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# **Managing a Massacre**

## **Savagery, Civility, and Gender in Moro Province in the Wake of Bud Dajo**

This article examines the delicate ideological maneuverings that shaped American colonial constructions of savagery, civility, and gender in the wake of the Bud Dajo massacre in the Philippines's Muslim south in 1906. It looks particularly at shifting notions of femininity and masculinity as these related to episodes of violence and colonial control. The article concludes that, while the Bud Dajo massacre was a terrible black mark on the American military's record in Mindanao and Sulu, colonial officials ultimately used the event to positively affirm existing discourses of power and justification, which helped to sustain and guide military rule in the Muslim south for another seven years.

**KEYWORDS: AMERICAN IMPERIALISM · MASSACRE · ISLAM · GENDER · PHILIPPINES**

In late February 1906 over 600 Filipino Muslim men, women, and children ascended the banks of an extinct volcano known as Bud Dajo on the island of Jolo in the southern Philippines. There, in the circular crater of the dormant cone, the Moro<sup>1</sup> band dug in, in defiance of the American military colonial regime. Their act of resistance was prompted primarily by the much hated cedula tax and sensationalist rumors that the U.S. military intended to eradicate Islam from the islands. Maj. Hugh L. Scott, the military governor of Sulu at the time, initially attempted to diffuse the situation by calling on local Muslim authorities to persuade their countrymen to surrender, or at the very least to evacuate women and children from the fortifications. For two days prominent Muslim chieftains, such as Datu Kalbi, Datu Joakanain, and Datu Panglima Bandahala, urged the rebels to abandon their cause and turn themselves over to colonial authorities. Ultimately their efforts failed as the insurgents became more resolute in their defiance. Frustrated by the Moros' apparent determination, Major Scott responded on 6 March with an all-out assault on Bud Dajo. American infantry units and members of the Moro Constabulary negotiated their way up the mountain while dodging bamboo spikes and stones hurled down from the summit. Despite these obstacles the soldiers were able to position artillery pieces along the volcanic rim and proceeded to pour fire down on the rebel fortifications. This was immediately followed by a combined infantry assault in the crater itself. The subsequent fighting was intense, chaotic, and bloody. Moro warriors armed with bladed weapons and homemade explosives were cut down by krag rifles and machine gun fire, while women and children dressed in men's clothing led charges against American artillery positions and fought hand to hand with American troops. In the end over 600 Filipino Muslims lay dead, many of them women and children (see p. 85). American losses stood at eighteen dead and fifty-two wounded.<sup>2</sup>

At first the action solicited a flurry of hearty congratulations from American colonial officials, including exceptional praise from U.S. Pres. Theodore Roosevelt. "I congratulate you," he cabled to Col. Joseph W. Duncan of the Sixth Infantry, who led the assault on Bud Dajo, "and the officers and men with you upon the brilliant feat of arms wherein you so well upheld the honor of the American Flag" (*Mindanao Herald* 1906b, 1). These remarks were added upon in the colonial press by glorious accounts of American bravery, including a detailed list of casualties and an elaborate



U.S. soldiers pose with Moro dead after the First Battle of Bud Dajo, 7 March 1906, Jolo.  
Source: Bacevich 2006

article celebrating various commendations, including two medals of valor and one Congressional Medal of Honor (*Mindanao Herald* 1906j, 1906k).

However, as news of the massacre spread throughout the broader colony and into the United States, military officials in Sulu were increasingly condemned as savage murderers of women and children. Anti-imperialist Democrats, such as Cong. William Jones of Virginia and Sen. Augustus Bacon of Georgia, blistered colonial officials in Moro Province for their "wholesale slaughter [of Moros] . . . regardless of age or sex" (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906c, 6). These attacks quickly filtered down into broader popular consciousness, as Bud Dajo became a symbol of U.S. imperial oppression in the Philippines. Less than ten days after the encounter, Rev. Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst delivered a fiery sermon to his congregation at the Madison Square Presbyterian Church in which he related gratuitous stories of "mangled men, torn women, [and] armless and headless children" at Bud Dajo. "With the exception of the maintenance in the South of negro slavery," he proclaimed, touching on a particularly charged historical memory, "there has been . . . nothing sadder in our history than the National attitude in which we to-day stand toward the little brown people of the Philippine Islands" (*New York Times* 1906c, 1).

Perhaps the most scathing criticisms of all came from the famed American satirist Mark Twain. In a piece simply titled, “Comments on the Moro Massacre,” Twain blasted American troops in the southern Philippines who would corner “six hundred helpless and weaponless savages in a hole like rats in a trap and massacre them in detail . . . from a safe position on the heights above.” Such an action, he argued, “was no brilliant feat of arms—and would not have been a brilliant feat of arms even if Christian America, represented by its salaried soldiers, had shot them down with Bibles and the Golden Rule instead of bullets.” Twain scoffed at military men who could justify the killing of women and children as the “perfectest [sic] symbol of innocence and helplessness.” How is it, he wondered, “that our soldiers could not tell the breasts of a woman from the rudimentary paps of a man . . . that they couldn’t tell a toddling little child from a black six-footer[?]” (Zwick 1992, 172–74).

