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Symposium

Father and Son in the Embrace of Uncle Sam

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Symposium

REYNALDO C. ILETO

Father and Son in the Embrace of Uncle Sam

This essay offers a reflection on the American sojourns of two Filipinos, Reynaldo Iletto and his father, Rafael Iletto, at two different historical periods. It brings to the fore the interplay of personal experiences and regimes of knowledge that constitute one's belonging and response to the US empire. Rafael Iletto's beliefs and actions are framed in light of his upbringing and his times, resulting in a military career that exemplified the special relationship between the United States and the Philippines. But the historical moment of Reynaldo Iletto's graduate studies at Cornell University led to a path that diverged ideologically from that of his father.

KEYWORDS: US EMPIRE • PHILIPPINES • NATIONALISM • HISTORIOGRAPHY • AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Drawing upon scrapbooks of photos, clippings, and other memorabilia, I offer in this essay a reflection on the American sojourns of two Filipinos—my father and myself—at two different periods in time. My father, shown in figure 1 posing with his fiancée Olga Clemeña (1921–1988) at West Point, New York, joined the United States Military Academy (USMA) as a cadet in 1940. His unique experience of America in the early 1940s turned him four years later into a faithful soldier of the empire, to fight in the wars with Japan and later the communists. Some twenty-seven years later, my bride of two months, Maria Consuelo (Loolee) Carandang (1947–2009), and I journeyed to Ithaca, New York (fig. 2), where I pursued graduate studies



Fig. 1. Rocky and Olga, West Point, 1943

on Southeast Asia at Cornell University. My sojourn from 1967 to 1973 coincided with the Indochina conflict and student unrest worldwide; the site of warfare in my case was the academe itself.

Through this account of father and son, I aim to draw out the interplay of personal experience and regimes of knowledge that constitute one's belonging and response to empire. My father and I came to hold very different attitudes toward America's wars in Asia and tended to situate our thoughts and actions within conflicting narratives of such wars.

The main protagonist in this story is Rafael Iletto (fig. 3), born in San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, on 24 October 1920. He was a product of US colonial rule, which formally began in 1901, when Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo was captured, and ended in 1942 when the Japanese took over the country. I focus on his training as a cadet in America's premiere military academy from 1940 to 1943. He would return to the Philippines as a lieutenant in the First Filipino Infantry Division of the US Sixth Army.

Iletto was a soldier of the empire (fig. 4). Yet he chose Filipino citizenship after the war and played a key role in building the Armed Forces of the Philippines after independence in 1946. He is best remembered as the "Father of the Scout Rangers," a commando regiment he helped form in 1950

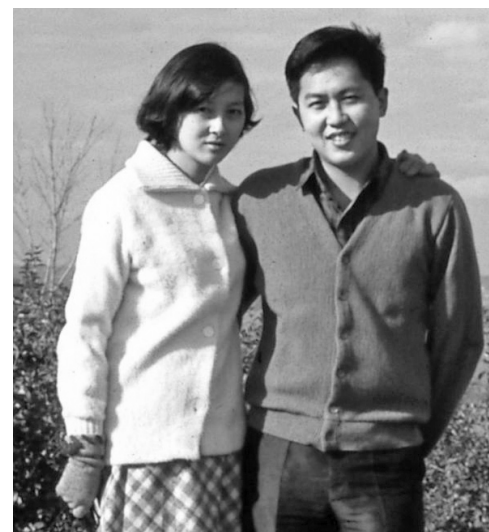


Fig. 2. Rey and Loolee, Ithaca, 1967



Fig. 3. Apeng and his older sister, Virginia



Fig. 4. Rafael M. Iletto, ca. 1945

(fig. 5). In 1966 Iletto was the commanding general of the First Constabulary Zone in San Fernando, Pampanga. He is shown in figure 6 conducting Pres. Ferdinand Marcos on an inspection tour.

What kind of “nationalism” did General Iletto embody? His critics provided one answer: Toward the end of his career, when he served briefly as defense minister in Corazon Aquino’s “People Power” cabinet, he was dubbed “Amboy” or “America’s boy.” But my father always reminded me that he was a genuine nationalist, who always upheld Filipino interests above all. This paradox leads me to ask how, through the work of figures such as my father, the Philippines remained firmly in the empire’s orbit after the Americans had physically departed. What kind of American power worked through nationally prominent figures like him?



Fig. 5. Rafael M. Iletto, ca. 1955 (above)

Fig. 6. Iletto to President Marcos's left in Pampanga, 1966 (below)



Conceived in the United States, I was born in Manila in October 1946, soon after my mother arrived on a ship from San Francisco. This was just three months after the Philippines became independent and a year after Japan’s surrender to the Allied Forces. Figure 7 shows me with a proud father, a US Army captain visiting from Okinawa. A few years later, he took the photo of me with my mother (fig. 8), who is very much the hidden voice in this narrative.

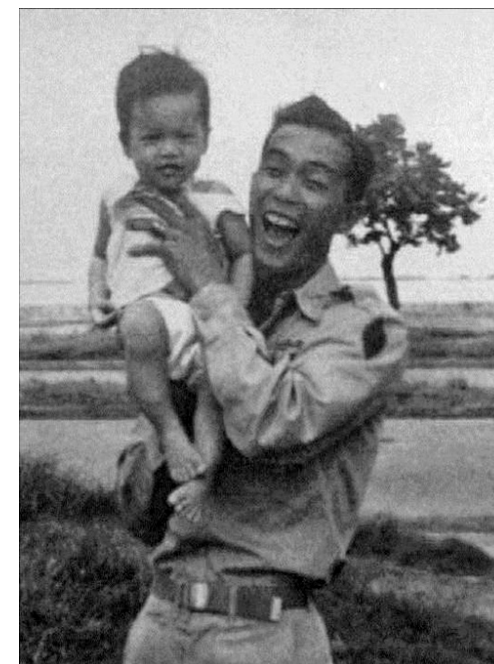


Fig. 7. Dad and me, 1947

Having met and married in the United States, my parents decided that their children would be brought up “in the American way.” They had grown up in the world of the Tagalog language (ironically, during the period of US rule), while I would be raised in the world of English. Both in school and at home, I read lots of books on American history, literature, and culture. This was not just a carryover of colonial institutions and practices, however. The promotion of American studies in the school curriculum of the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila, where I studied for thirteen years, was part of a calculated postwar restoration of US influence in the Philippines in a Cold War setting.

Growing up with America imagined as the source of democratic ideals and the model for social and economic development—that is, “modernization”—I could have embodied the empire even more than my father did. But something happened to me in the late 1960s that thwarted this process.

The Father—From San Isidro to West Point

Rafael Manio Iletto grew up in San Isidro, Nueva Ecija (fig. 9), and San Miguel, Bulacan. Although the Philippines was under American colonial



Fig. 8. With Mom at the Luneta, ca. 1949

rule in the 1920s and 1930s, Apeng (his Filipino nickname) no longer encountered American teachers in the public schools he attended. By the 1920s the Filipinization of the bureaucracy had been completed, at least at the provincial level. His father, Francisco, or Tatang Isko, a former seminarian during the Spanish era, had been recruited as a high school mathematics teacher in 1904, despite the fact that he spoke little English. By 1935 a Filipino Commonwealth government under President Quezon was running domestic affairs. The Americans remained in the background, ultimately calling the shots but largely hidden to rural Filipinos like my father.

By the time young Apeng was in the school system, it seemed like America's promise to uplift and educate the Filipinos was being fulfilled. The notion that the United States might have been and might still be an invader or aggressor seemed never to have occurred to him. From the beginning, his consciousness of the past was anchored on the forgetting of a war.

In the course of my research in the mid-1970s on the Philippine-American War, I found a document among the captured insurgent records in the US National Archives. It is a letter in Tagalog written by Francisco Yleto in 1900 and addressed to Gen. Isidoro Torres, commander of the Filipino resistance forces in Bulacan (fig. 10, 11). It stated, among other things, that he was at the service of the general. The Americans, having intercepted this letter, labeled Francisco a spy for the insurgents (note label "Spys, insurgent" in fig. 10). My grandfather had been a citizen of the Filipino Republic of 1898 and a part of the resistance against American occupation. Strangely, however, he did not tell his children about his involvement in this war. Perhaps in his eagerness to succeed as a public school teacher in the new American order, the past war was best forgotten.

