and postcolonial eras.

This approach reflects the author's response to the recent postcolonial debate among scholars of Philippine political history ignited by Reynaldo C. Ileto (1999), who argued (1) how persistently Philippine politics have been portrayed by political scientists, predominantly Americans, as representing "lack and failure," for which evils of indigenous political culture dominated by "traditional political elites" are primarily responsible; and (2) how deeply these assertions rely on an accumulation of texts dating back to the very beginning of the U.S. Occupation, which reflect the desires of American colonial officials to justify their presence in the Philippines. A possible counter-argument against Ileto's way of presenting his case is that his approach is purposely selective of the current writings of American political scientists; nevertheless, it is difficult to refute his point that there have been tendencies among American scholars to picture Philippine politics as characterized by (1) "derogation" with "bossism, patrimonialism, and cacique democracy," on the one hand, and (2) "passivity and powerlessness of the broad mass," on the other, as one political scientist targeted by Ileto admitted in a recent book (Hedman and Sidel 2000, 4–5).

Among the possible ways to avoid as well as go beyond the dualist bias in the study of Philippine-U.S. relations is the institutional/state approach, which stresses the "peculiar American nature" of the Philippine state institutional structure, rather than the indigenous political culture or Spanish influences, as the determinant of the course of Philippine history (*ibid.*, 6). Another possible approach can be seen in several recent works on the early American colonial period, which pay attention to the intertwined relations between the peculiar mindset the American colonial officials brought with them from their homeland and the colonial projects they carried out in the Philippines (Salman 2001; Abinales 2003).

Keeping the above points of discussion in mind, I would like to narrate in the pages that follow a story of colonial and postcolonial encounters between the two peoples. The major part of the argument will be devoted to a bilateral history of two electoral democracies, which brought about the Cold Warriors' campaign "success" in the 1950s. The discussion will then be directed to notions of Filipino "tra-

ditional political elites” in the eyes of American officials who chose to carry out their projects through the cooperation of “emerging new elites,” who in time would disappoint them for turning out to be, in their eyes, “traditional political elites.”

### **Cold Warriors Going to the Philippines**

#### **Strangers in the Former Colony**

One of the noticeable features of postcolonial Philippine-U.S. relations is a lack of significant continuity, or the insignificance of whatever continuity there was, in American personnel dealing with the Philippines. This feature prevails amid the remarkable continuity in the whole structure of bilateral relations, as was evident in the preferential trade relations and the protracted presence of U.S. military bases.

None of the “Cold Warriors” who went to the Philippines had any significant prewar (colonial) experience there. One of them, Edward G. Lansdale, set foot on the Islands for the first time in the last days of the Second World War and stayed there as an intelligence officer until 1946. This wartime experience might have led him to a Philippine assignment after joining the OPC (Office of Policy Coordination), the CIA’s branch for clandestine operations (Currey 1988, 31–55). Not a warrior but a scholar who joined the Cold War, Frank H. Golay (1915–1990) used to tell about his first glimpse of the Philippine Islands being “through the periscope” of his submarine during the war. After being awarded a Ph.D. in international commodity trade in 1951, Golay turned to the Philippines as his subject. He was hired by the CIA in 1952. Later he became an influential professor of Philippine political economy at Cornell University.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, William J. Pomeroy (1916–) was a “Cold Warrior”-turned-scholar who joined the Huk rebellion as an American communist. An active member of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. (CPUSA) local chapter in Rochester, New York, he was drafted and sent to the Philippines as a G.I. in 1944, and came to know and sympathize with the Hukbalahap, the wartime People’s Army against Japan which became the People’s Liberation Army when the group turned to rebellion. Demanding agrarian reform as well as justice for wartime collaborators, including many landlords, the Huk’s

political body, the Democratic Alliance, won several congressional seats in the first postwar election in 1946, only to be deprived of those seats on the pretext of election violence and irregularities. The Central Luzon plains were dragged into a state of civil war after August 1946. After being discharged from military service in 1947, Pomeroy left the United States for the Philippines "to write a book" on the Huks; he joined them and married a comrade among them.<sup>3</sup>

### Gabriel Kaplan, New York Politician in the Philippines

How then did Gabriel Kaplan go to the Philippines? The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections notes that Kaplan was "an active New York City Republican politician," who served as "legal counsel to the Citizens Union and the League of Women Voters in the 1940's, and sought voter reform through support of such issues as permanent voter registration and proportional representation."<sup>4</sup> The Gabriel Kaplan Papers in the Cornell University Library tell us how Kaplan, as a New York City progressive Republican, became an undisputed election expert in the crafty, old foxy electoral politics of New York City and State through a series of repeated defeats from the late 1920s onwards, some of which involved himself as a candidate.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1930s, New York City progressive Republicans supported the New Deal and Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia. These Republicans struggled to expand their strength by even aligning with the American Labor Party. In contrast, the main basis of support for conservative Republicans was in upper New York State rural communities. The progressive leader of New York County was Kenneth Simpson, who was elected to Congress in 1940, but met with an untimely death the following year (Stein 1972). Kaplan was Simpson's right-hand man. After Simpson's death, Kaplan continued to work for the progressives, except during the Second World War, when he enlisted in the Army Air Force as chief of staff at the Replacement Depot and was awarded the Legion of Merit for his contribution as a skilled organizer in the Air Force replacement system in the Southwest Pacific areas.<sup>6</sup>

After the war, Kaplan resumed work as legal counsel of Stanley M. Isaacs, his long-time colleague and the minority *leader* of the New York

City Council, where Isaacs was actually the only opposition councilor.<sup>7</sup> In September 1951 Kaplan resigned from Isaacs' service, and then flew to the Philippines the following month as "a political analyst for the Committee for a Free Asia, Inc." (*Manila Times* 1951), which was in fact a cover for the CIA. He seldom returned to the New York political scene after that, and ended up as president of the Community Development Counseling Service, Inc. in Arlington, Washington, D.C., an agency that specialized in training overseas allies for the U.S. campaign against communism. Kaplan died of kidney cancer in 1969.