Through these and other efforts the massacre at Bud Dajo became an icon for anti-imperialists by providing a quintessential example of raw American imperial power in the Philippines. Yet, despite the intensity of its critics and its sensational nature, Bud Dajo fell from the news pages almost as quickly as it appeared. By April 1906 Bud Dajo had been fully eclipsed in U.S. newspapers by more urgent domestic political issues. Since that time the events surrounding the massacre have been largely relegated to footnotes and minor subsections in larger histories of American empire or the Philippines’s Muslim south.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is in part due to the ostensibly straightforward and simple lessons Bud Dajo offers. Historians have typically drawn one of two conclusions from this episode.

First, Bud Dajo seems to represent the ultimate realities of asymmetrical power in the colonial Philippines. Despite lofty rhetoric of “benevolent assimilation” and paternalistic rule, American empire was after all, at its core, an exercise in raw power enabled by technological and political advantages (see Hurley 1936; Marohomsalic 2001; Gowing 1983). While this asymmetry was certainly apparent at Bud Dajo, such banal observations do very little to move the conversation forward regarding its ultimate meaning, and hence deserve only passing mention in more elaborate examinations of American empire in the Philippines.

Second, historians have often found meaning not so much in the actual events of Bud Dajo but in its symbolic meaning for a much larger colonial debate. Teodoro Agoncillo (1990, 257), for example, has viewed Bud Dajo as part of a larger strategy “to blunt the Filipino parliamentary struggle in the

United States where the anti-independence forces in Congress tried to blow up the Muslim attitude to American rule as an evidence of lack of [Filipino] preparedness for self-government.”

While these insights are certainly true, they fundamentally relate to issues and interests outside of Moro Province itself, and cast a false sense of homogeneity over the larger imperial efforts of American imperialists. This is a problem since Moro Province, from its inception, remained a distinct and separate entity from the larger colony. Indeed, Paul Kramer (2006, 218) points out that the military regime in Moro Province was essentially “separated from insular politics as a whole, even from the control of the Philippine Commission.” As such, the southern colony operated largely within its own ideological and administrative parameters. The underlying philosophies, methods, and assessments of colonial rule took on a distinct life of their own in the Philippines’s Muslim south as military officials attempted to create a much more focused and specifically tailored imperial project free from the entangling and obstructive civilian-run government. Hence, the essential meaning of Bud Dajo must be grasped within the parameters of its unique colonial circumstance, rather than viewing it simply as the subtext of a larger conversation on Filipino independence.

In other words, what did the events at Bud Dajo mean to those in Moro Province as they attempted to create an exceptional colony in the south? What messages did it convey to both Americans and Filipino Muslims who were constructing and participating in their own particular colonial experience separate from the larger colony? How was the massacre explicated, contextualized, and used to shape discourses and colonial constructs particular to the province itself? This article attempts to answer these questions by examining the ways in which the massacre at Bud Dajo supported, affirmed, and shaped critical notions of power, savagery, civilization, and gender in the Philippines’s Muslim south.

### **Moro Savagery and the Honesty of Bud Dajo**

Although centuries-long Muslim defiance of Spanish rule prior to American colonialism certainly contributed to the vilification of Moros as bloodthirsty thieves and pirates, it also placed them conspicuously outside the debilitating corruption and exploitation of Spanish imperialism. In many ways, Filipino Muslims more closely fit the American archetype of “colonial subject” than did their Christian neighbors in the north. Although Moros were routinely

disparaged by imperialists as “savage,” “defiant,” and “ignorant,” there remained something particularly honest and unadulterated about their exoticism that inspired the crusading imagination of American imperialists. Initial reports by the Philippine Commission took special note of the Moros’ “warlike and hostile spirit,” which produced “brave, dashing, and audacious” warriors. Unlike their northern brethren (Ibid., 2006, 130–45), Filipino Muslims had the courage “not to fight a guerilla [war].” Instead, they were willing to “expose themselves to an attack by modern artillery . . . . They are easily whipped, and though the whipping may have to be repeated once or twice, its effect ultimately is very salutary” (Philippine Commission 1904, 81). Major Scott (1928, 312, 283), governor of Sulu District, raved about the Moros’ “utter disregard of death,” adding that “not only in battle was this apparent, but at all times.” With his “razor-edged cleaver” the “Moro could cut a man’s body in two at one stroke, after which he would chop his victim to bits to test the blade of his weapon against the bone.” In a similarly romantic tone Dean Worcester, Secretary of the Interior for the Philippine Insular Government, once boasted that “six Moros with barongs [a short sword unique to Filipino Muslims] could stampede any civilized town in the Philippines” (*Manila Times* 1910, 1).<sup>4</sup> John J. Pershing (1913), governor-general of Moro Province in 1913, echoed these sentiments as well when he bragged that “The nature of the Joloano Moro is such that he is not at all overawed or impressed by an overwhelming force. If he takes a notion to fight it is regardless of the number of men he thinks are to be brought against him. You cannot bluff him” (cited in Marohomsalic 2001, 26).

