The Philippines

An Overview of the Colonial Era

By Dana R. Herrera

In the Beginning

Although the details vary in the retelling, one Philippine creation myth focuses on this core element: a piece of bamboo, emerging from the primordial earth, split apart by the beak of a powerful bird. From the bamboo a woman and man come forth, the progenitors of the Filipino people. The genesis of the Philippine nation, however, is a more complicated historical narrative. During their sixteenth-century expansion into the East, Ferdinand Magellan and other explorers bearing the Spanish flag encountered several uncharted territories. Under royal decree, Spanish colonizers eventually demarcated a broad geographical expanse of hundreds of islands into a single colony, thus coalescing large groups of cultural areas with varying degrees of familiarity with one another as *Las Islas Filipinas*. Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, claiming this area for the future King Philip II of Spain in the mid-1500s, took possession of the islands while imagining the first borders of the future Philippine state. During Spanish rule, the boundaries of the empire changed as Spain conquered, abandoned, lost, and regained several areas in the region. Had other colonies been maintained or certain battles victorious, Las Islas Filipinas could have included, for example, territory in what is now Borneo and Cambodia. When, during the Seven Years' War, Spain lost control of Manila from 1762–64, the area effectively became part of the British Empire. The issue of shifting boundaries notwithstanding, the modern-day cartographic image of the Philippine archipelago as a unified whole was credited to Jesuit priest Pedro Murillo Velarde, Francisco Suarez, and Nicolas de la Cruz who, in 1734, conceptualized, sketched, and engraved the first accurate map of the territory.

Explorers for Spain were not the first to encounter the islands. Chinese, Arabic, and Indian traders, for example, engaged in extensive commerce with local populations as early as 1000 AD. Yet it was the Spanish government that bound thousands of islands under a single colonial rule. The maps delineating Las Islas Filipinas as a single entity belied the ethnolinguistic diversity of the area. Although anthropological investigations continue, scholars believe Spain claimed territory encompassing over 150 cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Within this colonial geography, however, Spain realized that the actual distance between the capital center of Manila and areas on the margins (as well as the very real problems with overcoming difficult terrain between communities) made ruling difficult. Socially and geographically isolated communities retained some indigenous traditions while experiencing Spanish colonial culture in varying degrees. Vicente Rafael's *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (2000) chronicles this disconnection between the rule of the colonial center and those within the territorial borders.[1] His conclusions suggest in part that although the naming and mapping of Filipinas afforded the Spanish a certain legitimacy when claiming the islands, this was in some ways a cosmetic gesture. Instead of unifying the diverse local populations under one banner during the almost 400 years of Spanish rule, various groups remained fiercely independent or indifferent to the colonizer; some appropriated and reinterpreted Spanish customs,[2] while others toiled as slaves to the empire.[3]

Map of the Philippine Islands, published by Pedro Murillo Velarde in 1774. Velarde published the first accurate map of the islands forty years earlier. Source: http://tinyurl.com/o22gamaıoıo.

As they spread throughout the islands, Spanish conquistadors encountered a variety of religions; during the sixteenth century, the areas now referred to as the Luzon and Visayas cluster of islands were home to several belief systems that were chronicled by the Christian friars and missionaries who came into contact with them. Famed Philippine historian William Henry Scott (1994) recounts, for instance, examples of Visayans who "worshiped nature spirits, gods of particular localities or activities, and their own ancestors";[4] Bikolanos whose "female shamans called *baliyan* . . . spoke with the voice of departed spirits, and delivered prayers in song";[5] and Tagalogs whose pantheon included "Lakapati, fittingly represented by a hermaphrodite image with both male and female parts, [who] was worshipped in the fields at planting time."[6] Over time, however, Spain's colonial hegemony, power, and influence used to consolidate their rule spread through the vehicle of Catholicism, supplanting or heavily influencing several of the local spiritual traditions, which were transformed to fit the new religious paradigm. In the 1560s, Spaniard Miguel López de Legazpi introduced

1887 portrait of Miguel López de Legazpi.
Source: http://tinyurl.com/p3lojk6.