The Committee of Five Million, a civic campaign that Kaplan joined as chief organizer in 1949 to oppose the reelection of Democratic New York City Mayor William O'Dwyer, led him to the Philippine assignment. To expose the evils of the city's corrupt government, the committee made a survey of conditions in the slum areas of the city, and attacked the breakdown of city inspection services as permitting the spread of "rat infestation" (*New York Times* 1949). The campaign itself was not successful and O'Dwyer was reelected in 1950, although he was to resign in the thick of corruption charges after less than a year. Kaplan worked in this campaign with Desmond Fitzgerald, the committee chairman, who joined the CIA in January 1951 as chief of the Philippine operation (Thomas 1995, 49–50, 58). As early as April 1951, Kaplan sent a letter to the Air Force expressing his willingness to serve "in the Air Force expansion program," i.e., the CIA's project in the Philippines. Kaplan was in close consultation with Fitzgerald about this and that arrangement.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Kaplan was assigned to the Philippines, Lansdale and other American officials had already labeled President Quirino as hopeless, causing them to set up a political maneuver to get Ramon Magsaysay elected as president in the 1953 general elections. Making the 1951 midyear election "free and honest" was the first step in the plot. Since election day was set for 13 November, the National Movement for Free Election (NAMFREL) was inaugurated in August as a civic organization headed by Jaime Ferrer, then the thirty-five-year-old National Commander of the Philippine Veterans Legion. The organization was secretly financed by the CIA (Currey 1988, 106).

Kaplan's official assignment commissioned by the Committee for a Free Asia, Inc. was "to observe and report upon the registration, voting and general election procedures as evidenced in the forthcoming Philippine elections."<sup>9</sup> However, on his arrival on 26 October 1951, the *Manila Times* (1951) reported that he "will work with NAMFREL for clean elections." With only two weeks left until election day, Kaplan went around the Philippines with Ferrer, visiting local NAMFREL chapters and giving lectures to election watchers about how to find and guard against election fraud. Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Magsaysay ordered the Armed Forces to provide security for "any candidates" who appealed for protection; at the request of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), he also sent regular troops to provinces in order to ensure due process in voter registration, voting, and ballot counting (Abueva 1971, 197). The ruling Liberal Party's capacity to commit election fraud was effectively neutralized by the armed forces and by civic vigilance so that the opposition Nationalista Party could win a landslide victory in the election.

Although short, this tour of duty made Kaplan the *de facto* chief executive of NAMFREL, because his knowledge and experience were sorely needed to build up the movement and various other civic organizations in preparation for the coming 1953 election. Together with his wife and daughter, Kaplan returned to the Philippines in April 1952 as a representative of the Catherwood Foundation, another cover for the CIA (Smith 1976, 258–59), "to work with the Philippine government in pointing the way to install the democratic processes" (*Manila Times* 1952). It was an open secret, however, that Kaplan would not work "with" Quirino but with Magsaysay, who was defense secretary under Quirino but was seen as the U.S.-favored presidential aspirant. In April 1953, Magsaysay resigned as defense secretary, declaring that he had switched to the opposition Nationalista Party and would run in the coming November election. The Magsaysay for President Movement (MPM) was started under Kaplan's supervision, and its campaign song, "Mambo Magsaysay," composed by Raul Manglapus, became a big hit. Although it was only natural and even justifiable for Quirino and the Liberal Party to claim "U.S. intervention" in the election, they realized

that the only way left to them was to play a good loser (Smith 1976, 258; Currey 1988, 105–6). In the end, Magsaysay got about 2.9 million votes, more than double that of Quirino (Coquia 1955, 121–35, 291).

## Elections as a Meeting Point of Two Democracies

### Election Fraud in Two Democracies

It was indeed a rare victory for Gabriel Kaplan, who had seen defeat after defeat during more than two decades of electoral politics in New York. Asking why he could be so successful and useful in the Philippines of the 1950s should lead us to see Philippine elections as a meeting point between two democracies.

Scholars of Philippine politics have long depicted elections as an arena exposing Filipino political culture, in which the liberal democratic institutions that Americans installed have been systematically manipulated by “traditional political elites.” These elites are generally seen as descendants of the *principalia*, the landed intermediary class in Christian Filipino society during the Spanish colonial period. For instance, Glenn May (1989) argues that, under the Spanish regime, this class “had learned not how to serve government, but rather how to use it.” His findings show that fraudulent practices had already been rampant in *gubernadorcillo* elections, leading him to conclude that modern-day Philippine election fraud is a product of an encounter of American democracy with the “old realities” of Filipino politics, in which election is “not a ritual worthy of respect but rather a charade, silly and laughable” (Ibid., 35–36). A well-known book on Philippine politics authored by David Steinberg (1994, 110) also refers to vote buying, “cemetery residents on registration lists,” and political violence as the characteristic features of post-Second World War Philippine democracy.