Although individual acts of violence were officially condemned, such reports did inspire the American colonial imagination at home and abroad to consider the developmental possibilities for Filipino Muslims. Often encouraged by American colonial officials, *Harpers Weekly*, for example, wrote numerous romantic accounts of the striking Filipino Muslims. “The Moros have a manliness and independence of character not found among the Indians in the rest of the Philippines,” stated one article (Bass 1899, 1158ad). Writing some years later in the same publication, Col. Owen Sweet (1906, 808d) declared, “The Moro is brave to fearlessness, a born pirate, and essentially a first-class fighting-man . . . . He is a wiry, sinewy, and athletic fellow, very different from the Visayan or Tagalog, and quite different from the Filipino generally.” Similarly, in an extensive report highlighted in the *New York Times*, Thomas Millard (1908, SM8) described the Filipino Muslim as follows: “The Moro differs in some

respects from any Oriental I have seen at close range. His eye meets yours without flinching, with the look of a man who may at times have been defeated by superior force or skill, but who has never been subjugated.” Even Protestant missionaries and clergymen, who generally held Islam in deep contempt, could not help but praise the Moros’ potentials upon catching rare glimpses of their rugged culture. Episcopalian Bishop Charles Henry Brent, for example, who served as Missionary Bishop of the Philippines, told reporters in 1913 that “The Moro is by nature aggressive . . . . His prowess, daring, mental shrewdness and manual skill put him far ahead of most men of Malay origin. He has characteristics which, when properly trained, will be an asset of civilization” (Whiteside 1913, 4, cited in Clymer 1986, 72).

Hence for many Americans, and especially from an American military perspective, Moros had the uncanny potential of becoming a submissive, but not conquered, people. In his memoirs published in 1928, Major Scott (1928, 312–13) recalled his time as a district governor in Moro Province and emphasized the primacy of this delicate balance:

To be sure, it would not be so difficult to sweep the islands from stem to stern with fire and sword, but it has always seemed to me a poor diplomacy that seeks to civilize a country by killing everybody in it, to say nothing of the iniquity of destroying such a proud, brave, virile, and intelligent people as the Moros. To me the Moros were the most promising element, under proper guidance, to be found in the entire Philippine Islands . . . . I had a vast respect for a race so bold, tenacious and fearless of death. Moreover it was most important to preserve the pride of the Moros and safeguard it from attack from any quarter. One of the greatest mistakes made by our missionaries in our Indian country is their opposition to everything native—the notion that everything peculiar to the Indian must be broken down and destroyed, and their pride in the achievements of their ancestors must be preached against, derided, and wiped out.

It is not possible to raise up any people who are destitute of pride; and pride once lost is one of the things most difficult to restore; it lies at the root of all formation of character; its possession is a priceless gift; and no effort should be spared to save it.

Filipino Muslims, therefore, provided American imperialists the raw materials needed to construct the ideal modern colonial man. While newspapers and colonial officials in the northern islands complained of the inadequacies of their imperial subjects—“What they need is men among them,” criticized one journalist; “Men who are not afraid of wrong, and who would die for their family and homes; men who would go to the end of the earth to avenge a wrong and who continually watch after each other’s interest”—officials in Mindanao and Sulu believed they had found such a man in the Moro (*Daily Bulletin* 1900, 4).

Far from the emasculated and corrupted victims of Spanish tyranny so often portrayed in the north, Moros were also thought to have retained a visceral and organic connection to the environment. They manifested a raw primitiveness full of potential and untainted by the regulating gaze of civilized modernity. Take, for example, the following description from the 1900 Philippine Commission Report (1901, 3:371):

conspicuous for his sobriety, he [the Moro] nourishes himself with a handful of rice, with the fruits which he gathers in the forests, the herbs of the plain, and the little fish of the streams . . . when he is afloat satisfies his thirst with sea water. Extremely agile, he quickly ascends the mountains, climbs the highest trees, crosses the deepest and thickest mangrove swamps, fords the torrents, leaps across the small streams, and lets himself drop with the utmost coolness from a height of 15 or 20 feet . . . he swims like a fish, so that the crossing of a river, although be it wide and swift, is for him the most simple and natural thing in the world.

Colonel Sweet (1906, 808d) echoed similar assessments for the American public when he described Moros as “the most perfect of aquatic beings . . . He can no more drown than can a fish. There is no record of a drowned Moro. He can dive to the bottom of the sea at depths of from twenty-five to one hundred feet for the valuable mother-of-pearl.” Major Scott (1928, 316) also offered his own theories regarding the Moros’ physical constitution when he wrote,

The Moro appears to have a nervous system differing from that of a white man, for he carries lead like a grizzly bear and keeps coming on after being shot again and again. The only weapon that seems

adequate to melt him immediately in his tracks is a pump-gun loaded with buck-shot. One Moro of Joló was shot through the body by seven army revolver bullets, yet kept coming on with enough vitality and force to shear off the leg of an engineer soldier, more smoothly than it could have been taken off by a surgeon.

The nearly superhuman abilities ascribed to Filipino Muslims in these cases reveal not only the exoticism and savagery of Moros but also their immense potential once civilized. After all, civilization was not just a state of mind or mode of consciousness; it was also manifested in one’s embodiment. Recognizing this, the 1903 Census took great care in describing the Moros’ “physical characteristics” including “complexion,” “hair,” and physical build. “They are somewhat taller than the average Filipino,” recorded the Census, “straight and well formed, and often strong and stockily built, with well-developed calves” (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1905, 1:563). Physical size, endurance, and abilities were critical indicators of a person’s capacity for modern supremacy. However, unlike the savage or barbarian, civilized peoples were aware of the appropriate uses and restraints of physical power to manipulate or coerce the environment around them. While the Moros’ physical strengths had the potential for violence, they also proved extremely useful if properly directed.