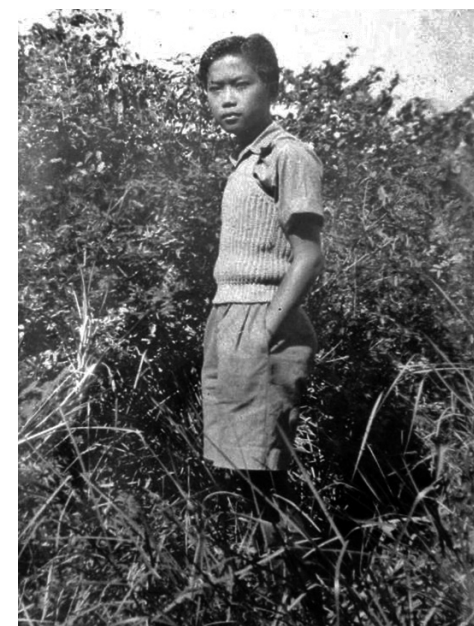


Fig. 9. Apeng Ileto in San Isidro

Naturally my father was extremely surprised—even shocked—to see the document I had unearthed about his Tatang’s brief career as an “insurgent spy.” For him the Philippine–American War was a nonevent, even more so his father’s involvement in it. The empire had produced a historiography that induced a forgetting of the war that helped to bind Filipinos to the American tutor even after independence. The irony is that the son of this insurgent spy would also become a spy of sorts for the former enemy, leading to the moniker “Amboy.”

Being a bright and hardworking student he breezed through his early schooling. In 1937 he finally moved from the town of San Isidro to the big city, Manila, where he was admitted as an engineering scholar at the University of the Philippines (fig. 12). There he encountered a few American professors for the first time and had to study English seriously. He was a wizard at mathematics and science, but English literature was his big stumbling block.

Doing well at the University of the Philippines, Apeng Iletto began to recognize his talent and potential for a more challenging career. Inspired by his uncle, an officer in the Philippine Constabulary, he applied to enter the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) in 1939 and was one of the lucky few who got in (fig. 13). For Cadet Iletto the origins of the American presence in the Philippines were unequivocal: to bring freedom, democracy, and prosperity to the islands. Lost to him was the fact that the PMA grew out of the old Constabulary School, which had been established in 1901 to train Filipino officers to work hand-in-hand with their US army counterparts in suppressing

23 July 1900
 To Gen Torres states
 he goes to Malabon
 from San Rafael San
 Dicho and is at
 disposal of Torres.
 Pys, insurgent
 Torres letter
 Francisco Ylito

Fig. 10. US Army cover note to Letter of Francisco Ylito, 1900

INSURGENT RECORDS
 L.R. 164
 JAN 5 1901
 Andres Torres Gen. Torres
 fecha 25 de Julio de 1900
 Pagguguidat: Acos magiging sagat
 sumulat niting ilang talata mag la
 quip ang maraming cummista sa
 sa bong familia. At cony aco naman
 ang inyong maitatamang ay mabuting aco ay
 Din na parin din ng tago ay magcarasa
 mo.
 Ples ibinabalita co sa iyo na aco na
 la na sa St. Rafael at aco nag pagpina
 na sa St. Ysidro et Nueva Erija sa sipang
 ng pinaramamahab ang familia, cony at
 manggagari na aco magagamit mo sa
 inyong mga maguiging cantayon sa na
 sabing ngan bugas. Ples ibinabalita co na
 man sa iyo na aco nag bibigay ng cahay
 sa offalabon magay bubuhay sa tabanatuan
 Yto na lamang at mag rito sa inyong diti
 na si.
 Francisco Ylito

Fig. 11. Letter of Francisco Ylito to Gen. Torres, 1900

further resistance to the US occupation. This period of pacification (during which all the remaining insurgents were renamed *ladrones* or bandits) took all of twelve years after the official end of the Philippine–American War. To my father, they *really* were bandits.

Cadet Iletto performed so well in his first year at the PMA that he was selected as one of the two plebes to be sent for further training to the United



Fig. 12. Apeng Ileta, UP student in Manila

than just about academics and military training, however. Eager to “belong” to the community of his hosts, Apeng joined many sports including boxing, wrestling, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and lacrosse (a game he had never heard of back home; fig. 16). Sports offered a lubricant for easing social relationships with white cadets. His physical prowess brought him respect, according to his roommate Ralph Hallenbeck, a big man who could never forget losing a wrestling match to this wily Filipino.

States Military Academy in 1940 (fig. 14). As he put it to me, being sent to West Point incurred in him a debt of gratitude—*utang na loob*—to America. Like all of the brightest young men and women of his generation, to be sent to the United States as a *pensionado* (government scholar) was the pinnacle of one’s dreams.

Apeng Ileta was a model cadet—and certainly an outstanding Filipino cadet—at West Point. A 1941 *Life* magazine feature on the academy shows him, third from the left in fig. 15, as the only student of color in a mathematics class (*Life* 1941a, 90). Life at West Point was more



Fig. 13. Rafael Ileta (extreme right) at PMA



Fig. 14. Rafael Ileta (extreme right) at US Military Academy



Fig. 15. Excerpt from the *Life* magazine feature on West Point, 1941

Cadet Ileta also participated with gusto in American rituals such as “Thanksgiving Day” (fig. 17), which he had only read about and imagined while at school in San Isidro. Although he had left behind a girlfriend in Nueva Ecija, his dream was to escort an American girl to the West Point ball. He honed his skills in social dancing, his innate talents revealed in the scorecard shown in figure 18. Finally the day came when he was able to take Ralph’s sister, Mary, to one of the academy dances (fig. 19).

A major stumbling block for Cadet Ileta was his English. Having spoken Tagalog exclusively throughout his childhood years, he always fared badly in English literature. He failed the Shakespeare course, says Hallenbeck. But

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY WEST POINT, NEW YORK		
LACROSSE		
WEST POINT vs. PENN STATE COL.		
SATURDAY, MAY 16, 1942, AT 2:15 P. M.		
WEST POINT	LINE UP	PENN STATE COL.
Crain** (8)	GOAL	Henderson (4)
Sweet*** (47)		Hausner (21)
Minkler** (26)	DEFENSE	Briner (22)
Cobb, J.R.** (66)		Gutwals (44)
Cris** (22)		Pitenger (27)
Wirt** (20)	MID FIELD	Temprova (15)
Ivan*** (13)		Mitchell (7)
Carberry** (23)		Singley (26)
Nazzaro** (7)	ATTACK	Koch (40)
Marshall** (9)		Piper (31)
WEST POINT SUBS:		
Pugh*** (2)	Parker, R.H.*** (11)	Brown, A.L.*** (25)
Walker, J.H.*** (4)	Ileta*** (12)	Ardery** (33)
Snyder*** (8)	Kidder*** (21)	
PENN STATE SUBS:		
Kay (6)	Thorne (14)	Flemmer (35)
Rattner (8)	Walker (17)	Bliner (39)
Watkins (18)	Watkins (18)	Faries (42)
Sakor (13)	Lockwood (35)	
OFFICIALS:		
Referee: Mr. John Paige		
Judge of Play: Mr. Joseph Rowland		
U. S. M. A. 5-16-42-125		

Parker, R.H.*** (11)
Ileta*** (12)
Kidder*** (21)