The presidential election of 1949 has been cited by scholars of Philippine politics as a good example to show the extent of fraud by which the ruling Liberal Party mobilized every possible means, including the police and private armies, to secure victory. Newspapers reported numerous cases of registration list padding, multiple voting, ballot and ballot box tampering, and acts of intimidation and violence that re-

sulted in more than a hundred deaths. Even the COMELEC report that claimed the election was “peaceful and orderly” had an appendix detailing province-by-province accounts of irregularities and violence, thus contradicting the main text of the report (Carbonell-Catilo et al. 1985, 13–17). A survey conducted in 1951 revealed that registration list padding in 1949 amounted to at least 404,525 voters out of the total 5,156,972 registered voters (Coquia 1955, 111). The number of voters was nearly doubled by padding the registration list in Lanao, a Muslim-populated province of Mindanao; this incident would be the object of ridicule in “Mambo Magsaysay,” with its line that said, “Birds they voted in Lanao!” (Manglapus 1953).

What scholars of Philippine politics have often overlooked, however, is the fact that all of these instances of election fraud can be explained as an outgrowth of the Americanization of political institutions. Neither should it be ignored that election fraud was still a tangible reality in American political life in the late 1940s up to the early 1950s. If one is to ridicule Lanao, where even the birds voted for Quirino in 1949, one must also ridicule Texas, where “Manuel’s dead father” voted for Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1948 Democratic state primary for the U.S. Senate. In this election, 200 ballots were padded into the “Ballot Box 13” from Jim Wells County under the direction of George Pearl, a local “boss” who controlled the county’s Hispanic population. Johnson won the primary by a narrow margin of 87 votes.<sup>10</sup>

New York, the city as well as the state, was another “heartland” of American election fraud all the way since the nineteenth century. In an address before the Republican School of Politics at Hamilton College in July 1950, Kaplan told the audience about an episode that happened shortly before the 1938 midyear election, in which his office sent letters to 1,908 male voters whose names and addresses were on the voter registration list in four Albany River wards and found 31 percent of these letters were returned as undeliverable. The Election Frauds Bureau of New York State was still busy in the fall of 1948 tracking registration and voting fraud, finding some forty names had been registered from the single address of a Manhattan building (Kaplan 1951).

## Making of Twins: Australian Ballot and the Two Electoral Democracies

These resemblances in election fraud cannot be dismissed as coincidental or superficial; they stem from the institutional similarities between the two electoral democracies dating back to the turn of the previous century, when the brand-new electoral system known as the "Australian ballot" was introduced to both the United States and the Philippines more or less simultaneously. Moreover, not only similarities in institutions and the simultaneity of their introduction but also the likeness of political notions led to the introduction of the new system, a move that would eventually make the two democracies remarkable twins. To explore these points, it is necessary to look back along the path of installing electoral democracy in the Philippines during the early American colonial period.

When the U.S. government decided to stay on in the Islands in 1898 as its new sovereign power, America's mission was declared as "benevolent assimilation substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule" (Blount 1913, 149). It meant that the Americans wanted to substitute themselves for the government that Filipino revolutionaries, largely composed of the principalia, believed to have been established as a legitimate one. The war followed. Filipinos were defeated, but the war was a fierce one. Under these circumstances an electoral system was introduced in the Philippines as an unprecedented act of offering enfranchisement to a colonized people.

As early as August 1899, a military order was issued to hold elections in "pacified" municipalities for the purpose of choosing town mayors pro tempore by "viva voce vote of residents."<sup>11</sup> Another military order issued the following year provided for the basic codes of elections, including suffrage and secret balloting, but it did not provide any details on how to conduct elections.<sup>12</sup> Then in January 1901 the Philippine Commission passed the General Act for the Organization of Municipal Government, providing full details to the election codes.<sup>13</sup> The swiftness of these changes suggests how essential it was for the U.S. government to hold elections as proof of their concern for the

“consent of the governed” and their desirability as replacement for Filipino “arbitrary rule,” considering that it had to persuade dissident Filipinos and anti-imperialist Americans who opposed the U.S. annexation of the Philippines.

In addition to the aspect of swiftness, one other remarkable feature of the election codes of 1901 was their set of graphically specific directions on how to conduct the secret ballot.<sup>14</sup> It was known as the “Australian ballot,” named after the country that introduced the system for the first time in 1856. By and large, the same instructions as issued by the Philippine Commission could be found in the New York Ballot Reform Law of 1890 (*How to Vote 1890*). After years of election reform movements, the Australian ballot was first introduced in the United States in 1888, spreading to thirty-two states and two territories by the 1892 election, and to seven more states by 1896, despite the fact that every state continued to determine its own form of voter registration, balloting, voting, and vote counting (Evans 1917, 17–28). These facts show that U.S. colonial officials introduced Filipinos to a very new brand of electoral system, which had not taken a firm hold in the United States.

In order to understand the significance of introducing the Australian ballot to the Philippines, one needs to take into account the sociopolitical context of its introduction to the United States. Although ballots had been widely used in American elections since the early nineteenth century, they were in principle to be provided by the voters themselves and, in practice, were distributed by political machines as “party tickets.” There was no secrecy in voting because “party tickets” could be distinguished from a distance by color, size, and design. Vote buying was rampant, and people were willing to vote in public to ensure reciprocity with their bosses or unions. In this way, election was a ritual demonstrating the power of the bosses, or a spirited contest between them (Argersinger 1985–86). The Australian ballot was considered primarily as a measure to introduce “law and order” into the anarchy of elections, which were becoming more and more of a circus amid the swelling populations of urban immigrants (Fredman 1968, 99–118). Reformers also desired to cut off ties between the masses

and the bosses, who stood in the way of their efforts for good government. As Theodore Roosevelt (1900) lamented: “reformers have more than once discovered when the mass of the voters stolidly voted against them, and in favor of a gang of familiar scoundrels, chiefly because they had no sense of fellow-feeling with their would-be benefactor.”