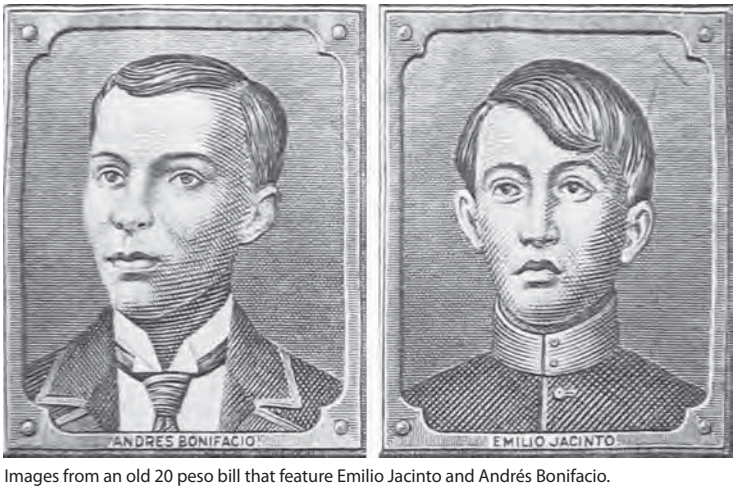
Catholic friars to the north. Christianity redefined the worldview and relationships of some of the locals, implementing a social structure heavily based on Biblical perspectives and injunctions. By the eighteenth century, indigenous people caught practicing so-called pagan rituals were punished; local histories written on bamboo or other materials were burned, and cultural artifacts were destroyed. Church edifices dominated the landscape as the symbolic and psychological center of the permanent villages and towns that sprung up around them. Once firmly established, the Catholic Church, through various religious orders with their own agendas, clearly shared power with Spain, and the two jointly administered the colonization of the islands.

The Catholic Church, through various religious orders with their own agendas, clearly shared power with Spain, and the two jointly administered the colonization of the islands.

Gabriela Silang Monument on Ayala Avenue, Manila.
Source: Ayala Triangle website at http://tinyurl.com/kf5teob.

However, Spanish Catholic colonial rule was incomplete. Domination of the southern half of the archipelago proved impossible due in large part to the earlier introduction of Islam in approximately 1380. Muslim traders traveled in and around the southern islands, and over time, these merchants likely married into wealthy local families, encouraging permanent settlements while spreading Islam throughout the area. By the time of Spanish arrival in the sixteenth century, the Islamic way of life was already well-established; for example, the Kingdom of Maynila (site of present-day Manila) was ruled by Rajah Sulayman, a Muslim who fought against Spanish conquest. Scholars agree that the Spanish arrival profoundly affected the course of Philippine history. Had Magellan or other colonizers never arrived or landed much later, they may have encountered a unified Muslim country. As history would have it, however, Spain encountered serious resistance in the Filipinas south, sowing the seeds of one of the oldest and bitterest divisions in contemporary Philippine society. Spanish colonizers soon realized they were against a strong, although not entirely uniform or unified, Muslim people. The constant struggle to extend Spanish hegemony to the south spawned the Spanish-Moro Wars, a series of long-standing hostilities between Muslims and Spanish. From the late 1500s until the late 1800s, Spain attempted to gain a foothold in the area—succeeding only to the extent that some soldiers were eventually allowed by local leaders to maintain a small military presence. Spanish colonial leaders, however, never dominated or governed the local area, despite laying claim to the territory.

Statue of Rajah Sulayman on Roxas Bouelvard, Manila.
Source: http://tinyurl.com/lv95nwt.



Images from an old 20 peso bill that feature Emilio Jacinto and Andrés Bonifacio.
Source: http://tinyurl.com/oyohpwr.