Fig. 16. Lacrosse match schedule

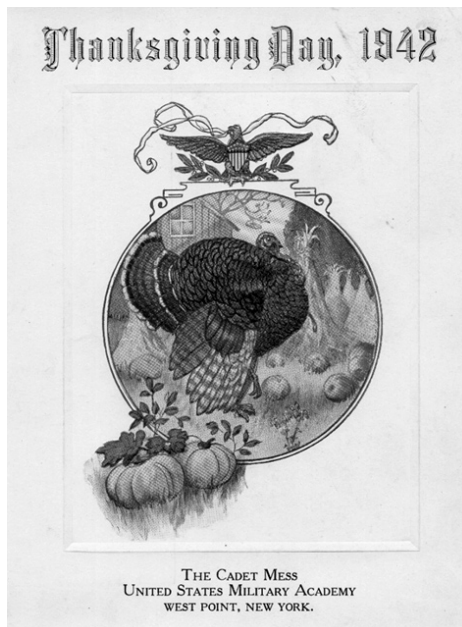


Fig. 17. Invitation to Thanksgiving Day, West Point, 1942

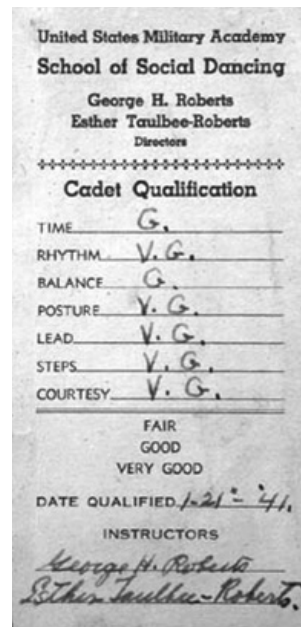


Fig. 18. Social dancing school scorecard

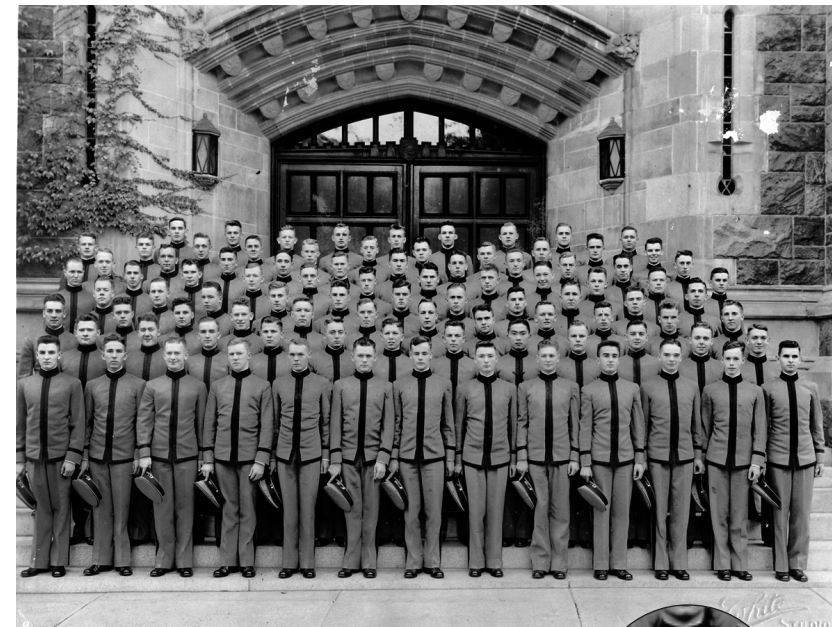


Fig. 20. Members of West Point Class 1943



Fig. 19. West Point ball

he tried hard to improve his spoken English, acquiring in the process a rather contrived American accent.

Rafael Ito's efforts to "belong" to Mother America culminated in a name change. Back in the Philippines he had always been known as "Apeng," the typical Filipino nickname for Rafael. A few weeks into West Point, they started calling him "Ralph." But since Ralph was already the name of his roommate, they settled for a nickname that he would carry for the rest of his life: "Rocky."

In the photo of West Point Class 1943 (fig. 20), we can identify Rocky Ito on the second row, fifth from the right. Although by then sporting a very American name, he is conspicuous for being the only nonwhite cadet in this group. Class 1943 was unusual, by the way, for graduating after only three years of training. The class underwent an accelerated program owing to the outbreak of the Pacific War. Sixty-two of the graduates were later killed in battle, more than any other class in the US Military Academy's history.



Fig. 21. Rocky Iletto visits Rey and his wife in Ithaca, 1968

The Son—From Quezon City to Ithaca, New York

Just as my father journeyed to New York for military training at the age of 20, I, too, was 20 when I went to New York in the fall of 1967 for my graduate studies. In the fall of 1968, my father visited us in Ithaca. Figure 21 shows the only photo of father and son in the heart of the empire. Then 48 years old, General Iletto is about to reach the zenith of his career as commanding general of the Philippine Army. Having just turned 22, I look every bit the effete intellectual of that era.

This photo is also significant for 1968 marks the start of my ideological estrangement from my father. Back in Manila, at about this time the radical student movement was fast taking shape. Framing my “awakening,” however, was not the Philippines but the United States of the late 1960s—a very different America from what my father encountered in the early 1940s. These two different Americas haunted our future careers, showing the workings of American empire in two generations of Filipinos.

My father in the late 1930s had moved from the world of Tagalog to the world of English as he went to the University of the Philippines and then to West Point. For him “America” and the English language were the embodiments of promise and success—the American dream. In contrast, I had been brought up in the world of English, thanks to my US-educated parents. It was Loolee, born and raised in Tanauan, Batangas, who led me back into the world of the Tagalog language. In a way, she was my living Tagalog dictionary. It could be said that, by moving from English to Tagalog as I set foot on the United States with Loolee, the impact of the American

experience was somewhat deflected, facilitating my early recognition of the glitter of empire, the false promises, and the contradictions between myths and realities. I felt no desire to “belong” to the America outside of Cornell.

Whereas my father went to America for military officer training, my goal was to obtain postgraduate training in Southeast Asian studies. A photo from 1968 (fig. 22) shows me in a Bahasa Indonesia class conducted by a language assistant named Pak Soeseno, the first Indonesian I had ever met—as if his country wasn’t just a doorstep away from mine.

Just as the looming Pacific War was the backdrop to my father’s journey to West Point, the Cold War had generated a lot of funding for the study of Southeast Asia, which was seen as ready prey for communism. The enemy was not just in North Vietnam but everywhere else in the region in which radical nationalisms and Marxist movements were taking root in the process of decolonization. Thus it was a Foreign Language Area Scholarship (or something like that) that had brought me to America.

The America and the school I went to were worlds apart from what Apeng/Rocky Iletto had encountered in 1940. The Cornell Southeast Asia Program was dominated intellectually by Prof. George Kahin, one of its founders in 1951. A veteran of the Second World War, Kahin got involved in US intelligence gathering in postwar Southeast Asia, and in the process acquired a heartfelt sympathy for the Indonesian revolution and its leaders. His book, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Kahin 1952), remains a classic in the field.

As shown in figure 23, Kahin hosted the visit of Indonesian Vice-President Hatta to the Southeast Asian Program. Kahin was sympathetic to



Fig. 22. In Bahasa Indonesia class conducted by Pak Soeseno



Fig. 23. George Kahin hosts visit of Indonesian Vice-President Hatta, Cornell, 1960

anticolonial nationalist movements beyond Indonesia. He is remembered for his participation in a fifteen-hour national “teach-in” opposing the Vietnam War on 15 May 1965, which was broadcast over television and radio from Washington, DC. When the student uprising broke out in Manila in 1970, Kahin was always looking for me, to ask what was going on. And I obliged because I felt that he was on our side.

Unlike the West Point of my father, where American ideals were reiterated in the classroom as well as outside, my first teacher was not even an American. D. G. E. Hall, known as the “father of Southeast Asian history,” had in fact been a long-time servant of the British Empire, first as a teacher in Burma and later as foundation professor of history at the University of Rangoon in the 1930s, before he joined the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Sure, he was critical of colonial rule, but it seemed only of the French variety in Indochina. The British in Burma



Fig. 24 Rey Iletto with D. G. E. Hall, 1976

could not be faulted in any way. He was proud of the British role in the Anglo–Burmese Wars, and could even sing some of his army’s marching songs. Not surprisingly, some of Hall’s anticolonial students gave him a lot of trouble at the University of Rangoon.

Despite the impatience with Professor Hall’s flawed historiography, nevertheless I realized how privileged we students were to have a living imperial scholar of the Victorian era lecture to us. My photo with Professor Hall (fig. 24) was taken at his home in Hitchin, England, two years before he passed away in 1978.

Initially the only American in my graduate committee was Knight Biggerstaff, an expert in modern Chinese history (fig. 25). He joined Cornell’s History Department in 1938, but spent a lot of time in China during the 1930s and then again in the latter half of the 1940s. In 1945 he participated in truce negotiations between Chiang Kai-shek and Zhou Enlai; he joined Mao, Chiang, and Zhou in a toast to the victory over Japan. He was in Nanjing when the communist forces took over in 1949 and later published a book of his memoirs titled *Nanking Letters 1949* (Biggerstaff 1979).

