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Filipinas, un país entre dos imperios

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Book Reviews

MARIA DOLORES ELIZALDE AND
JOSEP M. DELGADO, EDS.

Filipinas, un país entre dos imperios

Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2011. 331 pages.

What happened when Spain signed away the Philippines to the United States? Hardly anyone has asked the question. Tradition says that the Philippines, distinguished for its Hispanic-Christian lifestyle for more than 300 years, was “Americanized” overnight—supposedly, because the Filipinos felt their political dreams would come true with the American policy of “benevolent assimilation” and promise of eventual political independence. But at a recent seminar in Barcelona to analyze the transfer of sovereignty over the Philippines at the end of the Spanish–American War, ten scholars offered a more balanced view of its immediate effects. As the title of the book indicates, this is the purpose of this collection of lectures now offered as a book.

Two introductory essays by the two editors of the book prepare the reader for seven essays grouped into four parts analyzing the situation after Spain lost the Philippines: (a) “Political Models”; (b) “Continuity and Break”; (c) “Viewing from the Outside”; and (d) “The Spaniards Faced with the Transition.”

In his essay, Reynaldo Ileto suggests that the Rizal Law of 1956 hoped to revive the Spanish epoch that was “forcibly erased” (*relegó con fuerza*) from the people’s memory. Obliging students to read the true version of Rizal’s two novels, the proponents of the law believed, would help mitigate the

exaggerated attention to the first ten years of Philippine independence. Iletto also suggests that Taft, the first American civil governor of the Philippines, presented Rizal as a national hero in order to win the goodwill of Filipinos and support the government program during his term (58). Taft, however, seems to have conveniently overlooked that, before him, on 30 December 1897, the first anniversary of Rizal's execution, the Filipinos in Hong Kong had already honored him as their national hero. During the Japanese occupation of the Philippines after the tragedy of Pearl Harbor, Rizal was not necessarily the inspiration that energized the Filipinos to resist their aggressors.

In his essay "Vías hacia la modernidad: Migraciones laborales . . ." written by Filomeno Aguilar, it can be inferred that Filipinos searched for a better life without necessarily drawing inspiration from Rizal. In the last century, thousands of Filipinos left home to find work abroad, many of them opting to remain as overseas workers and not return home. And yet, they remained as Filipino as ever, they loved their country just as much as those who stayed behind, and their lives reflected the culture that identified them as Filipinos.

Resil Mojares rightly describes the travels of Mariano Ponce throughout Southeast Asia in search of a political ideal for his country. But Ponce never really saw what he wanted. As Mojares indicates, he was a "dreaming Filipino politician" (*imaginario político filipino*, 79).

Paul Kramer analyzes how the United States adopted much of Spain's colonial policies, mainly through initiatives of the *ilustrados*, the Filipino elite who immediately supported the new American government. A novice in colonial rule, and with rather inadequate traditions to introduce, the Washington government "forced" itself on the Philippines, while Spanish practices in the Philippines remained intact (129). The United States did not know what they had received from Spain, and they necessarily turned to Spanish guidelines that had made the Philippines what it was.

One of the more notable contributions to this collection of studies is by the coeditor of the book, Josep M. Delgado, a leading Philippine historian teaching at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona). He shows that the democratic policy of freedom of conscience and religion allowed non-Catholic religious beliefs in the Philippines. But the new religious leaders failed to win over the majority of the Catholic population. Despite the strong nationalistic tones of independence from Rome and the use of indigenous external rites and liturgical symbols by the schismatic "Philippine

Independent Church" that Isabelo de los Reyes had founded, it remained a minority sect. Perhaps more importantly, Delgado explains that the effort to settle the widely publicized problem of the friar lands was badly handled by the new government officials. Anti-Catholic Filipino propagandists and revolutionary leaders had harped upon the wealth and personal abuses of the Spanish clergy in the country. Instead of leaving the courts to decide the issue, the American officials mishandled the whole situation by recognizing the claims of the religious orders (154). It was by no means a trifling matter, for besides the friar lands the urban properties of the religious orders valued at US\$9,380,517 were untouched (155). Delgado has one explanation for this, namely, that the new government realized that the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines was a key factor in stabilizing the still unformed new society.