In this way the Moros’ propensity for savagery and violence remained a constant indicator of their fundamental potential for civilized modernity throughout the military period. One of the greatest fears of military officials in Mindanao and Sulu was that Filipino Muslims would someday lose their savage edge and succumb to the emasculating effects of colonial conquest, thus dashing imperial aspirations for true modern masculinity and civilization. This delicate balance required colonial officials to confront, contain, and discipline indigenous savagery and violence for the sake of security, but at the same time to cast it in romantic and constructive terms to uphold their imperial discourse of Moro potential. Bud Dajo provides an excellent example of this tenuous balance.

Initial reports of Bud Dajo in Mindanao’s colonial press gushed with romantic images of the indomitable Moro warrior and his steely fearlessness in the face of certain death. “The Moros fought with the greatest determination [at Bud Dajo],” the *Mindanao Herald* (1906a, 1) reported, “but few attempt[ed] to escape. Upon finding themselves in danger of capture,



they would sally forth and attack the troops with their bolos and spears, and their efforts would not cease until the last man fell.” One week later, after contemplating the gravity of the conflict, the paper profoundly opined that “The Jolo Moro is something unique in [the] human species. In four fights on that Island [including Bud Dajo] some two thousand have been killed, all dying practically to a man. Surely, such a people can be made something of other than food for powder if properly handled” (*Mindanao Herald* 1906c, 4). The Moros’ courage, grit, and indomitable spirit, while bothersome to colonial administration at times, exuded the requisite qualities of modern man as envisioned by American imperialists.

Rather than undermining the morale of colonial officials, incidents like Bud Dajo in fact invigorated colonial aspirations and promises of effective social engineering in the southern Philippines. Leonard Wood, governor-general of Moro Province at the time, extolled these qualities while attempting to contextualize the conflict at Bud Dajo for American politicians and the general public who did not grasp the unique nature of Muslim Mindanao. “In this particular case,” he explained,

[T]he heavy mortality among the Moros engaged would probably be explained by their method of fighting. It would have been impossible to have inflicted the same loss on the northern Filipinos. The latter have a way of disappearing before the troops in the interstices of the jungles and conducting guerrilla warfare. But the Moros on the appearance of an enemy sound the alarm and gather everybody inside their forts, where they will fight to the end. (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906a, 2)

In this way, the massacre at Bud Dajo served as a measure of comparative colonial potential in Moro Province. It demonstrated characteristics and possibilities apparently lacking in the north. While northern Christian Filipinos remained ostensibly elusive and passively resistant to colonial tutelage, Moros demonstrated an honest and courageous negotiation with it, as demonstrated at Bud Dajo. This honesty in turn provided a great deal of clarity and precision to the colonial project and to the regime’s relationship with Filipino Muslims. The fact that this negotiation was mediated by violence was in fact an indicator of its forthrightness. Official reports to the Philippine Commission describing the Bud Dajo ordeal presented a similar

picture, describing “the natives” of Sulu as “the most turbulent of all the Moros” (Philippine Commission 1907, 344). “They are the remnant of a once-powerful people,” explained the report, “who at one time dominated the narrow seas in this part of the world and, as pirates, were so formidable as to bring about on the part of European powers a united protest to the Spanish Government” (ibid.) Given their resolute character, “it was known . . . that an [military] action meant the practical extermination of these outlaws, as these people, once an action is commenced, rarely, if ever, surrender” (ibid., 345). Hence, although painful in the short run, military officials in Moro Province believed that by confronting and disciplining Muslims through occasional episodes of violence they could expedite the evolutionary process of colonial tutelage. The Moros were not hiding from, but rather confronting and working their way into, modernity.

The effectiveness of this approach seemed to find confirmation in the Moros’ positive response to Bud Dajo. American colonialists were quick to follow up the tragedy with immediate reports of progress and evidence of the Moros’ renewed amenability to colonial tutelage. “Affairs at Jolo are assuming a very hopeful appearance . . . [after] the recent trouble at Bud Dajo,” proclaimed an article in the *Mindanao Herald* (1906f, 1) less than three weeks after the massacre, “and the Moros are turning their attention to the gentle arts of peace with renewed vigor.” As evidence of this reformed posture the article pointed to increased commerce, mobility, and the fact that Moro datus had “pledged themselves to loyally assist the authorities in every effort to enforce the laws.” “This would seem to indicate,” concluded the article, “that the Moros in that section [Jolo] have at last begun to realize that the authorities are determined to enforce the laws, and that opposition to them can have but one termination.” The paper affirmed this conclusion with numerous articles over the next few months that continued to praise the progressive and peaceful nature of the Joloano Moros after their disciplinary episode at Bud Dajo (see, e.g., *Mindanao Herald* 1907a, 1907b).