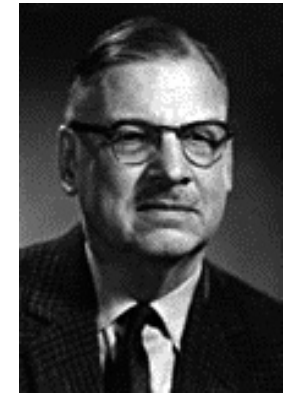


Fig. 25. Knight Biggerstaff, 1972

Biggerstaff was no ordinary American professor either. He got into trouble by testifying, “I feel very strongly the United States did not lose China to the communists. As a matter of fact, this is a very complicated problem, and I feel that the statement that China was lost to the communists by the United States is a bad overstatement. Just as the statement that China was won for Communism by Russia is a bad overstatement” (Biggerstaff [ca. 1954]; cf. Friedlander 2001). For refusing to toe the official line concerning the “loss” of China to Mao Zedong’s forces, Biggerstaff was accused of being a communist sympathizer and persecuted by Sen. Joseph Raymond “Joe” McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1950s. But he had many allies at Cornell—professors like George Kahin, for example. He became head of Cornell’s History Department from 1956 to 1963.

Through Biggerstaff, I came to understand what the Chinese Revolution was all about and how the Chinese agrarian model might have some

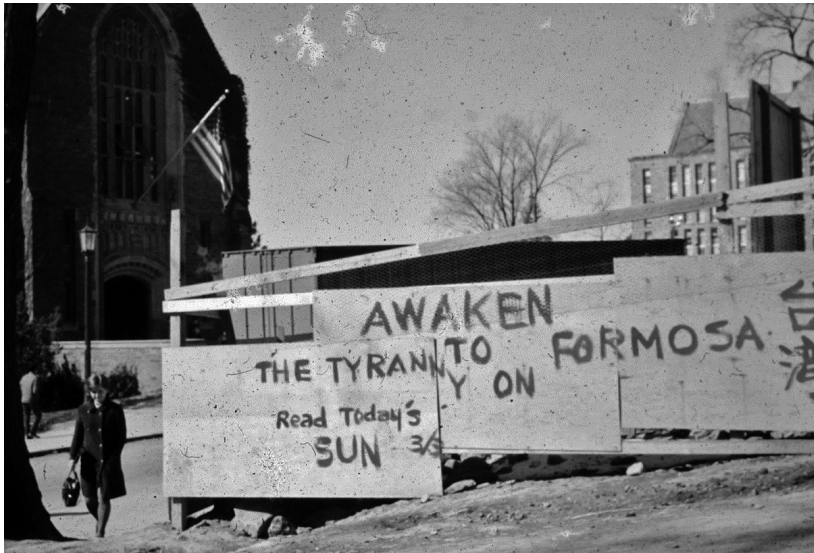


Fig. 26. Graffiti at the Cornell University campus, 1968 (above)

Fig. 27. Afro-American Society members occupying Cornell building, 1969 (right)



applicability to the Philippines. The radical movement in the Philippines was leaning toward Mao's China in the late 1960s, but I learned all about it from an American professor.

What I encountered upon my arrival at Cornell, then, was different—almost the inverse—of what greeted my father at West Point in 1940. In 1968 I took the photo of graffiti across from Willard Straight Hall, the Cornell student union building (fig. 26). This was interesting enough. A year later, however, this very same building was occupied by armed members of the Afro-American Society (fig. 27). This was a truly dramatic event: a war in Cornell's midst!

So who were the equivalents of Ralph Hallenbeck, my father's roommate at West Point, who shaped his views of America in the world? One of my

closest friends was a PhD student in modern Chinese history named George Hildebrand. He probably taught me more about Mao and the Chinese Revolution than any other person save our teacher, Professor Biggerstaff. Another close friend was Gary Porter (on the left in fig. 28), who was working on Vietnam. He is today a searing critic of American foreign policy in the alternative press.

George and Gary coauthored a controversial book about Cambodia, *Starvation and Revolution*, in 1976. They both were fine examples of the tradition of anticolonial scholarship at Cornell exemplified by George Kahin, Ben Anderson, and arguably Knight Biggerstaff himself. The educational institution itself, in tandem with the broader antiwar movement in the United States in 1968–1970, inevitably brought about a profound transformation in my outlook. The experience certainly radicalized me, giving me an understanding of an imperial and colonial America that had never been conveyed as such in any of the subjects I took in high school or college in the Philippines.



Fig. 28. Gary Porter (left) and George Hildebrand



Fig. 29. Cornell antiwar rally, 1969



Fig. 30. Backyard of Iletto's host family's house in Lamar, MO



Fig. 31. Ralph Hallenbeck (*above*)

Fig. 32. Dr. and Mrs. Hallenbeck (*below*)



I took the photo shown in figure 29 at an antiwar rally held in the Cornell gymnasium in 1969. Like many of my generation, the antiwar movement in the late 1960s had a profound influence on my political outlook. This was the context in which I came to realize that the Philippines was the first Vietnam. My ignorance had been due partly to the Catholic school I attended, which was aligned with the political Right and the “Free World” in contrast to the University of the Philippines nearby, which was a hotbed of Marxism and anticolonial nationalism in the 1960s. In addition, the pro-American and anticommunist values of my father surely would have rubbed off on his children. In the stories he told us, the only bad guys were the Japanese and the communists. Americans, in contrast, deserved our utang na loob for having saved us from disaster time and again.

Rocky Iletto's America

The world of anticolonial professors, radical classmates, and antiwar rallies that shaped my life as a Cornell student was an exceptional fragment of the wider America that I hardly experienced since I did not venture much outside the university environment during those years. Listening to AM radio stations, particularly those run by evangelical Christian and conservative groups, made it frighteningly clear to me, though, that the so-called silent majority was just around the corner waiting to reassert its dominance. My father, in contrast, immersed himself in all things American during his sojourn there. He spent all of his vacation time in Missouri and even stayed for a while in Oklahoma, where he went to flying school. The photo in figure 30 shows the backyard of his host family's house in Lamar, Missouri.

What, you might ask, was Rocky Iletto doing in Missouri during vacations or furloughs? It all had to do with his West Point roommate and “brother” Ralph Hallenbeck, who hailed from Lamar (fig. 31). When my father talked about the much-vaunted “American way of life,” what he meant was the Hallenbeck family's southern, white, middle-class way of life, which he came to know quite intimately.

Dr. and Mrs. Hallenbeck (fig. 32) were my father's adoptive parents during his American sojourn. Sure, he would talk about American ideals of democracy, individual freedom, the self-made man, and all that, but these were clichés he repeated almost mechanically. When he got going about lived America, it was about his summers in Lamar as a guest of the Hallenbecks, who had more or less adopted him. Through the Hallenbecks,



Fig. 33. Rocky Ileto and Mary Hallenbeck

Rocky Ileto even became an honorary citizen of Lamar. The American way of life—or one version of it, anyway—which he could only dream of in the Philippines was thus turned into lived experience.

Oh, and there was also a “sister” Hallenbeck: Mary, shown in figure 33 with Rocky. They maintained an intense correspondence with each other in 1944 and I know my father would have wanted to be more than a brother to Mary, but there was a line that could not be crossed. Was it because he was a brown Filipino and she was white?

Rocky Ileto ended up marrying a Filipina studying at Dunbarton College in Washington, DC: Olga Clemeña, from a prominent family in Manila (fig. 34). She was named after Olga Preobrajenska, a famous Russian prima ballerina.



Fig. 34. Wedding of Rocky and Olga, 1945

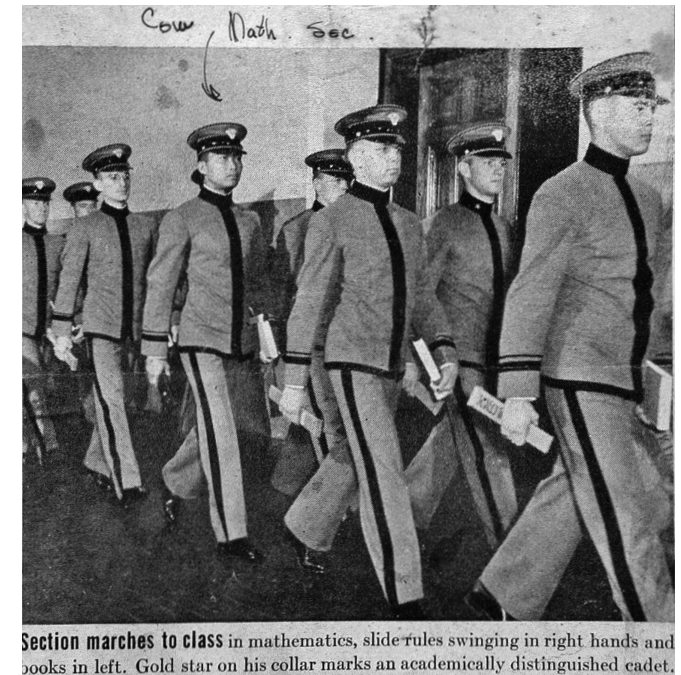
Her father, Engracio, was a lawyer and politician; her mother, Adela Ongsiako, was a “Chinese mestiza” who was trained as a nurse.