Edited exclusively by Filipinos, the first issue of the newspaper, *El Renacimiento*, came off the press in September 1900. It disproved the American report that the Filipinos were not a nation but a mere collection of tribes. It also tried to show that the latter were both talented scholars and people of mature political sense. As its name indicates, "El Renacimiento" (Rebirth), the paper sought to promote the new life of a people struggling to find their place under the sun. Among others, it exposed abuses in the government, especially those by the Constabulary under American officers, and continued the fight to maintain the Castilian language in the Philippines. As Glòria Cano states in her essay, the paper announced that, "although publicly Taft showed friendship and sympathy for the Filipinos, *privately he considered them distinctly childish, whimsically, often unreasonably childish, sometimes obstinately childish*" (319).

Dean C. Worcester, a scientist who had been in the Philippines for research and had authored several books on the Philippines, felt alluded to in some of these accusations and sued the paper and its editors, who were then condemned to a brief prison term and the not insignificant fine of P60,000. This tolled the death knell for the newspaper, and it folded up after about eight years of courageous writing.

An editorial titled, "Aves de Rapiña" (Birds of Prey), appeared in October 1908, to answer some anti-Filipino observations of James A. LeRoy. Otherwise a sympathetic author who praised the Spanish success in the Philippines, he had summed up his views in a letter intended to liberate Filipinos from the Spanish yoke, but not even made any promise to grant

Philippine independence (322–23). In other words, contrary to the public statements of the American expansionists, there was freedom of conscience and the press only if one accepted being under a second colonial master. Public criticism was stifled by a new law on libel and sabotage.

Florentino Rodao, professor of history at the Universidad Complutense (Madrid) and one of the pioneers in the study of Spanish presence in Asia, briefly discusses the fortunes of the small Spanish enclave in the Philippines under the Spanish, American, and Japanese governments, three administrative systems that, with slight adaptations, based themselves on the long Hispanic sociopolitical context of Philippine society.

A single theme unifies this collection of essays: that there was more continuity than break when the US government took over Spain's farthest colony, perhaps unavoidably, because the Washington government was a novice colonizer. The change of jurisdiction over the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century has not been adequately studied, and what has been written—and accepted by many writers and teachers of Philippine history—has been a chain of prejudices, half-truths, and partial perspectives. The only solution is to study the sources preserved in the archives, of which not even one half has been utilized. Unfortunately this is a utopian ideal, since Castilian, the language in which our historical documents are written, has disappeared from our country.

This collection of essays is a welcome addition to our constant search for the true story of our country. It corrects a number of errors that have passed as essential factors in the formation of a free democratic Philippines. Written in Castilian, one hopes a translation will prevent it from remaining a closed book for our people.

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VINA A. LANZONA

Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2010. 370 pages.
Originally published in 2009 by the University of Wisconsin Press.

The amazing feat of a woman guerrilla leading a group of guerrillas and defeating a stronger Japanese military troop in Candaba, Pampanga, on 8 March 1942 explodes into written historical accounts on the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. It dramatically presages the organizing and launching of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Army Against the Japanese Invaders or HUKBALAHAP) on 29 March 1942. The woman guerrilla, Felipe Culala, known as Commander Dayang-Dayang, would later find herself the only woman to be elected as one of the four top leaders of the military command of the HUKBALAHAP. Then silence. Hardly anything is to be written anymore of women's participation in what has been acknowledged as the most successful guerrilla movement to challenge the Japanese invaders. Women Huk guerrillas appear only in the interstices of written histories as couriers, medical aid givers of wounded soldiers, and the like. That is, until this book, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines* (2009), by Vina A. Lanzona.

In decentering history from male Huk leadership to women guerrilla participation, from an accounting of events to focusing on everyday concerns and problems as well as gender relationships among members inside the Huk organization, Lanzona faced the formidable task of reconstituting the lines of the history of women's participation in the Huk struggle with barely any written historical documents to rely on. And so she turned to oral history, to interviewing countless and hitherto unnamed women for their memories of their participation in the Huk struggle during and after the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines. She discovered, as I did when I researched on the songs of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PSP), HUKBALAHAP, and the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (People's Liberation Army or HMB), that networks of former members continued to exist long after the Huk movement was deemed decimated by the government. She sought out the women Huk guerrillas in communities and villages that must have been strongholds of Huk support, and when