Accounts from military officials in Moro Province struck an identical tone. In their report to the Philippine Commission in 1906 military officials lauded the renewed discipline and progress of their wards. “Agriculture has made great strides [in Jolo], and there is probably several times more land under cultivation to-day than at any time during our occupation” (Philippine Commission 1907, 345). The reason, of course, was that after Bud Dajo “[a]ll of the prominent men seem to be thoroughly sick of fighting, and

while in the past they have undoubtedly been behind most of the opposition to the Government I believe that they now recognize the folly of their proceeding, and are really anxious to help bring about a stable condition of affairs” (ibid.). Also included in the report was an excerpt from a letter by Major Scott, which highlighted his firsthand observations of the Moros’ transformation after Bud Dajo. “Never were the people so pliable and plastic . . . arrangements are now perfected which will, I believe, put a final end to robbery, etc. They are anxious for schools, roads, etc.; are willing to pay their cedula, or do anything else wanted of them” (ibid., 345). Thus for military officials in Moro Province violent colonial discipline was acceptable due to Filipino Muslims’ visceral masculinity and frontier ruggedness. These qualities rendered violence understandable and effective rather than defeating and emasculating. In other words, Moros so resembled American frontiersmen that they were able to engage in and comprehend the discourses and symbols of power that defined their status and evolution in relation to their colonial occupiers.

### **Savagery and Gender at Bud Dajo**

While colonial discourses on savagery bespoke evolutionary potentials to American imperialists in Moro Province, these discourses were almost exclusively gender specific. Whereas masculinity and violence served to define Moro men as protomodern subjects, these same characteristics, if demonstrated by Moro women, defined them conversely as the very antithesis of modern femininity, and in many cases served to negate any gender identity at all. As howls of protest and condemnation blistered colonial authorities for their brutal disregard for age and gender in the Bud Dajo killings, military officials responded with a subtle but pervasive argument calling into question the fundamental femininity of those involved; thus arguing that “women,” as the term was typically applied and understood in civilized society, did not apply to anyone at Bud Dajo. Although officials in Moro Province certainly did not deny the biological sex of those killed, they did deny them their gender.

In her excellent study of masculinity and civilization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, Gail Bederman (1995) explores the changing Victorian social conventions and paradigms that structured gender in emergent American modernity. Her work identifies several key requisites that both established and institutionalized gender as a defining force in American culture. All of these elements were in some way contingent on

the abstract notion of “civilization.” By drawing lines between “barbarity,” “savagery,” and “civility,” modern Americans were able to produce sharper definitions of themselves in an increasingly heterogeneous world, especially in the colonies. One of the foremost requisites of civilization was a clear distinction between the genders. “Indeed,” argues Bederman (ibid., 25), “one could identify advanced civilizations by the degree of their sexual differentiation. Savage (that is, nonwhite) men and women were believed to be almost identical, but men and women of the civilized races had evolved pronounced sexual differences.” These sexual differences were upheld by systems of financial support and elaborate notions of domesticity. Civilized men (i.e., “real men”) sustained and protected vulnerable women by providing material support and denying their baser passions. Civilized women in turn embraced their vulnerability by adopting a modest and cultivated sense of cultural refinement focused on maintaining a well ordered and peaceful home and family. Usurpation on the part of either gender supposedly led to societal breakdown and social chaos indicative of savagery. Bederman (ibid., 25, 28) explains,

[G]ender differences among savages seemed to be blurred. Savage women were aggressive, carried heavy burdens, and did all sorts of “masculine” hard labor. Savage men were emotional and lacked a man’s ability to restrain their passions . . . . Savage men abandoned their children instead of providing for them . . . . Civilized men provided for their families and steadfastly protected their delicate women and children from the rigors of the workaday week . . . .

“Savage” (that is, nonwhite) races . . . had not yet evolved pronounced sexual differences—and, to some extent, this was precisely what made them savage. Savage men had never evolved the chivalrous instinct to protect their women and children but instead forced their women into exhausting drudgery—cultivating the fields, tending the fires, carrying heavy burdens. Overworked savage women had never evolved the refined delicacy of civilized women.

As products of turn-of-the-century America, military officials in Mindanao and Sulu were deeply influenced by these notions of gender and civilization. The relative femininity and masculinity of their colonial subjects served as a

constant barometer of evolutionary status and potential for change. Whatever the condition, however, gender as an evolutionary indicator among Moro women provided a constant source of justification for colonial rule, and became a valuable weapon to defend against critics of Bud Dajo.

For the most part of American military rule in the Philippines's Muslim south Moro women served as a symbol of indigenous innocence and vulnerability in need of protection from savage, uncontrolled masculinity. They became a canon by which to measure Moro savagery, American chivalry, and the ultimate righteousness of the colonial project. Muslim women appeared constantly in government reports and local press stories striving to establish an evolutionary narrative for Moro Province. The *Mindanao Herald*, for example, was replete with articles chronicling the misogynistic practices and attitudes of Muslim men throughout the region. Slavery, polygamy, spousal abuse, and neglect were common themes, all described in gratuitous detail.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the greatest indignation at indigenous misogyny, however, came from American soldiers who viewed themselves as the arbiters of justice and civility in a savage land.