Rocky Ileto was especially proud of the 1941 *Life* magazine feature on West Point because he appears in a number of the pictures. In the photo in the *Life* (1941a, 95) clipping (fig. 35) he is the third cadet from the left as his mathematics section marches to class. This photo, however, is even more significant for a reader’s response it triggered, which reflected a racialized America that Rocky would rather not have known about.

E. A. Bibs from Seattle wrote: “In your article on West Point you show in cadet uniform on page 95—second picture, third from left—a Jap. Please enlighten an American-born—where and what is West Point? Whose army is pictured—Roosevelt’s, Hitler’s, Konoye’s or Tojo’s? Who pays the bills?” (fig. 36). To this letter the *Life* magazine editor replied: “Reader Bibs’s ‘Jap’ is Cadet Rafael Manio Ileto, one of four full-blooded Filipinos allowed at the Academy under the Act of Congress of May 28, 1908. . . .” (fig. 37) (*Life* 1941b).

Racial discrimination was, in fact, a hidden underside of the *Life* magazine feature on Class 1943. Cadet Ileto had two black classmates at

Fig. 35. Excerpt from *Life* magazine feature on West Point, 1941



West Point. One of them, shown in figure 38, was Clarence Davenport, who happened to be in the chapel when the *Life* magazine photos were about to be taken. A white cadet spotted Davenport and told him to leave the chapel. Davenport protested, but an Army officer supported the white student and Davenport had to yield. That is why there is a Filipino, but no African-American, in the *Life* magazine feature.

Davenport was only the sixth black cadet to graduate from West Point. Unlike the happy, if extremely challenging, experience of brown Cadet Iletto, Davenport's life at the academy was miserable. He was never assigned a roommate. The other black cadet in his batch also had to room alone. Both endured four years of "silencing," in which they were spoken to only for official business. No other cadets would sit beside them, even during chapel services. They placed shit in his shoes and under his bed. Only much later did Davenport's classmates show remorse for what they had done to him.

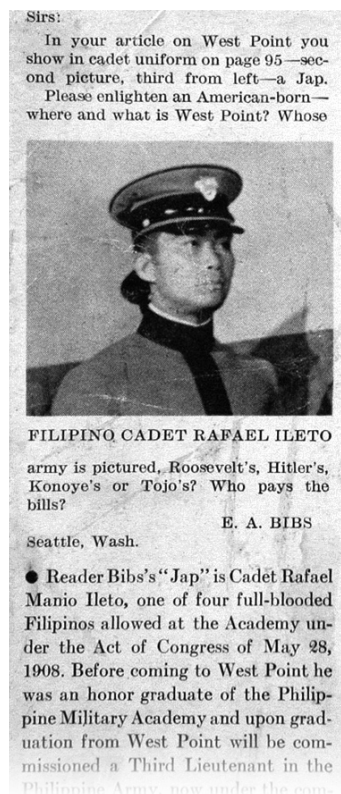
Luckily for Iletto, Filipinos belonged to a slightly different order of beings; they were "little brown brothers" and allies in the war with Japan. Cadet Iletto's response to being mistaken for a "Jap" was to reassert his loyalty to America and the Philippine Commonwealth and his firm commitment to fight the common Japanese enemy.

The clipping in figure 39 shows Rocky Iletto and fellow West Pointer Ed Suatengco, a Tagalog Tsinoi who was likewise mistaken for a "Jap" on a few occasions, congratulating each other "for being commissioned as officers in the U.S. Army." Except for their "Asian" looks (they could be Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese,



Fig. 38. West Point finally honors Clarence Davenport

Fig. 37. *Life* magazine editor's reply, 1941



Korean), in every other respect they were American officers. But the background poster with the words "Fighting Filipinos—Always Fight for Freedom" associates them with a specifically Filipino narrative, the struggle for independence. So what are they, Americans or Filipinos? Here I prefer to adopt the terminology Alfred McCoy (1981) has employed for Filipinos of my father's generation: Binationalism, which was enabled by the figure of the Japanese as the common enemy or "other."

Let us take a closer look at the poster behind Iletto and Suatengco (fig. 40). It states, "Fighting Filipinos—Always Fight for Freedom"; who is the historical figure represented in the poster? He is, of course, Andres Bonifacio,



Fig. 39. Rocky Iletto with Ed Suatengco



Fig. 40. Iletto and Suatengco in front of "Fighting Filipinos" poster



Fig. 41. A clipping from the
Tulsa Tribune, Oklahoma,
1943



Fig. 42. A page from *In Column*, the West Point magazine

HOT SPOT—The hazards of being a Filipino became quite apparent this last summer. One of our Filipino cadets, obliged to make a forced landing, found himself the immediate center of the excited interest of a crowd of farmers. When the farmers got a look at our cadet the interest became menacing and rustic weapons such as pitchforks, hoes, and scythes began to appear. Lynching was eminent and only after considerable talking did he convince the mob that he wasn't a Jap.

docked at Yokohama and for the first time he came in touch with real Japanese people. He distrusted them. He could “feel” their hatred toward America, he told me in an interview, and because of this Filipinos were also implicated as “enemy.” He did not know that Artemio Ricarte, the recalcitrant general from the Philippine–American War, lived in exile in Yokohama; that past was foreign to him.

Since the days of Pres. William McKinley and the policy of benevolent assimilation, the Philippines had been depicted as America’s progeny in the Pacific. After Filipinas had forcibly come under Uncle Sam’s protection in 1902 she became an ally of the US in the contest with Japan over control of the Pacific. By the time of Apeng Iletto’s birth this special relationship had become naturalized. Thus the young Iletto never realized that Japan had aided the Filipino revolutionaries in 1896 and that Japanese modernization would continue to hold a certain attraction for Filipino nationalists during the American colonial period. One of them was Augusto Ongsiako, brother of Adela, who received his medical training at the Tokyo Imperial University in the 1930s.

In the clipping from the *Tulsa Tribune* (fig. 41) we read:

Muskogee, June 19, 1943—One cadet, a West Point student from the Philippines, really has “blood in his eye” as he goes through the daily

founder of the secret society that initiated the armed revolt against Spain in 1896. Throughout American rule, the figure of Bonifacio was central to the labor and peasant movements that were attempting to carry out the so-called unfinished revolution of 1896. Hence the colonial government tried to “tame” this figure in various ways.

In the poster, the armed Filipino warrior (Bonifacio) is holding up a flag that appears to juxtapose the Filipino republican flag and the American stars and stripes. The freedom that he is fighting for is not the fulfillment of the revolution of 1896 but the recovery of his land under Japanese occupation. It is a binational flag, and the bad guys are the Japanese.

Even before my father went to study at West Point, Japan had already become *the* enemy to him. While on the way to the US in 1940 his ship

routine in the Air Force training detachment at the Muskogee branch of the Spartan School of Aeronautics. He is Rafael M. Iletto, who was born in San Isidro, on the isle of Luzon. Training as an air force cadet at Spartan, he already has pledged himself to aid in the recovery of his native land from the Japanese. "I'm really going to dish it out to the Japs, just as they did it to my people," he said.

Iletto's career as a pilot would end abruptly, however, when his trainer plane crash-landed in the cornfields of Oklahoma. The West Point magazine, *In Column*, tells it all (fig. 42):

HOT SPOT—The hazards of being a Filipino became quite apparent this last summer. One of our Filipino cadets, obliged to make a forced landing, found himself the immediate center of the excited interest of a crowd of farmers. When the farmers got a look at our cadet, the interest became menacing and rustic weapons such as pitch-forks, hoes, and scythes began to appear. Lynching was eminent and only after considerable talking did he convince the mob that he wasn't a Jap.