It was the *principalia* who stood in the way of American efforts to form “good government” in the Philippines. James A. Le Roy (1905, 172), a young colonial officer whose writings had a tremendous influence on the American imagination of the Philippines, wrote: “The chief obstacle to social and political progress in the Philippines is ‘caciquism,’ the term by which ‘bossism’ is known in those regions.” Deploying the word *caciquism*, Le Roy cast the image of the familiar world of “bossism” on his characterization of Filipino society as the elite/masses binary. His notions echoed in the words of William H. Taft, the first civil governor (1901–1904) and the chief architect of U.S. colonial policy on the Philippines:

We are the trustees and guardians of the whole Filipino people, and peculiarly of the ignorant masses, and that our trust is not discharged until those masses are given education sufficient to know their civil rights and maintain them against a more powerful class and safely to exercise the political franchise.<sup>15</sup>

The binary of “a more powerful class” and “ignorant masses” can certainly be read as representing the colonial officials’ desire to see peculiarities and darkness in the colonized people. However, the same texts can be re-read interestingly, if one takes into account the notion of Gilded Age elections being conceptualized by reformers, especially progressive Republicans like Theodore Roosevelt, who were to form the nucleus of policymaking over the Philippines. In describing the society they encountered, they might have overlapped the images of foreign and of domestic in the common terms available to them—“bosses” as enemies and “masses” as needing to be rescued at home and abroad. The desire to reduce the political and social domination of “bosses” over “masses” might have echoed a similar chord among

reformers in the United States and American colonial officials in the Philippines.

During the initial elections, however, the Philippine Commission limited enfranchisement largely to the principalia class by specifying voter qualifications.<sup>16</sup> As a result, registered voters in the initial elections constituted 2 percent only of the "civilized" population, and actual voters accounted for 1.5 percent only (Jenista 1971, 38). Even after popular male suffrage was established in 1916, with literacy as the only requirement, the voter registration rate was still as low as 15 percent of the total male population in the 1935 election, while the literacy rate had reached 48 percent among the over ten-year-old population according to the 1939 census. Women's suffrage was established in 1937, but voters accounted for 13 percent only of the total population in 1946 and 18 percent only in the notorious 1949 election (U.S. High Commissioner 1937, 88; 1947, 80; Tanigawa and Kimura 1977, 78).

The low registration rates relative to the population of eligible voters seemingly contradict the claim that the United States was protecting "the masses" from elite domination. Restricted suffrage was nevertheless adopted not only as a policy to accommodate the principalia class in order to conquer the islands with the minimum sacrifice of American lives and resources, but also as a reflection of social ideas widely shared by colonial officials and Republican progressives that held "the masses," Filipino or American, should be denied suffrage as long as they were "ignorant," i.e., illiterate or not intelligent enough to "exercise their political franchise." Here again, the Philippine Commission's election law overlapped with the New York Ballot Reform Law of 1890, which had significantly decreased the reported turnout in elections during the 1890s (Converse 1974).

In this respect, Mark Twain's well-known anti-imperialist essay in 1901 against the Philippine-American War, titled "To the Person Sitting in the Darkness," is intriguing since it begins with lengthy quotes from New York newspapers exposing "offenses against humanity" committed in some of the notorious East Side districts under Tammany Hall boss Richard Croker, under whose regime "murder, rape, robbery and theft go unpunished" (Twain 1992, 24-25). Twain might have wanted to

say that there were people “sitting in the darkness” at the very heart of America, which could even be “darker” than the Philippines. On the other hand, the colonial officials accused by Twain might just knowingly have been uttering to themselves about the “darkness” of the colony, but also looking at it through the prism of “darkness” and “bossism” that they were fully aware prevailed in New York and other places in the United States.

### Fraud after Reform in the Two Democracies

History shows, however, that in either country an extremely complicated secret ballot system could not eradicate election fraud or bossism, both of which would be modernized with a flavor of secrecy. New York City continued to be notorious for rampant election fraud, at least until Fiorello LaGuardia became mayor in 1933 on an anticorruption bipartisan ticket during the Great Depression (Thomas and Blanshard 1932, 79). Another infamous city was Philadelphia, where one investigation revealed that as much as 25,000 names were padded on to the voter registration list in the mid-year election of 1926. Election fraud in the city was so rampant during the same election: ghost and flying (repeat) voters, padding, and ballot tampering reduced legitimate ballots to about one-eighth only of the total count (McCaffery 1993, 138–39). In the same election, 44 percent of the ballots cast in Chicago was found to be fake (Fredman 1968, 120).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, instances of chaos and fraud began to be reported as early as the 1902 municipal elections.<sup>17</sup> Within less than three years after the first National Assembly election of 1907, 764 people were prosecuted on charges of violating election codes, mostly for obtaining false oaths regarding voter qualifications.<sup>18</sup> In the 1912 election, the number of registered voters suddenly increased due to registration fraud. Irregularities committed by election inspectors also surfaced, such as recording names different from those stated by illiterate voters.<sup>19</sup> The colonial government circulated directions and warnings to provincial governments to prevent such irregularities, with appendices illustrating fraudulent practices and related court decisions, which became more and more voluminous after each series of elections.<sup>20</sup>