Their sentiments were embodied in a 1913 letter written by a soldier in Moro Province named W. G. McMurray to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, W. C. Redfield. During his work with the Thirteenth Moro Company of the Philippine Constabulary in Lanao District, Mindanao, McMurray (1913) witnessed a number of injustices; however, one particularly abusive incident against a Moro woman prompted him to appeal to the highest levels of government. He related the story of a Moro soldier who "enticed away from her master a Moro slave woman for the purpose of making her his wife." As a slave, however, the woman could not legally leave her master until all her family debts were paid. The case was brought before the American district governor of Lanao for adjudication and "his decision was that the woman be returned to her master" in accordance with colonial provisions allowing certain forms of debt peonage to continue. What followed was almost more than McMurray (*ibid.*) could bear:

When an attempt was made to carry out this order the woman again screamed and clung to the soldier with such tenacity that it took the combined efforts of three men to separate them; after this was accomplished the woman fell down on the ground and refused to go, but she was forced to go by the most brutal treatment that a savage

mind could devise: after being kicked and beaten [by her Moro master] she was dragged by the hair of her head off the reservation, screaming her protest until she passed out of sight and hearing—this in the presence of . . . American citizens, whose duty it is not only to protect the weak and defenseless, but to be the standard bearers of a Christian civilization. Every drop of outraged blood cried out and every quivering nerve demanded that I rush out and stop the proceedings.

"I still remember the incident with a sense of shame," continued McMurray, as he recalled his inability to fulfill "the duty that goes with the royal right of a free American citizenship" by defending vulnerable womanhood against such misogynistic abuse. Although outrageous, by the end of the letter McMurray seemed to recognize reluctantly the ultimate necessity of such incidents to both rationalize and validate continued American colonial rule. He conceded that "the principal agency through which the Government hopes to lift up the masses is the datu [Moro chief], and the datos are the chief offenders in this respect, moreover it is sanctioned by their religion, which we have promised not to interfere with. Hence it may be that individual rights will have to suffer for awhile in order that the general welfare may be promoted" (*ibid.*). Thus, while misogyny and abuse were the primary targets of colonial eradication campaigns aimed at eliminating savagery, the continued presence of vulnerable, oppressed women provided a sustained validating force that both defined and upheld American moral superiority in Moro Province.

Bud Dajo of course did not conform to this narrative of vulnerable femininity. The women massacred during the assault on Bud Dajo were not vulnerable victims of Moro abuse, but rather of American violence. The chivalrous obligations of American colonialists fell by the wayside during Bud Dajo, as did the moral and civilized superiority undergirding the colonial project. As a result, military officials in Moro Province had to find an explanation of the massacre, which would both affirm notions of Muslim misogyny and contextually negate the feminine vulnerability of Moro women involved in the conflict.

Although it was American military bullets and artillery that ultimately killed the insurgents at Bud Dajo, colonial officials in Moro Province attempted to shift the discussion away from the means of violence and



toward the underlying context that produced it and determined its victims. The governor-general of Moro Province, Leonard Wood, had historically gone to great lengths to remind those outside of Moro Province that “the Moros are a Mohammedan people; they are a patriarchal people” (U.S. Senate 1902, 1962). His official and public relations reports after Bud Dajo were no different. “In all actions against the Moros we have begged the Moros again and again to fight as men, and keep women and children out of it,” he cabled to Secretary of War William H. Taft following the events at Bud Dajo. Not only did the rebels refuse to evacuate the women and children, but they were also “in many cases used by the men as shields while charging [U.S.] troops” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906b, 6). Secretary Taft expounded on these themes in a cablegram to President Roosevelt. “Gen. Wood’s answer [to the Bud Dajo massacre],” he argued, “show[ed] most clearly that the unfortunate loss of life of the men, women, and children among the Moros was mostly unavoidable, in view of their deliberate use of their women and children in actual battle, and their fanatical and savage desire that their women and children should perish with them if defeat were to come” (*New York Times* 1906b, 1). Hence, it was not American violence per se that led to the deaths of women and children at Bud Dajo, but rather the Moros’ misogynistic refusal to excuse their women and children from the inevitable violence they called forth from the colonial regime. In this particular orientation, American colonial violence and discipline were cast as disinterested forces acting in consequence of the colonial subjects’ particular behaviors and provocations. American troops and the Moro constabulary ostensibly did not seek to kill women and children, but that was the inevitable consequence of a series of decisions made by Moro rebels prompted by their inherent misogyny and fanaticism. Articles in the colonial press echoed similar rationales, recounting stories of heartless and violent exploitation at Bud Dajo in which women and children were sacrificed for the rebels’ hopeless cause.<sup>6</sup> “No Moro of family on Bud Dajo wanted [his wife and children] to survive him,” argued a piece in the *Mindanao Herald*, and in this way the “Mohammadan religion and custom made it necessary to fire in the direction of women and children” (*Mindanao Herald* 1906d, 4).

The problem with this rationale, however, was that most of the Moro women at Bud Dajo were not vulnerable victims cowering in fear of male authority. To the contrary, almost without exception these women were fighting alongside their male counterparts with equal ferocity. Although

Moro patriarchal authority offered Americans a probable explanation for the women’s presence on Bud Dajo, it could not adequately account for their tactical, determined, and volitional participation in the violence. In order to maintain their discourses of benevolent, chivalrous, and civilized paternalistic colonialism, American authorities would have to find a way to negate any evidence of femininity or viable womanhood at Bud Dajo. In other words, they would have to deny Moro women their gender, thus casting them in the androgynous ambiguity of irrational savagery.