Revolutionary Narratives

During the late eighteenth century, revolutionaries such as Gabriela and Diego Silang fought for a free Ilocano nation in the northern Philippines. Other revolutionaries emerged, and by the end of the nineteenth century, leaders such as Andrés Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto were pressuring Spanish leadership on several fronts. Future national hero José Rizal incurred the wrath of the colonial government with the publication of *Noli Me Tángere* (*Touch Me Not,* 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (*The Filibustering*, 1891). Rizal,

Today, Rizal's immortality extends to national hero status, with numerous awards, national monuments, parks, associations, movies, poems, and books dedicated to his memory.

Philippine government poster from the 1950s. Source: National Archives and Records Administration at http://tinyurl.com/moosqsu.

born to a relatively prosperous family of Filipino, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese descent, was well-educated in the Philippines and in parts of Europe. A true renaissance man, Rizal was an ophthalmologist, scientist, writer, artist, and multilinguist whose works were written in several languages, including Spanish and Latin. *Noli Me Tángere* and *El Filibusterismo*, first published in Germany and Belgium, respectively, brought international attention to the abuses of the Filipino people by the colonial government and Catholic Church. Throughout Rizal's life, he continued writing and advocating reforms such as the recognition of Filipinos as free and equal citizens to the Spanish. Rizal's popularity grew amongst Filipinos fighting against Spanish oppression, drawing the suspicion of local officials who accused him of associating with armed insurgents. In 1896, Rizal was arrested and convicted of several crimes, including inciting rebellion, and was executed by firing squad on December 30. However, rather than suppressing the revolution, Rizal's death cast him as a martyr for the cause, and his works were more widely disseminated and read by leaders fighting for an independent Philippines.

Today, Rizal's immortality extends to national hero status, with numerous awards, national monuments, parks, associations, movies, poems, and books dedicated to his memory. Rizal's writings proliferate on the Internet. His works, once considered seditious propaganda by some, are now available as free downloads.[7] Admirers who take to social media characterize Rizal as their hero and post facts about his background and achievements or quotes from his texts.[8] The power of Rizal's narratives transcend the paper documents handwritten 125 years ago. He is remembered as a Filipino writing for his people, a native son who used the tools of storytelling to expose the truth about life under colonial rule.

Colonialism: The Sequel

Scholars argue that the execution of Rizal inspired a broader fight for freedom from the Spanish government. Led by heroes such as Bonifacio, the Philippine Revolution began in 1896 and included numerous battles against Spanish forces on multiple fronts. By 1898, as Spain was fighting to quell the uprisings in the Philippines, it became embroiled in the Spanish-American War. After losing to the United States in several land and naval battles, Spain released the Philippines and other colonies to the US in exchange for US $20 million, as agreed upon in the Treaty of Paris of 1898. During the negotiation of the treaty, the American Anti-Imperialist League opposed the annexation of the Philippines. Composed of social, political, and economic luminaries of the era (for example, activist Jane Addams and former President Grover Cleveland), the league organized a series of publications criticizing the US government's colonial policies. Mark Twain, prominent author, wrote for the *The New York Herald* in 1900:

John Hay, Secretary of State, signing the memorandum of ratification for the Treaty of Paris on behalf of the United States, from p. 430 of *Harper's Pictorial History of the War with Spain*, Vol. II, published by Harper and Brothers in 1899. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at http://tinyurl.com/p6fowzm.

> *I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. . . . It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make those people free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way. And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.*[9]

The treaty was hotly debated by the Senate. Ultimately, ratification of the treaty was approved on February 6, 1899, by a vote of fifty-seven in favor and twenty-seven against—a single vote more than the required two-thirds majority. Meanwhile in the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo, a Filipino leader in the fight for freedom, declared an independent Philippine government—which neither the Spanish nor United States governments acknowledged. When the final version of the Treaty of Paris was enacted, the islands once again became subject to the laws and policies of another distant nation.