These visible similarities in election fraud make one wonder if there was not some sort of "personal technical transfer" from Americans to Filipinos during the early colonial era, an interesting hypothesis but difficult to prove. Perhaps a more persuasive theory is that similar institutions are likely to bring about similar kinds of illegal behavior (Argersinger 1985–1986, 686–87). That is to say, first, periodic voter registration requiring the electorate to register over and over again was highly vulnerable to manipulation both in padding and disenfranchisement. Padding (inflating voters) might have been more frequent in the early-twentieth-century Philippines because the registration rate was so low, while disenfranchisement (deflating voters) might have occurred as frequently as padding in the United States where the registration rate was much higher.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, lengthy and complex forms of ballots with plural entries have given room for irregularities both in ballot casting and counting. In American elections, dozens of public offices, from the president to county officials, are chosen at one time, in addition to a number of local referenda, all of which are usually printed on a single ballot that sometimes looks like a newspaper. In such elections, a "write-in" ballot is considered impractical. The call for a "shorter" and "simpler" ballot was a constant cry of the electoral reform movement in the United States before the Second World War (Ludington 1910; Smith 1938). In the Philippines, the write-in ballot form was adopted from the beginning and official ballots have been provided by the government nationwide to this day, despite having to write the names of as many as two dozen public officers at one time on a single ballot, from municipal board members to the president, and having to provide plural entries for the positions of municipal councilors, provincial board members, and senators. The write-in method made it necessary to provide "sample ballots" for voters to follow, and for political parties to distribute millions of such sample ballots, often handed out with money or small gifts. Although considered an important source of fraud and vote buying, the ballot form has been little changed in the Philippines to this day.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, the United States and the Philippines both shared similar complexities in electoral systems during the first half of the twentieth

century, which may well be said to have encouraged both peoples to invent similar kinds of maneuvers in their pursuit of election victories. Whether or not Americans and Filipinos felt like twins, they were to meet again in the years of the Cold War, when even the birds voted for Quirino in Lanao and the dead voted for LBJ in Texas. Then came Gabriel Kaplan, who had been chasing after phantom voters and rats in New York. The needs of the time brought Kaplan to the Philippines as one of the top experts in election fraud in the American system. Due to his repeated defeats in that system, however, he was an enthusiastic supporter of permanent personal registration and the proportional representation system. Ironically enough, it was his intimate familiarity with the flaws of the very institution he wanted to change so desperately in New York that made him so successful and useful in the Philippines of the 1950s.

### **Filipino Elites in the Eyes of Americans**

#### **"New Elites" as Cold War Collaborators**

One reason for the Cold Warriors' success, in spite of their "innocence," was the availability of collaborators who so satisfactorily met their expectations. Ramon Magsaysay (1907–1957) was definitely "the guy." Although belonging to a family of local principalias, Magsaysay grew up in a rural Zambales province. He joined the anti-guerrilla movement under U.S. military command and was appointed military governor of Zambales by the U.S. army after its liberation from the Japanese. He was elected to the House of Representatives in the first postwar election of 1946. His relatively humble socioeconomic background, his Second World War record, and his likable, yet masculine, appearance got American observers excited about him. In 1950 he visited the United States as chairman of the Military Affairs Committee and met Lansdale for the first time. Instantly fascinated with each other, they decided to work side by side toward victory in the 1953 presidential election (Currey 1988, 70–71).

U.S. operations in the Philippines during these years were largely carried out through cooperation by the "new elites," like Magsaysay and his younger supporters. They overlapped with "traditional political elites"

in their social backgrounds; nevertheless, they were “new” because they were relatively young, more often technocrats and businessmen with little experience in electoral politics, or had only a fragile foothold, if any, among their constituencies. Many of them belonged to a group born in the mid-1910s, including NAMFREL chief Jaime Ferrer (1915–1987); Raul Manglapus (1918–1999), the composer of “Mambo Magsaysay”; and Emanuel Pelaez (1915–2003), who would become vice president from 1961 to 1965. This generation represented the most Americanized one in Philippine history in terms of their extensive usage of English and wartime allegiance to the United States, in contrast to many of the senior generation of political elites who played the role of collaborator with the Japanese during the war, whether they liked or not.

With the help of these new elites, Kaplan was able to make the most of his previous experience in New York organizing such civic movements professing “nonpartisanship” as the Citizens Union, League of Women Voters, and Committee of Five Million, rallying together like-minded people regardless of their party and other affiliations. This scheme had been necessary for New York City Republicans, who were a hopeless minority with no prospect of beating the Democrats single-handedly. These experiences were definitely helpful in organizing NAMFREL, the Magsaysay for President campaign, and other civic organizations claiming nonpartisanship, while demanding a change of government.

### Dreaming of Community Development

It was rural community development programs, however, that Kaplan was most enthusiastic about among his pet projects in the Philippines. After securing funds from CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere) and Coca-Cola Co., Kaplan made full use of NAMFREL’s national organization. In February 1953, two NAMFREL Community Centers in Mabalacat, Pampanga, and Marbel, Cotabato were inaugurated; eight more community centers were to follow by 1956. These centers were expected to function as facilities for local meetings and various adult education programs, offering agricultural and

sanitation training programs for building toilets, making cement blocks, and creating backyard compost piles. In Kaplan's words, they were "not established with the idea of fighting communism, but rather to eradicate the conditions under which communism thrives, namely poverty, ill health, ignorance and lack of opportunity for citizen participation in community affairs" (*Manila Times* 1953).<sup>23</sup>

As the managing director of those community centers, Kaplan picked a very young NAMFREL officer, Ramon P. Binamira (1927–2004), who was to become, with Kaplan's strong endorsement, the youngest cabinet-rank official of the Magsaysay administration as Presidential Aide for Community Development (PACD). Binamira stayed on the position until 1961 as the chief executive of national community development projects, authoring the Barrio Charter, which extended local government to the barrios. Another very close comrade of Kaplan's community development projects was Don Joaquin "Chino" Roces, the publisher of *Manila Times*, who dramatized the projects, through a series of front-page coverage, as if they were a major social movement or a crusade.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, Kaplan targeted "rat infestation" just as he did in New York only a few years before he found himself engrossed in "barrio democracy." What Kaplan did in "the dramatic rat-extermination campaign of 1953 and 1954" was described by one newspaper in the following way:

