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Megan C. Thomas

**Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados:
Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism**

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regarding great short stories: each story gives “a feeling of completeness [. . . a] sense of the artistic whole” (xi–xii). More remarkably, “there is the sense in his short stories of an easy competence, a casual unrehearsed performance,” yet in “the seeming effortlessness [Bautista generates] stories of the highest order, in vision and resonance, matter and form and prose; in felicities of language that recall Nick Joaquin, Renato Madrid and Kerima Polotan” (x–xi). Surely, *Stories From Another Time* by Benjamin Bautista must appear upon the literary shelves among books by these celebrated writers: with Joaquin, Madrid, and Polotan, as well as with Francisco Arcellana, NVM Gonzalez, and Gregorio Brillantes.

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MEGAN C. THOMAS

Orientalists, Propagandists, and *Ilustrados*: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism

Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 277 pages.

The late-nineteenth century, with the Propaganda Movement and the Revolution of 1896, is arguably one of the most interrogated and intensely studied periods of Philippine history. A book that purports yet again to look at this period may seem superfluous and repetitive, but that is not so in the case of Megan C. Thomas's *Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism*. By examining this period from the lens of intellectual history, more specifically, the history of the knowledge produced by the *ilustrados*, the author provides a fresh and interesting perspective on an old, familiar topic.

In the first chapter, “Locating Orientalism and the Anthropological Sciences: The Limits of Postcolonial Critiques,” the author establishes the framework of the book in conjunction with the intellectual trends and fields of knowledge that emerged in the late-nineteenth century. Starting out with a background on the state of knowledge in late-nineteenth-century Europe, particularly the ideas that came from the Orientalist standpoint, Thomas sets the stage for a discussion of Philippine intellectual developments in the

same period. Orientalism as a concept and anthropology as an emergent field of science were particularly attractive and useful to Filipino scholars and intellectuals of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Common themes in Orientalism and anthropology, such as the narrative of decline and the focus on textless societies, made them especially ripe for appropriation by the Filipino intellectuals who encountered them in Europe. Methods such as philology and sources of data such as ethnology, folklore, and artefacts were also particularly apt. The result was that this group of Filipino scholars and intellectuals produced knowledge which would eventually lay the philosophical groundwork for the revolutionary movement.

The second chapter titled, “The Uses of Ethnology,” delves more deeply into anthropology and how ethnological ideas were used in the scholarly discourse about the Philippines in the 1880s to the 1890s. Ilustrados such as Pedro Paterno, José P. Rizal, and Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera used diverse approaches and data for varying ends. The different approaches “harnessed the possibilities of various scholarly discourses—race, history, civilization, and progress—in the service of promoting the Philippines, not necessarily against Spain, but as a location of advancing history” (83). Although with different ends in mind, they were able to reconstruct prehispanic Philippine society and begin to articulate the idea of “Filipino.” In Chapter 3, “Practicing Folklore: Universal Science, Local Authority and Political Critique,” the author hones in on the work of the foremost folklorist of the time, Isabelo de los Reyes. De los Reyes’s work was already significant because of the sheer size of the data in what would become the first collection of Philippine, specifically Ilocano, folklore. More importantly for De los Reyes, folklore became a vehicle for criticism of contemporary governance and society in the Philippines (101), convincingly shown in numerous examples.

In Chapter 4, “Is ‘K’ a Foreign Agent? Philology as Anti-Colonial Politics,” Thomas shifts focus to another ilustrado intellectual: Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera and his studies on philology and linguistics. A significant but often overlooked contribution was his proposal for a new orthography to standardize the Tagalog language. Pardo de Tavera observed that the combination of Spanish orthography and Tagalog grammar resulted in spelling irregularities (144), which could be resolved with the use of the new orthography, perhaps best represented by the use of the letter “k.” The author narrates the storm of opinion raised by the substitution of “k” for “c”

and “qu,” with figures such as Rizal advocating the new orthography while others such as Pascual Poblete reviling it. Interestingly, Thomas points out the visual impact of “k” as changing the way Tagalog looked. “K not only changed the shape of Tagalog words, but it also helped obscure the Spanish origins of some Tagalog words” (165).