In his initial explanation to the War Department, Governor-General Wood emphasized themes of androgyny and irrational savagery repeatedly. “The Moro women wore trousers,” he defended, “and [were] armed much like the men, and charged with them” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906b, 6). For Wood, the lack of apparent femininity in the Moros’ outward appearance alone was excuse enough to engage them in combat. “I do not believe that in this or in any other fight any American soldier wantonly killed a Moro woman or child except unavoidably in close action when it was impossible to distinguish sex” (*New York Times* 1906a, 1). More than their masculine appearance, however, Wood argued that the Muslim women at Bud Dajo had also given up their fundamental feminine character and mentality. Rather than concerning themselves with the safety of their home and family and giving way to their nurturing and maternal instincts, the women at Bud Dajo adopted the same religious fanaticism and savagery that animated their male counterparts. The genders had thus conflated, becoming a blur of indistinguishable, irrational savagery. “These incidents are much to be regretted,” continued Wood, “but it must be understood, that the Moros one and all were fighting, not only as enemies, but as religious fanatics, believing paradise to be their immediate reward if killed in action with Christians. They apparently desired that none be saved” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1906b, 6). What, American authorities implicitly queried, could be more unfeminine?

Although Wood’s explanation was deemed “entirely satisfactory” by President Roosevelt, doubts concerning the action at Bud Dajo continued to linger, most critically in Moro Province itself. The *Mindanao Herald* was peppered with letters and editorial comments criticizing the rash actions of American authorities at Bud Dajo while calling their administrative competence into question.<sup>7</sup> The paper responded by publishing lengthy correspondences from two Spaniards who had lived in Zamboanga before the American occupation. Their comments provided both an outside perspective

and historical confirmation of Wood's assertions. The first letter came from Señor Don Angel Infante, "a leading member of the Spanish community of Zamboanga" and thirty-year resident of Mindanao. The Spaniard assailed the critics' apparent "lack of intimate knowledge of the Joloano Moros" that could lead them to believe that "Moro women are inoffensive." "These gentlemen are gravely in error," he disputed while offering the following description:

The Joloano women prepare for . . . combat in the same manner as their fathers, husbands and brothers and are really more desperate and determined than the men. With her child suspended to her breast or slung across her back, the Moro woman enters the fight with the ferocity of a panther, and the [colonial] soldier, in the fulfillment of his duty and in self-defense, has no alternative but to fire upon her. The conduct of General Wood cannot be censured by any one acquainted with the Malay Moro [woman] of the Island of Jolo. . . . when she becomes 'juramentado,'<sup>8</sup> the Moro woman is more to be feared than the hungry Javanese panther. (*Mindanao Herald* 1906g, 1–2)

Infante's letter was followed two weeks later by another more scathing and dramatic description of Moro women's potential for androgyny, savagery, and brutality while in the throes of combat. Also a Spaniard, Ramon Blardony was a former officer in the Spanish army assigned in Mindanao. Like Infante, Blardony's letter was aimed at those "entirely ignorant of the customs of the Moros of Mindanao and Jolo," or, more specifically, at those critical of the events at Bud Dajo. The letter characterized Moro women as follows:

When the Moro families concentrate at a certain point, with the intent of making war to the death upon their antagonists, the women are the first to animate and prepare for battle all the children old enough to hold a weapon in their hands. They fight ferociously and even when wounded will continue to fight until they are killed. In most cases they are not known to be women until after the end of the fight, they wearing the same clothing as the men, and the latter, wearing their hair long, as the women do, render it impossible to distinguish the difference of sex during the fight, and besides, even were it possible to do so, it would be impossible to respect it, as a simple matter of self-

defense. Is there anyone, among the gentlemen who have been so prompt to censure the troops at Mount Dajo, who, from the sentiments of humanity, would cross his hands upon his breast, when attacked by a Moro woman with a kriss? (*Mindanao Herald* 1906i, 4)

Blardony's final query essentially cut to the heart of the matter. At what point did American chivalry cease and violence against women become justified? The answer to this question apparently lay not only in Moro women's actual acts of violence that required self-defense, but also in their internal and external denial of the essential credentials of their womanhood. By donning men's clothing and eschewing their maternal, nurturing instincts Moro women not only discarded their gender but also forfeited all the rights and privileges of American paternalistic chivalry that came with it.

## Conclusion

Despite the ferocity of the debate surrounding Bud Dajo, news stories about the conflict fell from popular consciousness in Moro Province almost as quickly as they did in the United States. By the end of August 1906, the *Mindanao Herald* and other colonial outlets were virtually free of all references to Bud Dajo, as were official reports. Although this indifference certainly can be attributed in part to the colonial regime's sense of guilt or shame for committing such an uncivilized and therefore hypocritical act, thus undermining colonial authority, as well as its desire to bury old grievances and promote peace throughout the province, the *Mindanao Herald* suggested a decidedly new perspective. The horrors of Bud Dajo in Moro Province diminished in direct proportion to their systematic contextualization within overarching narratives of civilization, savagery, and the unique colonial project in the Philippines's Muslim south.