Americans who supported annexing the Philippines viewed the archipelago as a doorway through which the United States could gain more of a financial foothold in Asia while extending its empire overseas. Before the US could begin fully establishing control of the islands, a new war began. Some scholars have termed it "the first Việt Nam," referencing the extended armed conflict which ended in 1975 between North Việt Nam and the US, whom many North Vietnamese also perceived as an imperialist aggressor. The Philippine-American war began on February 4, 1899, when American soldiers opened fire on Filipinos in Manila. In the first years of US occupation, the battles were fought between the new US colonizers and Filipino guerrilla armies tired of existing under any foreign rule. James Hamilton-Paterson, a British travel writer and commentator on the Philippines, estimates that the war's death toll included over 4,000 American and 16,000 Filipino soldiers, as well as almost one million civilians who perished from hunger and disease.[10] Although the war officially ended in 1902, skirmishes continued for several years afterward.

Under the rule of the United States, a plethora of people, ideas, and changes to the infrastructure flooded the archipelago. During this era, Christian groups flourished as Protestants and other denominations began proselytizing via missionary expeditions. Organizations such as the Salvation Army and the YMCA began operations in the Philippines; the so-called "Big Three" of American voluntary associations, the Lions Club, Kiwanis, and Rotary, also quickly spread throughout the islands. The United States military sponsored the establishment of hospitals and funded improvements to roads and bridges. Prominent urban planner Daniel Burnham visited the Philippines in 1904 and designed the capital city of Manila for redevelopment.[11] US culture dominated Philippine life. Linguist

President Aguinaldo. Page 71 of Harper's *History of the War in the Philippines*.
Source: The McCune Collection at http://tinyurl.com/l8hqfo7.

"Big Boot": Clifford Berryman's cartoon published in *The Washington Post* depicts Aguinaldo's futile attempt to oust the US from the Philippines. The sign in the background reads: "Notice: The US is requested to withdraw P.D.Q. (signed) Aguinaldo."
Source: From the National Archives via *MIT Visualizing Cultures* website at http://tinyurl.com/mmuytqk.

Bonifacio P. Sibayan, for example, discusses the introduction of English by American colonial authorities as the medium of instruction in schools: "English thus became the only medium of instruction in the schools, the only language approved for use in the school, work, in public school buildings, and on public school playgrounds."[12] Sibayan further explains that while English-only eventually changed to bilingual instruction, English usage had become pervasive throughout the whole of society. Throughout the business and government sector, English became the dominant language, as well as the language that bridged communication gaps between regional Filipino cultural groups who did not share an indigenous language.Today, English, along with Filipino, is recognized as a national language of the Philippines. Renato Constantino, Filipino scholar, characterized the introduction of English as a detriment to Filipino society: "With American textbooks, Filipinos started learning not only the new language but also a new way of life, alien to their traditions . . . This was the beginning of their education, and at the same time, their miseducation."[13] Filipino linguists and other social scientists continue researching and debating the extent to which indigenous cultural values and traditions were lost with the change in language.[14] Nevertheless, English proved beneficial to at least some Filipinos. The US government sponsored some students from the elite upper class to study in American schools and, upon their return, work in the government. Other Filipinos, recruited by US companies beginning in the colonial era, migrated to California, Hawai`i, and other states, lured by the promise of lucrative work compared to wage rates picking sugarcane and pineapple in the Philippines. With at least some familiarity with the language, Filipinos were able to communicate with their foreign employers.

In 1935, the United States designated the Philippines as a commonwealth and established a Philippine government that was meant to transition to full independence. During World War II, however, Japan attacked the Philippines and held the country from 1941 to 45. Lydia N. Yu-Jose in "World War II and the Japanese in the Prewar Philippines" (1996) describes an immigrant population of approximately 20,000 Japanese people living in the islands prior to the war.[15] Some were temporary migrants, content to work in the Philippines for several years and then return to Japan with their earnings. Others were permanent settlers, many of whom would go on, for example, to establish agricultural operations, open factories, and begin logging operations. Some of these Japanese business owners, Yu-Jose explains, were utilized as advisers and installed as local leaders by the occupying army. Initially, some regarded the Japanese as liberators, freeing the Philippines from the United States and bringing the islands into the Japanese empire. However, in light of the subsequent war atrocities, harsh realities came to light. In October 1943, the Japanese established what is now referred to as the Second Philippine Republic, with José P. Laurel as president. Widely recognized as simply a puppet government, the dominating Japanese military continued occupying the area. Local factories under Japanese control produced goods for the war effort while Filipinos suffered food shortages.