Chapter 5, “Lesson in History: The Decline of Spanish Rule and Revolutionary Strategy,” moves into another emerging scientific discipline of the time, the study of history. Rizal, with his annotation of Antonio de Morga’s monumental *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, would logically emerge as the main figure. But the author also extensively discusses the lesser known history of the 1763 Diego Silang revolt as reported and analyzed by Isabelo de los Reyes. In his annotation of Morga’s account, Rizal uses Morga’s description of prehispanic society as a basis to show the technological, social, and economic decline of the Philippines under Spain. This followed a common Orientalist trope of ancient grandeur and present decline. De los Reyes echoed this aspect of early greatness but tended to blame individuals for its deterioration, while Rizal, with his grasp of the “systemic and institutional character of the problem,” pointed a finger at Spanish governance and colonization (184). However, in his interpretation of the Silang revolt in Ilocos, De los Reyes goes several steps further and presents the “boldest example of cautionary history” (197). He provides a “series of lessons in political strategy and an exercise for the political imagination” (193). The historical discipline was thus used to reveal any number of future possibilities that the Philippines and Filipinos could have.

In the final chapter, “Conclusion: Politics and the Methods of Scholarly Disciplines,” the author emphasizes the different fields of knowledge and scientific disciplines that were emerging in the late-nineteenth century and their appropriation by Filipino ilustrados and intellectuals. Ethnology was used to explain peopling, descent, and such contested ideas as “race.” Folklore became a tool to critique the present, and Orientalist tropes allowed Filipinos to criticize contemporary Spanish rule while at the same time claim the patrimony of an earlier, nobler Spanish history. It is tempting to assume that what occurred was a straightforward substitution of Filipino data on European models of knowledge. However, Thomas argues that the models themselves were appropriated for very individual purposes and “defined by local political contexts and projects” (203).

All in all, Megan C. Thomas's book demonstrates a high level of scholarly research and analysis and may initially seem most suitable for a scholarly and specialist audience. Students and scholars of intellectual history in general and Philippine history and politics in particular will find much to chew on in this book. Throughout the book, there seems to be an assumption of familiarity with events, personalities, and issues of late-nineteenth-century Philippines. But although reading the book may be a challenge for the general reader, the ideas, perspectives, and examples contained in this work are novel and absorbing. The author's use of India as a comparative and analytical fulcrum may provide familiar ground to nonspecialists in Philippine history.

The work is an important contribution to a relatively new but increasingly visible interdisciplinary area in Philippine studies: intellectual history. On this matter, no era is richer with data than the late-nineteenth century, which saw the emergence of Filipino intellectuals who had been exposed to European tropes and intellectual discourses and had, in turn, written and published their own works using data from their country. Thomas examines not only the obvious sources such as Rizal's *Annotations* to Morga, but also the lesser known but equally important philological works of Pardo de Tavera and folklore studies of De los Reyes. In doing so, the author reveals how the appropriation of methods, sources, and themes of emergent fields of knowledge were utilized in various, uneven ways by different Philippine intellectuals. Rather than a simplistic dichotomy into reformists and revolutionaries, the work reveals the blurred margins in nationalist and anticolonialist works of the period. The appropriation of these methods, sources, and knowledge for ends other than those envisioned by the Europeans was a vital part of the development of nationalism in the country. Although dealing with diverse subject matters and with different ends in mind, the writings of the ilustrados "made it possible to think with certainty and a sense of inevitability of Filipinos as a distinct ethnic people, with ancient roots, an emerging modernity, and a political future" (203). The book is thus successful in shining light on an essential aspect of history that has often been buried in the rush to get to the drama and excitement of the Revolution of 1896.

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