(Kaplan) made several excursions into the far-flung villages of the affected areas, took with him tape-recording instruments, and induced the villagers to talk, to reveal what they needed in the fight against the rats, and to say what they thought the outcome would be if nothing was done to stop the infestation. (Abueva 1959, 110–11)

This was exactly the same things the Committee of Five Million did in "Manhattan's Lower East Side, Chelsea, Hell's Kitchen, and Harlem" and other sections of the city, reporting their findings of "rat bitten babies and adults, limbs broken by falling ceilings and disintegrated floors" (*New York Times* 1949), though he did not tell Binamira and other Filipino colleagues about this interesting precedent. Later he found an even more localized issue in trawl fishing, which was ruining the

livelihood of fishermen in San Miguel Bay, Camarines Sur, in south-eastern Luzon. In March 1954, the NAMFREL community center at Calabanga launched a petition-signing campaign calling for a ban on trawl fishing, which "moved" President Magsaysay to sign a decree to that effect. Kaplan, of course, directed this media event to show that "democracy works" (Abueva 1959, 120–21).

By the time Kaplan returned home to the United States in 1958, community development projects conducted by Binamira's PACD office had offered basic training programs to as many as 250,000 local leaders from roughly one-third of all the barrios in the country (Kaplan 1967). These training programs provided an opportunity for Kaplan to cultivate "new elites" on a more grassroots level. In later years, Kaplan would insist that community development exists neither to provide social services nor is "an opportunity for public philanthropy," but rather to nurture "democratically oriented civic and political leaders" through such measures as building "a two way channel of communication" between local communities and the government. He argued that the threat of communism in rural society resided in the ignorance of the central government and the media about what mattered there, and that the fundamental solution lay in the establishment of communication channels through local leaders (*ibid.*).

Kaplan's Cold War projects in the Philippines were warmly recalled by another CIA agent, Joseph Smith (1976), who had been sent to the Philippines by the director, who was not impressed by "Gabe's dream," to see "how we could reduce our expenditures" on the projects initiated by Kaplan. Smith's later experiences in the Philippines show, in spite of his "resolve to imitate Gabe's method," that the CIA turned to more conventional clandestine operations, such as backdoor maneuvers in favor of more pro-American politicians and negative campaigns against those disfavored by the U.S. government. In all cases, operations were to be carried out at the lowest cost possible as the Philippines had been downgraded in CIA operations due to the passing of the imminent crisis of the early 1950s (Smith 1976, 265–321).

In retrospect, Kaplan's Cold War projects may be recalled in terms of both commendable legacy and failure. His projects produced such assets as community centers, libraries, and fairly well-trained personnel,

that would contribute to the build up of physical and institutional infrastructure for later development projects in Philippine agrarian society. However, almost all the resources for community development came and would continue to come from the outside, despite the fact that capital accumulation within the community was desirable to make it sustainable and self-sufficient. Such community leaders as the “new elites” of barrio democracy were thus absorbed into politics, where they became just another agent at the terminus in a chain of dependency. By the end of 1961, when Binamira resigned as the PACD, several corruption charges had been laid against PACD officials (*Daily Mirror* 1961). In later years PACD officers were to lose their administrative neutrality and transform themselves into a sort of political machine under Ferdinand Marcos.

Whether or not he was aware of the limitations to his projects, Kaplan was filled with the optimism and idealism typical of passionate civic organizers, even as his chants of anticommunism were rather platitudinous. After all, he was a New York Republican progressive working with Isaacs, known for “his passion for civil rights and social justice” and his fight “to build decent housing for families living in the squalor of tenements,” who had even appointed Simon Gerson, a CPUSA member, to his staff in 1939 when he was president of Manhattan Borough (Isaacs 1967). Available records and secondary sources show that Kaplan might have been not so much a secret agent as a civic organizer who used the CIA as a cover for his aspirations to organize civic movements, which would otherwise have come under suspicion during the McCarthy era.

### Disillusionment and Call for Withdrawal

In March 1957, Ramon Magsaysay died in an airplane crash in the mountains of Cebu. The accident marked the end of euphoria and the beginning of a “quagmire” in America’s Cold Wars throughout Asia. American disillusionment with Philippine democracy was deepening, gradually yet steadily, to the point of desperation by the time Marcos declared martial law in 1972, which was nevertheless generally tolerated, and even endorsed, by American officials.

During the same years, American scholars in chorus began to express criticism of Philippine politics or, more precisely, *Filipino* politics. The fact that Magsaysay and the “new elites” could not achieve the socioeconomic reform (above all, land reform) and that the new elites were seemingly being absorbed into traditional elite politics led many American specialists to conclude that the domination of those elites and the helplessness of the masses in the Philippines was something politically unalterable, and that it was the Filipino political culture inherent in their social lives that permitted this class of people to survive through the twentieth century. Many scholars also believed that one of the grave errors committed by the United States in the Philippines was its own historical alliance with “traditional political elites.”