Against this backdrop, Filipinos once again organized widespread resistance throughout the islands. Over 250,000 people used guerrilla warfare tactics against Japanese occupiers, who steadily lost control as the war continued. During the war, famed General Douglas MacArthur also organized American troops to fight alongside the Filipinos. From

General Douglas MacArthur wades ashore during initial landings at Leyte, Philippine Islands. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at http://tinyurl.com/p8cuqju. National Archives and Records Administration. Photo by U.S. Army Signal Corps officer Gaetano Faillace.

February to March 1945, Filipino soldiers and US troops fought in the Battle of Manila, which would eventually mark the end of the occupation. During this month, at least 100,000 civilians died at the hands of Japanese soldiers. Overall, scholars estimate between 500,000 and one million deaths of Filipinos during the World War II Japanese occupation.

After the end of the war, the United States and the Philippines signed the Treaty of Manila on July 4, 1946; Manuel Roxas transitioned from the President of the Commonwealth of the Philippines to first President of an independent Philippine Republic.

Guide to the Present

Yet while "independent" implied a Philippines officially free from foreign rule, many contemporary narratives of Filipino identity, citizenship, and statehood are inevitably influenced by the colonial past and, some say, the continuing undue influence of other countries. The political, social, and economic elites of the country, for example, are often members of the same families that have held power in the country for generations. Gavin Shatkin's "Obstacles to Empowerment: Local Politics and Civil Society in Metropolitan Manila, the Philippines"[16] traces how Spanish and US colonial authorities granted extensive rights and privileges to favored landowners. Many of these families later leveraged their power into political and economic dynasties, leading to a contemporary Philippine government mired in nepotism, cronyism, and corruption.[17]

After war reparations were paid in the 1950s, Japanese businesses and investors soon returned to the islands. Today, Japan is a strategic economic and political partner of the Philippine government. However, as in the aftermath of Spanish and United States colonialism, Filipinos still struggle with defining a national identity after such widespread traumas. Other challenges for the Philippine state today include settling a territorial dispute regarding areas of the

PHILIPPINES

Geography and Population
Area: 120,000 square miles; slightly larger than Arizona
Population: 107 million
Government
Freedom House rating from *"Freedom in the World 2015"* (ranking of political rights and civil liberties in 195 countries): Partly Free
Type: Republic
Chief of State and Head of Government: President Benigno Aquino (since June 30, 2010)
Elections: President elected by popular vote and serves a single six-year term
Legislative Branch: Bicameral Congress; Senate (twenty-four seats, half of the seats are elected every three years, elected by popular vote, serving six-year terms) and House of Representatives (287 seats, all seats elected by popular vote every three years, serving three-year terms)
Judicial Highest Courts: Supreme Court (chief justice and fourteen associate justices)
Judges: Appointed by president on recommendations by the Judicial and Bar Council and serve until age seventy
Economy
The Philippines' economy is continuing to grow and is moving away from agriculture exports and toward electronics and oil.
GDP: $694.5 billion
Per Capita Income: $7,000
Unemployment Rate: 7.2 percent
Population Below Poverty Line: 26.5 percent
Inflation Rate: 4.5 percent
Agricultural Products: Sugarcane, coconuts, rice, corn, bananas, pork, beef, fish
Industries: Electronics assembly, garments, footwear, petroleum refining
Society
Religion: 82.9 percent Catholic, 5 percent Muslim, 2.8 percent Evangelical Christian, 2.3 percent Iglesia ni Kristo (English translation: Church of Christ [different from US Church of Christ]), 4.5 percent other Christian
Life Expectancy: Approximately 72 years
Literacy Rate: 95.4 percent
Major Contemporary Issues
Security: The Philippine government has been dealing with insurgent groups throughout the past couple of decades. Peace talks with the Moro insurgents have brought some stability to the islands, but the government also must deal with the New People's Army, a Communist insurgent group inspired by Maoist principles. The Philippines and China are also in a dispute over sovereignty for the Spratly Islands.
Drugs: The Philippines are a major consumer and producer of methamphetamines, as well as a producer of marijuana. The government has attempted crackdowns on both but has been unsuccessful so far.