Painful as it was, the massacre at Bud Dajo demonstrated and affirmed at least three critical discourses underpinning the military regime's overarching imperial philosophy in Moro Province. First, by fighting to the death at Bud Dajo, Moro men exhibited the raw, untainted, courageous, and masculine potential that offered the Americans an exceptional colonial project in Mindanao and Sulu. Unlike the northern Filipinos' guerrilla tactics Moros had the courage to face their enemies openly. This sense of honesty in the colonial experience inspired American officials and promised a more effective and expedited tutelary colonial program. Because of this ferocity

of character Moros responded favorably to colonial discipline. Rather than becoming angry, emasculated, and conquered, Filipino Muslims learned the lessons of colonial discipline and immediately took significant steps toward modernity and civilization.

Second, while Moro savagery suggested exceptional potential, it also provided a sustained rationale for continued military rule in Mindanao and Sulu. As long as Muslim misogyny threatened vulnerable womanhood, American military men could continue to assert their chivalrous protection and maintain their modern masculinity. The fact that Moro men did not take control of their women and children and did not evacuate them in the face of impending bloodshed confirmed notions of barbarous misogyny. Colonial reports of slavery, polygamy, abuse, and neglect were all corroborated at Bud Dajo as Moro women became collateral damage to Muslim men's savagery.

Third and finally, the violent and supposedly savage behavior of Moro women at Bud Dajo definitively linked gender and civilization in the minds of American imperialists. Femininity, like masculinity, was inexorably linked to certain internal and external criteria. By dressing in men's clothing and rejecting their maternal instincts, Moro women at Bud Dajo were thought to have violated a reciprocal relationship between femininity and chivalry that existed in civilized society. Violence against women at Bud Dajo was not necessarily violence against *women* as understood by American military authorities in Moro Province. While colonial authorities would likely not dispute the biological constitution of these women, they did dispute their gender. Hence, while the events at Bud Dajo caused military officials in Moro Province to come under severe scrutiny and criticism, ultimately these men were able to use the events to positively affirm existing discourses of power and validation, which helped to sustain and guide military rule in the Philippines's Muslim south for another seven years.

## Notes

- 1 The term "Moro" has a long and contentious history. During the Spanish colonial era it was employed as a pejorative indication of the southern Malay's socioracial difference from and inferiority to Christianized Filipinos. During this period, the epithet "Moro" embodied all the antipathies and condescension associated with the Spaniards' expulsion of Muslim "Moors" from southern Spain in the fifteenth century. During the twentieth century, however, Filipino Muslims have embraced the term "Moro" as a proud indication of their difference and unique history. They frequently refer to themselves as Moros and call their geographical sphere of influence

"Bangsamoro"—the "Moro Nation." Hence, this article employs the term freely as an expression synonymous with "Filipino Muslims," "Muslim Filipinos," or "Muslim Malays" in Mindanao and Sulu, and as a collective reference to the various ethnolinguistic groups in the southern Philippines professing an adherence to Islam.

- 2 For the narrative details of the battle itself, see Gowing 1983, 160–63; Agoncillo 1990, 256–57; Tan 1968, 69–74; George 1980, 61–62; Hernandez 2006, 58–65.
- 3 There are limited exceptions to this statement. Since the beginning of the United States' "War on Terror" some journalists and historians have held out Bud Dajo as an object lesson; however, its treatment is largely allegorical rather than academic or historical. See, for example, *Boston Globe* 2006, C2; Woolman 2002, 34–40.
- 4 I have relied on copies of the *Manila Times* found in "50 Years with The Times," an unpublished compilation made by Raul Ingles.
- 5 See, e.g., *Mindanao Herald* 1904, 1905a, 1905b, 1906l.
- 6 See, e.g., an article in the *Mindanao Herald* (1906a, 2) that told a story in which a "wounded Moro seized a baby and hurled it at the head of a soldier."
- 7 See, e.g., *Mindanao Herald* 1906c, 1906d, 1906e, 1906h; Philippine Commission 1907, 345.
- 8 *Juramentado* is a Spanish term literally meaning "oath taker." It was applied to Filipino Muslims who, in a fit of rage, engaged in killing sprees of infidels, which usually ended in their own deaths. Considered a religious rite by some Moros, "running juramentado" was part of the larger concept of jihad against those that would pollute or oppress Muslim communities. Such suicide attackers engaged in elaborate rituals prior to their assaults, including ritualistic cleansing, body binding to prevent blood loss and prolong attacks, donning symbolic clothing and magic amulets, the recitation of prayers, as well as polishing and sharpening weapons, which usually consisted of a kris and barong. Once prepared, the juramentado found a cluster of Christians and, shouting "La ilaha il-la'l-lahu" (There is no God but Allah), dispatched as many of the enemy as possible before meeting his desired martyr's death. The ferocity of juramentado has created a rich lore embraced by both Americans and Moros. When traveling throughout the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao today, Moros of all tribes rarely fail to relate a well-known story of the American .45 caliber in Mindanao. According to many accounts, the standard American issue Smith and Wesson .38 caliber sidearm proved largely ineffective against the raging juramentado. Given the bravery and resilience of these attackers, American military personnel were forced to adopt the more powerful Colt .45 caliber. Such stories provide Filipino Muslims with a sense of pride and a reaffirmation of certain cultural narratives regarding their martial spirit and fierce religious devotion. For an extensive discussion of juramentado, see Vic Hurley's (1936) engaging account.

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