Unanimity in this regard extends even to those with opposite political orientations, all the way from a socialist scholar such as William Pomeroy (1970) to a conservative scholar such as Frank Golay, who worked for the CIA and USAID while studying Philippine political economy. Asked what to do with the Philippines after the “Fall of Saigon” in 1975, Golay drafted a memorandum to his old friend Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State, saying in part, “political power in the Philippines is monopolized by an elite which shrewdly perfected a system of government—American in form but Filipino in substance—which serves the narrow interests of those wielding political power.” Golay further ventured to propose a U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines as “shock therapy,” because “[s]o long as the Philippines remains a client/protectorate of the U.S., the present political elite will recognize no compelling pressures” to change, while “the United States has no interest in the Philippines of sufficient importance” to postpone “independence for this country from the Philippines,” concluding “[t]he strategy of ‘shock therapy’ is a policy of desperation, but we have little to risk by throwing that society on its own resources.”<sup>25</sup> In spite of Golay’s call for withdrawal, the two nations would not be “independent from” one another and the two democracies would be entangled for years to come. It may well be said, however, that the frustration Golay expressed was widely shared among American officials, affecting the Philippine-U.S. military bases negotiations in the early 1990s.

### Mirage of "New Elites"

It has been two decades now since Benigno Aquino Jr. was assassinated in August 1983, an incident that rang the death knell to the Marcos dictatorship. Throughout these years, the former "new elites" have not at all vanished but have been instrumental in the restoration and maintenance of Filipino electoral democracy. Although their initial responses to martial law varied, they became the nucleus of the nonleftist anti-Marcos movement during the late years of his regime. The NAMFREL was restored before the 1984 Batasang Pambansa elections, in which Jaime Ferrer ran as the opposition candidate and won. The lyrics of "Mambo Magsaysay" were revised as a new protest song used by the anti-Marcos Catholic station, Radio Veritas, as its theme song (Mamot 1986, 90-91).

After the fall of the Marcos regime, Jaime Ferrer was assigned in the new Corazon Aquino cabinet as Secretary of Local Government, working with the U.S. military to nurture local "vigilantes" as an anti-communist force whose white-terror drew severe criticism from human rights nongovernment organizations and the United Nations (Wurfel 1988, 316). Ferrer was assassinated by unknown assailants in August 1987. Raul Manglapus was appointed Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Emmanuel Pelaez Ambassador to the United States, both playing in the Aquino administration key roles in the U.S.-Philippine military bases negotiations and defusing tensions between the two countries after the termination of the bases agreement. Ramon Binamira, Kaplan's "son," continued to work for community development projects in his home province of Bohol with financial assistance from the USAID, UNICEF, and other organizations. He was designated as the spokesperson of the "Silent Protest Movement" against Joseph Estrada's attempts to profess that he was "non-partisan and non-violent" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2000).

In this way America's former boys have been active as old soldiers who never fade away, continuing to play roles as "substitutes for" Marcos and as elders in a series of presidencies that kept the country as a favorable ally of the United States. In spite of the fact, or possibly all the more because of that fact, American critics have shown impatience

with Filipino democracy, monotonously arguing that the present generation of Filipino political elites could not be entrusted with the conduct of the government, while placing hope in the younger generation. This pattern of argument dates back to James Le Roy (1905, 196–97), who expressed hope in the following words: “some old men, and more of the young [among ‘the cacique class’] may be rated as patriotic and as desirous of seeing political progress that shall include the masses.”

In response to this kind of hope, a group of young caciques emerged in the early years as collaborating “new elites,” including Manuel Quezon (1878–1944), the first president of the Philippine Commonwealth, and Sergio Osmeña (1878–1961) from Cebu, the second president. However, by the time war clouds began gathering over the Philippines in the late 1930s, Quezon’s allegiance to the United States had become suspect as he was surrounded by Spanish Falangists, and out of fear that he would strike a deal with the Japanese government should war break out. This time it was a new generation, including the first graduates of the University of the Philippines which had been established by the colonial government, that attracted Americans as bright young “new elites” who were educated in a thoroughly Americanized institution. The cohort of U.P. graduate lawyers included Manuel Roxas (1892–1948), the first president of the Republic from 1946 to 1948; Elpidio Quirino (1890–1956), the second president from 1948 to 1953; and Jose P. Laurel (1891–1959), the president from 1943 to 1945 of the wartime republic during the Japanese Occupation. Then came the Wars, Second and Cold, when they were downgraded to “traditional political elites” or “oligarchs,” while the Americans found “new elites” in Magsaysay’s camp.

Does this repetition in the American narrative, where new elites come and go like mirages, where the aspirations of Filipino youth are always replaced by opportunism, and where a perfect America’s boy is relentlessly revealed as desperately *Filipino*, represent only continuity and resilience in Filipino elite politics and political culture? Or, is there possibly another aspect in such repetitiveness, like the colonist’s desire to differentiate “self” from the “other,” because Filipinos were so skillfully able to conform to, or even appropriate, American institutions? What is

it that has made Americans so impatient about what they have encountered in the Philippines? The quest for the answer to these questions may possibly lead one to an odyssey of the American “self” with the Filipino “other,” which became entangled with each other throughout the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

Gabriel Kaplan continued to work for Cold War projects because of his success in the Philippines after two decades of repeated defeats in New York City and State politics. When he died, the *New York Times's* (1968) obituary did not mention his most recent career, but rather portrayed him as one who “championed permanent voter registration and proportional representation in New York” in the 1940s and 1950s and quoted him as saying that the proportional representation system is “as American as the hot dog, as native as baseball on a Sunday afternoon.” For the *New York Times*, Kaplan was the guy who lived American politics to the end.

In this article, the author has tried to point out that the “success” of Kaplan and other Cold Warriors, in spite of their so-called “innocence,” was made possible through (1) their ability to convert experiences gained in electoral politics due to the Americanization of Philippine political institutions, and (2) the availability of “new elites” as the most Americanized collaborators in Philippine history at the time. And so, if their “success” was the result of similarity and closeness like “twins,” did later developments viewed as a “lamentable failure” by American observers signify difference and remoteness between the two? The author’s findings and their implications do not support such a presumption.