My father had a lot to say about this harrowing experience—not so much the forced landing of his plane as his misrecognition by the locals. Throughout his military career in the 1940s, it would appear that this was the closest he came to losing his life. Ironically, the "enemy" here was not the Japanese, but white American farmers who readily mistook him for a Japanese spy.

In the photo with his training mates, Rocky Iletto indeed looks rather like a Japanese pilot (fig. 43). Bearing such features is not surprising, since he himself admitted to me that his *Tatang Iskó* was also known as "*si Hapón*" in his hometown of San Ildefonso, Bulacan; who knows what secrets lie behind this nickname. The experience of misrecognition during the war nevertheless resulted in the intensification of my father's anti-Japanese sentiments. He worked hard to differentiate and distance himself from the Japanese "other" even as he appeared to be the same as them. In the "shared history" of the Philippines and the United States that my father had internalized from childhood, and which was reinforced by his American sojourn in the 1940s, Japan was the common enemy. After the war, the Japanese would be supplanted by the Chinese, Soviet, and local communists.



Fig. 43. Rocky Iletto (2nd from left) with his training mates

“Enemies” and “Friends” Revisited

My father’s brief stopover in Yokohama on the way to the US in 1940 served to confirm his fears about the imagined Japanese enemy. In 1965, two years before my journey to the United States, I, too, paid a visit to Japan (fig. 44).

In my youth I had been bombarded by the media with stories of atrocities by the Japanese. The dreaded Kempeitai’s capture and execution of a guerrilla uncle had left my maternal aunt grieving for the rest of her life. Travel and tourism, however, dissolved whatever remained of the fears I held about Japanese people that were transmitted by my elders and the media. Japan was no longer the enemy when I visited in 1965; it was a bastion of the Free World, an ally. It was starting to be an industrial powerhouse. Tokyo, in fact, had hosted the Olympics in 1964.

Shortly after my return from my brief tour of Japan, I abandoned my course in pre-engineering and took up a major in humanities instead. I also enrolled in the first-ever Nihongo language course taught at the Ateneo. From 1965 on, my received memory of Japanese atrocities would be tempered not just by travel but also by revisionist histories in which Japan no longer held a monopoly over “atrocities.” Although I did not read this textbook until after I had graduated from the Ateneo, Agoncillo’s *History* included accounts of

the US Army’s routine use of the “water cure” in quelling Filipino resistance to its occupation.

Over the following decades I would learn that, what Gen. Arthur MacArthur had done in the Philippines in 1900, his son Douglas would repeat in Japan in 1945. The firebombing of Tokyo and the nuking of Nagasaki and Hiroshima would serve the same purpose as the post-Balangiga “final solution” pursued by the US Army in Samar, Leyte, and various parts of Luzon (cf. Borrinaga 2003;



Fig. 44. Rey Ileto as tourist, Kegon Falls, Nikkō, 1967

Ileto 2002; Miller 1982). The Filipino surrender in 1902 would be repeated in the Japanese surrender of 1945, and the younger MacArthur would arrive to set up the US colonial apparatus—or GHQ government, as it was popularly called—over a desolate country. The same processes of collaboration with the Americans and tutelage in democratic politics leading to a “special relationship” with the imperial power would then follow.

In a photo from my Cornell days (fig. 45) a notice posted on a window reads: “Carpenter Hall is a liberated zone—re-named GIAP-CABRAL HALL, named after Vo Nguyen Giap, victor of Dien Bien Phu, Minister of Defense of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Amilcar Cabral, leader of the liberation forces of Guinea-Bissau.”

The official enemy of the Philippine–American alliance at this time was communism, and General Giap represented the enemy “other” as effectively as anyone could. Amilcar Cabral represented a black anticolonial nationalist variant of the same “other.” These were my father’s enemy as well; by this time Brigadier General Ileto was commander of the Philippine Army, fighting communist and Moro insurgencies, as well as the radical student movement. But in the America I came to know, represented here by this photo (fig. 45), the official enemy is the unofficial hero of the students. The

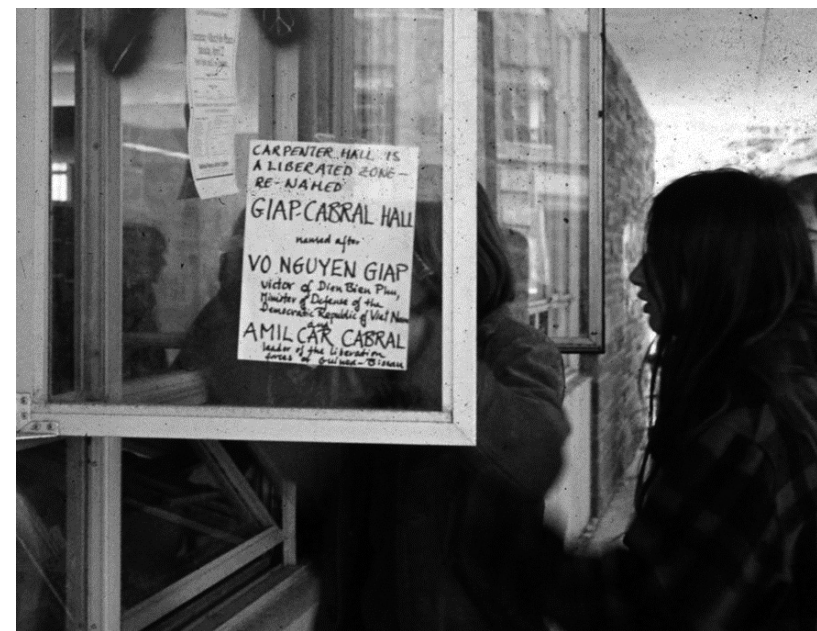


Fig. 45. Notice on a window at Cornell, 1972



Fig. 46. J. Rocamora (center) and "Remove All U.S. Troops from Vietnam Now," 1969 (above)



Fig. 47. T. B. Lam (center) and "Asians Against the Vietnam War," 1969 (left)

shared history operating in this case is vastly different. What did Vietnamese, Chinese, Blacks, Africans, Filipinos, and Japanese share here? It was the experience of being at the receiving end of American power. In 1969 my new awareness of a common cause with the supposed enemies or victims of the empire was manifested in student activities such as the march in front of the White House in Washington, DC (fig. 46). I was, with fellow Cornelians Lindy Aquino and Joel Rocamora, among the Filipinos in the group of protesters called "Asians against the Vietnam War."

Why "Asian"? The American educational system in my father's time never encouraged solidarity between Filipinos and other peoples of "Asia," although Filipinos did get slotted into the racial category "Malay." The notion of "Asian solidarity" from the 1940s up to the early 1950s was associated with Japanese Asian Co-prosperity ideals and propaganda. Only after the Bandung Conference of 1955 did Asian solidarity come to have a new meaning. Predictably, at this meeting the Filipino representative, Carlos Romulo, was derided as a lackey of the Americans. By the time of my Cornell student days, the situation had come full circle. I could identify with a Vietnamese scholar, Truong Buu Lam (fig. 47), who was openly critical of US support for the puppet South Vietnamese regime.



Fig. 48. Oliver Wolters

Holding a scholarship to study history at the height of the Vietnam War, I was bound to confront imperial historiography sooner or later. This process was initiated practically from day one by my British PhD adviser, Oliver Wolters (fig. 48). A distinguished historian of premodern Southeast Asia, Wolters came late to the academe. Until 1955 he had been a civil servant in Malaya. He served as District Officer in the campaign against the communists during the Malayan Emergency, at the same time that my father was leading the Scout Rangers in the fight against the communist-led Huk rebels. When I first visited Wolters in the Cornell History Department in August 1967, he reached toward a shelf behind him and pulled out a 1960 textbook jointly authored by Teodoro Agoncillo (fig. 49) and Oscar Alfonso titled *A History of the Filipino People*. Then he warned me in no uncertain terms: "Do not write like Agoncillo!" This was his first advice to his first Filipino student.

“Agoncillo” is partly responsible for the ideological rift that developed between me and my father. As I pointed out earlier in my discussion of the Second World War poster, “Fighting Filipinos,” American colonial historiography had tamed the figure of Bonifacio, making him serve binational ends rather than the unfinished revolution of 1896. This was the Bonifacio that my father was acquainted with.

Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan*, published in 1956 after nearly ten years of being suppressed by the government, restored Bonifacio’s militant role in the revolution. It identified Bonifacio with the “masses” and portrayed him as victim of a power struggle with Aguinaldo and members of the Cavite provincial elite. To Agoncillo the Katipunan secret society was an authentic revolutionary movement, precursor to the communist-led Hukbalahap of the 1940s for which he showed sympathy. Both Oliver Wolters and Rocky Iletto, by contrast, were busy in the 1950s suppressing communist-led insurgencies in Malaya and the Philippines, respectively. They could not possibly have been sympathetic to Agoncillo’s views.

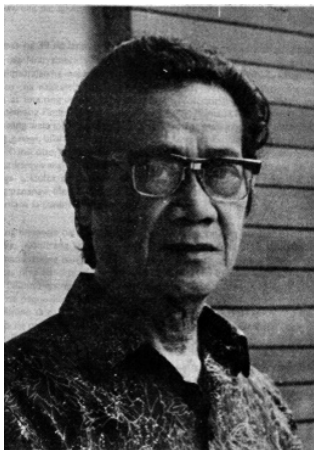


Fig. 49. Teodoro Agoncillo

Agoncillo went on to write about the Philippine–American War in *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (1960). Cesar Majul, a Muslim-Filipino scholar, had meanwhile published *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (1957). These books were part of a constellation of new writings about the Revolution and the Philippine–American War that would profoundly change how university students viewed their past. To my father, who was assigned to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) in the early 1960s, *The Revolt of the Masses* was one of those “subversive” writings that ought to be banned for spreading communist propaganda in the schools.

Despite Wolters’s early warning, I became drawn to Agoncillo’s work. But first my imagination had to be fired up by romantic accounts of the student movement I picked up from my new friends from UP then studying at Cornell. I had to go to America to discover what had been hidden from



Fig. 50. “Continue the Unfinished Revolution,” student demonstration, Manila, 1966

me in the confines of the Ateneo. After I read *Revolt of the Masses* in 1969, it became the inspiration for my PhD dissertation. Wolters, to his credit, encouraged me to follow my instincts and never failed to support my work, although I will never know if this also reflected a mellowing toward his Cold War enemies.

The 1966 clipping shown in figure 50 illustrates how Agoncillo’s revisionist histories played an important role in the student movement. The students are holding a demonstration in front of the US Embassy in Manila to protest the Vietnam War. But it is more than an antiwar demo, for as one placard declares: “Continue the Unfinished Revolution.” Students saw themselves as replicating the activities of the Filipino propagandists and revolutionists of the late nineteenth century as depicted in history books. They were also able to locate themselves in the ongoing narrative of resistance to US imperialism.

As a student in the Ateneo, I don’t think I ever became aware of the notion of “unfinished revolution.” In fact, the Philippine Revolution meant nothing to me as I was growing up. On both sides of my family there are significant links to the revolution and the Philippine–American War. I have mentioned Tatang Iskó spying for the *insurrectos* (insurgents). My great-grandfather Nemesio Clemeña of Obando, Bulacan, was a soldier in



Fig. 51. Rey Ileteo with school friends (left to right) Mike de Leon, Ruping Alonzo, and Titos de Borja, Baguio, 1967

Aguinaldo's army who kept his *rayadillo* (striped) uniform in a trunk till the day he died. The Ongsiakos produced some nationalists as well. Palma (1949, 218) writes that Rizal was hosted at dinner by "Mrs. Gorgonia Velasco de Ongsiaco" in 1892. Such banquets were monitored by the authorities, leading to raids on the houses visited by Rizal (*ibid.*). As the crisis worsened in the mid-1890s, Oniang and Lucio Ongsiako sent their daughter, Adela, to the safety of Singapore where she joined her cousin, Dr. Isidoro de Santos, chairman of the Singapore Popular Committee.

My parents, educated during late American colonial rule, had lost touch with this part of their family heritage. This is not surprising since the "old rich" such as the Ongsiakos and De Santoses had profited handsomely from the post-1901 political and economic order, while the middle classes exemplified by the Iletos and Clemeñas were drawn to the opportunities in education, politics, and the military that the new colonial regime offered. Thus was the former enemy transformed into a benefactor and tutor in democracy; resistance to it was virtually unthinkable.

My parents brought us up to continue in the American tradition, first through making English our first language and then through putting us in good Catholic schools. Father frequently compared me and my brothers

unfavorably to the sons of Ralph Hallenbeck. He wanted us to be like little brown Americans. However, as a military officer assigned to different missions, he was rarely at home to impose his will, and our mother had other ideas about raising her children. The possibility remained that at some point in our lives we would be able to reconnect with the past of our grandparents.

The Philippine history I learned, largely designed by the Jesuit scholar Horacio de la Costa, placed a lot more importance on the figure of Rizal than on Bonifacio, and on our Spanish Catholic heritage rather than the anticlerical revolt of the 1890s. The revolution in this grand narrative seemed to be more or less "finished" by American education and tutelage. I am not surprised that Agoncillo's work was never introduced to us.

Nevertheless, events in Vietnam and China made us aware of anticolonial struggles and revolutions occurring elsewhere. In the intriguing photo shown in figure 51 with my school friends, taken in Baguio right after our final exams in April 1967, we seemed to be mimicking Chinese revolutionaries, using plastic raincoats and caps. We seemed to be playing at revolution without, however, a sense of being connected to our own unfinished revolution.

Three years after I graduated from the Ateneo, the Filipino student movement came to a head with the storming of the Malacañang palace



Fig. 52. A page from *Heights*, July–Aug. 1970



Fig. 53. Ileta with Edilberto de Jesus (4th from right) and other Filipino students in New Haven, CT, 1970

gates and the establishment of the Diliman commune—events portrayed as a reenactment of the revolt of 1896. Even in my alma mater the discourse of “unfinished revolution” took root. One of my schoolmates in the above photo would thence join the revolution and end up being exiled in China when martial law was declared.

The illustration by Ed Aragon (1970) in figure 52 is from the July–August 1970 issue of *Heights*, a literary magazine produced by Ateneo university students. Notice the Molotov cocktail in the hand of a student. This would not have been admissible in 1966 when I was essay editor of this magazine.

The “First Quarter Storm,” as the student uprising of January 1970 was christened, actually reached the US in the ensuing months. In the East Coast, some Filipino students met in New Haven to discuss ways of showing their solidarity with the movement back home. In the center of the photo in figure 53 is Yale history student Edilberto de Jesus, who would later become a reluctant secretary of education in Pres. Gloria Arroyo’s first cabinet. In the photo I stand on Ed’s left, looking plump and unhealthy after three long winters in upstate New York eating half-priced pastries. The historians among us, at least, would find resonance between our student activities in the US and the work of the 1880s propagandists in Spain.

Compare the 1970 photo with a 1943 photo (fig. 54), taken in San Francisco, of a tall and smart-looking Lieutenant Ileta in the back row together with his fellow officers in the First Filipino Infantry of the US Army on the eve of their return to the Philippines with General MacArthur’s armada. Theirs is the familiar saga of the island-hopping campaign, the Leyte and Lingayen landings, and the liberation of American prisoners in the Cabanatuan prison camp by Filipino guerrillas aided by a platoon of Alamo Scouts led by team-leader Rocky Ileta. What broad historical narrative underpins these events? Not the “unfinished revolution,” I would think.

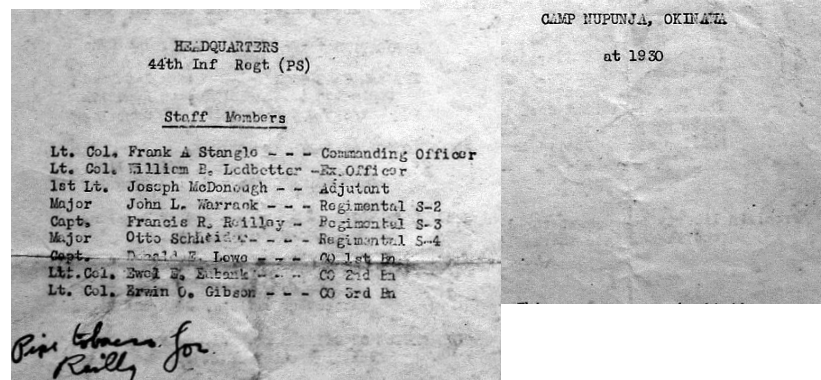
Even though my father’s “Fighting Filipino” was not the Bonifacio of the 1896 “revolt of the masses,” there nevertheless was a metanarrative underpinning his career. We get a glimpse of it in a mimeographed invitation to the celebration (fig. 55), by the 44th Infantry in Okinawa, of “American–Filipino Independence” on 4 July 1947.