SOURCES

CIA. "The World Factbook: Philippines." Last modified June 20, 2014. http://tinyurl.com/2y58zo.

Freedom House. "Freedom in the World 2015." Accessed February 11, 2015. http://tinyurl.com/knwvzk6.

South China Sea with the People's Republic of China; allowing the return of the United States military to the islands; brokering a lasting peace with the historically Muslim-dominated south; coping with the increasing number of Filipinos working overseas, as well as the subsequent social and economic consequences of this migration; and reducing poverty. These realities, juxtaposed against the Philippine Department of Tourism slogan, "It's more fun in the Philippines," suggests that understanding today's Republic of the Philippines means studying the historical roots of power and influences born from the imposition of colonial structures. ■

NOTES

1. Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2000).
2. Reinhard Wendt, "Philippine Fiesta and Colonial Culture," *Philippine Studies* 46, no. 1 (1998) 3–23.
3. Rosario M. Cortes, Celestina P. Boncan, and Ricardo T. Jose, *The Filipino Saga: History as Social Change* (Quezon City: New Day Publisher, 2000); Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998); William H. Scott, "The Spanish Occupation of the Cordillera in the 19th Century" in *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations*, ed. A.W. McCoy et al. (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982).
4. William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1994), 77.
5. Ibid., 185.
6. Ibid., 234.
7. "Books by Rizal, José (sorted by popularity)," *Project Gutenberg*, accessed March 10, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/ku7fygt.
8. "José Rizal: Not Your Ordinary One Peso Guy," accessed March 10, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/lr9gvht.
9. Excerpt from the October 15, 1900 *New York Herald*. See "Mark Twain—The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War," *Library of Congress*, accessed September 13, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/y4zyea.
10. James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy: A Century of Colonialism in the Philippines* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1998), 33.
11. Ian Morley, "America and the Philippines," *Education About Asia* 16, no. 2 (2011) 34–38.
12. Bonifacio P. Sibayan, *The Intellectualization of Filipino and Other Essays on Education and Sociolinguistics* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1999), 543.
13. Renato Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982), 6; quoted in ibid., 551.
14 See Laura M. Ahearn, "Language, Thought, and Culture," in *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology* (Malden: Wiley-Backwell, 2012), 65–98 for a general overview of the research regarding language, local traditions, and culture change.
15. Lydia N. Yu-Jose, "World War II and the Japanese in Prewar Philippines," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27 , no. 1 (1996): 64.
16. Gavin Shatkin, "Obstacles to Empowerment: Local Politics and Civil Society in Metropolitan Manila, the Philippines," *Urban Studies* 37, no. 12 (2000): 2357–2375.
17. "Transparency International: the Global Coalition Against Corruption," accessed September 13, 2014, http://tinyurl.com/qfms53j.

DANA R. HERRERA is currently an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Saint Mary's College of California. She received her Master's and Doctorate degrees from the University of California at Davis. Herrera teaches courses in cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology, as well as St. Mary's College Collegiate Seminar "great books" classes. She has conducted research studies in the Philippines, United States, and Europe. Her current scholarly interests include pedagogy and technology, digital media, and the Filipino diaspora.