Investigation into the historical development of the secret “Australian Ballot” system in the United States and the Philippines reveals that the two democracies have shared not only similarities in electoral institutions, especially the simultaneity of its introduction, but also in political notions that led to the introduction of the new system: that is, the bosses (elites)/masses binary and the desire for ending reciprocity be-

tween the two via the secret ballot. In other words, these two electoral democracies were born as remarkable twins. U.S. intervention in the Philippine electoral process during the 1950s was so successful because of familiarity with various shortcomings shared by similar electoral systems—they were twins. The entanglement of two democracies in electoral politics to this extent suggests that one needs to be cautious when trying to indicate flaws in the other's political practices and attribute them to peculiarities of its culture, despite the fact that those same flaws actually arose from similar institutions on both sides.

The author has also confirmed here that there has been remarkable continuity and repetition in the American criticism of "Filipino traditional political elites" that date back to the very beginning of the American occupation of the Philippines. This continuum might have begun as a military confrontation with Filipino revolutionaries, which brought about notions of the *principalia* as villainous *cacique*. It was followed by frustration on the part of American officials and scholars concerning the U.S. policy of accommodating Filipino elites, resulting in the construct that Filipino elite politics has been the major source of Filipino "failures." Because this continuity has been historically tied up with bilateral relations not "independent from" each other, one should be careful not to be trapped in the psychological contest waged between the colonizer and the colonized.

In this respect, the author noted the absence of derogatory remarks on Filipino politics in Kaplan's comments. It may partly be because of his "innocence," which could be a Cold War historian's conclusion, or his optimism, so typical of never-give-up civil activists. The author also suspects that Kaplan's field familiarity with earthy American politics in the boroughs and counties of New York prevented him from being annoyed with *Filipino things* occurring around him. After all, it may not have been significantly far from business as usual on the American political scene. Crooks and rascals certainly infested both the City of New York and the Philippines, like the rats that Kaplan so passionately tried to eradicate on the shores of the Atlantic and the Pacific in the interest of local communities.

## Notes

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1. For details of the 1953 election and the Huk rebellion, see Abueva 1971, Cullather 1994, and Kerkvliet 1977.

2. See “Security Investigation Data for Sensitive Position,” October 1967. Frank Golay Papers, Rare and Manuscript Collection, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University (hereinafter Frank Golay Papers); and Golay 1998, xii.

3. “William J. Pomeroy,” Entry 134B: Investigative Records Repository, RG319; National Archives at College Park (hereinafter NACP); Pomeroy 1963.

4. <http://lcweb.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/rlnsearch.html> [28 June 2004].

5. For Gabriel Kaplan’s involvement in New York City and State politics, his correspondence with Stanley M. Isaacs in the 1940s up to early 1960s is found in the Stanley M. Isaacs Papers at the New York Public Library Manuscript and Archives Division.

6. Citation for Legion of Merit. *New York World Telegram*, 18 December 1945. Gabriel Kaplan Papers, Rare and Manuscript Collection, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University (hereinafter GKP).

7. Stanley M. Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 10 September 1951, GKP.

8. Interview with Nikki Jane Zapol, 15–16 November 2003.

9. George H. Greens, Jr. to Gabriel Kaplan, 8 October 1951, GKP.

10. “Manuel’s dead father” was a favorite story told by Lyndon B. Johnson himself. See Kahl 1983, xi.

11. General Orders No. 43, Headquarters Department of the Pacific and Eighth Army Corps (8 August 1899), E5/10265-1, RG350, NACP.

12. General Orders No. 40, Office of the U.S. Military Governor in the Philippine Islands (29 March 1900), E5/10265-2, RG350, NACP.

13. General Orders No. 82, A General Act for the Organization of Municipal Governments in the Philippine Islands (13 February 1901), E5/10265-4, RG350, NACP.

14. *Ibid.*, Article 11, 7–9.

15. William H. Taft to Theodore Roosevelt, 23 January 1908. Quoted in Patric J. Hurley, “Second tentative draft transmitting Report of the Secretary of War to the President: Appendix 1,” October 1931, RG350, NACP.

16. Initially, the 1901 election codes provided that the electors shall be male; twenty-three years of age and over; those who either (a) held public offices in Spanish colonial administrations, or (b) owned real property to the value of 500 pesos or who annually paid thirty pesos or more of the established taxes; and

those who could speak, read and write English or Spanish. General Orders No. 82, 4–5.

17. Manuscript Reports of the Philippine Commission (1902), E91, RG350, NACP.

18. Philippine Commission, *Official Gazette*, vol.10, no.17 (24 April 1912), 1.

19. Bureau of Justice, Circular 158, 17 January 1913. E5/10265-60; Philippine Constabulary, “Confidential Report,” Manila, 7 June 1912. E5/10265-51, RG350, NACP.

20. “1922 Elections—General information and instructions re-,” 10 March 1922. E5/10265-97, RG350, NACP.

21. Cox and Kousser (1981) suggest that the introduction of the Australian ballot may have increased “deflationary” corruption in rural New York elections.

22. See sample ballots used in the Philippine 1959 election in Lande 1973, 12.

23. For details of the early years of community development projects in the Philippines, see Abueva 1959.

24. Interview with Ramon P. Binamira, Cebu City, 6 September 2003.

25. Frank Golay to Philip Habib, “Draft paper,” 2 June 1975. Frank Golay Papers.

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