July 4: Is this a celebration of American independence or Philippine independence? In fact the two celebrations are conflated into one—“American–Filipino Independence”—as announced on the front page.



Fig. 54. Officers of the First Filipino Infantry Division, 1944

Fig. 55. "American-Filipino Independence Program," 1947 (front page)



In the program we find a juxtaposition of the songs "America" and "Philippines my Philippines," and national anthems "Land of the Morning" and "Star-Spangled banner" (fig. 56). On the right we notice that Capt. Rafael Iletto, CO of Company "A," is to give a talk on the "Significance of Independence Day." I wonder what he said. From what I have described about his 1940s experience, we can guess that he would have hailed Philippine independence at that time as the culmination of US tutelage, but forged in the common Filipino-American struggle against the Japanese invaders.

Rocky Iletto began his illustrious career as an officer in the former colonial Army. In the 1947 photo shown in figure 57 he has risen to the post of company commander and is briefing his American superiors, most likely in Okinawa. After his return to the Philippines, however, he would turn down an offer of US citizenship (and a comfortable career in the US Army) and instead join the fledgling army of the newly independent Philippines.

I, too, was entangled in the empire's web, but the very different America I encountered in the late 1960s helped me to maintain a certain stance as a scholar in the embrace of empire without being entrapped in its ideological cage. Asian solidarity in the face of US imperialism brought me to Washington to protest the Vietnam War (fig. 58).

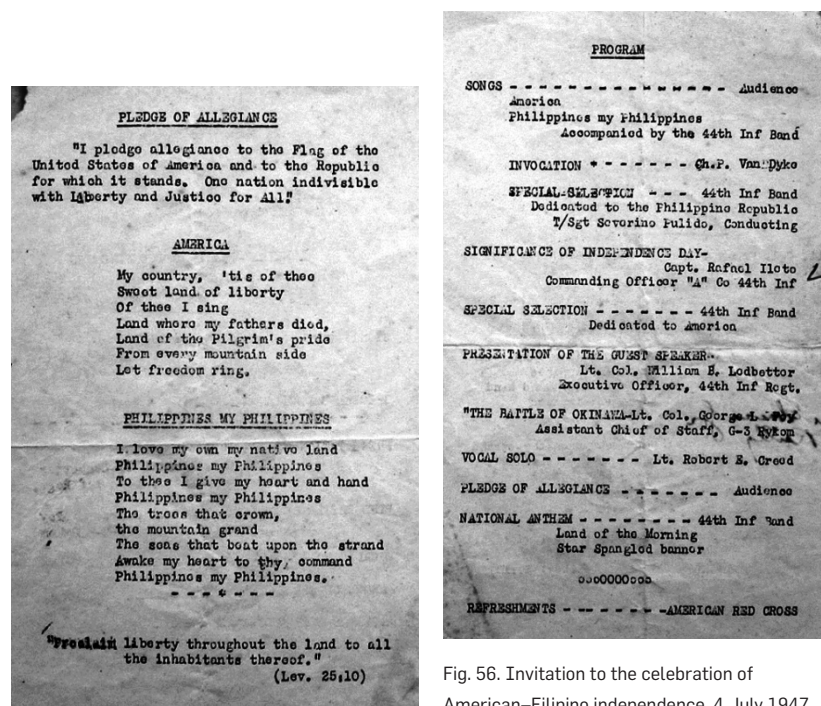


Fig. 56. Invitation to the celebration of American-Filipino independence, 4 July 1947



Fig. 57. Capt. Iletto briefing his American supervisors, 1947



Fig. 58. Rey Ileteo in Washington, DC, Nov. 1969

From 2 to 4 July 1970, a large number of Filipino students in the East Coast of the United States “celebrated” the Fourth of July (Philippine–American Friendship Day) by holding an all-Filipino conference in Ithaca to discuss our academic work in relation to the unfinished revolution in the homeland. Was this gathering of Filipinos, which included the likes of Walden Bello, Joel Rocamora, and Epifanio San Juan, a vestige perhaps of the 1880s Propaganda Movement mounted by Filipino students in Spain? Thanks to the pioneering works of nationalist scholars such as Agoncillo and Majul in the 1950s and early 1960s, at least it was possible for us to imagine such a scenario.

As president of the Cornell Filipino Club at that time, it was my task to welcome the participants with a brief speech. It was then that I introduced my take on Agoncillo’s “revolt of the masses” theme, which I would develop later in my PhD thesis. I suggested to the audience that we must listen intently to voices “from below” instead of imposing our categories of meaning on the so-called masses. This was not just a historical problem (i.e., how to understand the 1896 revolt better) but a problem as well of the present: student activists, despite their well-meaning enthusiasm for the cause, tended to preach to rather than learn from the masses. I agreed with many others

in the student movement that the lessons of the Chinese revolution led by Chairman Mao should be heeded by Filipinos.

Past and present hence were intertwined for us. But what about my father, who by 1970 had risen to the position of commanding general of the Army? As he led his men in the fight against Moro and communist rebels, no doubt he was putting into practice the lessons in history and warfare that he had learned since his PMA and especially his West Point days.

The Ithaca student conference led to the founding of a movement called NAFUS, an acronym for “National Association of Filipinos in the US.” It was supposed to coordinate closely with the student movement in the Philippines. In September 1972 Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. Many former members of NAFUS took to campaigning against the Marcos regime and its US patron. In early 1973 my father, sidelined by Marcos to the innocuous position of vice chief of staff of the Armed Forces (while approving of martial law in the war against communism), warned me not to return to Manila as planned, since I was on a blacklist and would be arrested. Not wishing to stay in the United States, I hurriedly finished my thesis so that I could take up a postdoctoral fellowship in Australia and from there negotiate my return to Manila.

Some Ten Years Later

Rafael “Apeng” Ileteo journeyed to the United States in 1940 to train as a cadet at West Point, and emerged as Rocky Ileteo, a model soldier in the empire’s global army. After fighting the Japanese, the Cold War would be his next battlefield. He had long accepted the view that struggles for economic and social emancipation threatened the American way of life, which for him seemed indistinguishable from the Filipino way of life. The “communists” were as real a threat to him in the post-1946 period as the “Japs” were during the previous decade. Not surprisingly, his early career consisted of replicating American institutions in the newly independent Philippines. He patterned the PMA more closely after his beloved USMA. He fathered the Scout Rangers, a clone of the US Army’s Alamo Scouts.

In the photo shown in figure 59, ten years after he set foot in the United States he is a newly promoted major addressing the first graduates of the Scout Ranger Training Unit (SRTU). Note the presence in the audience of an American officer and his wife. In his battles against the communists Rocky Ileteo was guided by the US Embassy, JUSMAG (Joint US Military



Fig. 59. Major Iletos addressing graduates of SRTU, ca. 1951



Fig. 60. Asst. Prof. Iletos with UP historians visiting China, 1979

Advisory Group), and the CIA. He was a soldier of the empire, embodying America's presence in the Philippine nation-state.

In 1967 it was my turn to go to the US to pursue graduate studies at Cornell. Ten years later, I was back in the Philippines as an assistant professor in the University of the Philippines's History Department. The 1979 photo (fig. 60) shows me with a group of Filipino historians visiting the People's Republic of China. To my father it was bad enough that I had been recruited into the UP Arts and Sciences faculty, which he considered a hotbed of communism—but now a visit to “Red China” in a gesture of friendship to the enemy? This was a bit too much for him. Yet, as I have shown in this essay, it was actually my sojourn in America that led me along this path.

In this essay I have tried to explain my father's beliefs and actions in the light of his upbringing and his times, and to learn something from the

Fig. 61. Father and son, 1947



divergence in our paths. We were both creatures of empire, deeply formed by it, and left with precious little room to deflect and manage its power. I think one can show love and gratitude to a father without being colonized by his beliefs. My father had very strong views about Japan as the enemy in the Second World War, China (together with the Soviet Union) as the enemy in



Fig. 62. Mother and son, 1949



Fig. 63. Rafael Iletto poses with his scrapbooks together with his son (right) and visitor Vicente Rafael. He passed away six months later, on 19 June 2003.

the Cold War, and the sinister influence of “godless communism” upon the Filipino youth. In all this, however, he basically took the cue from America. His career is the perfect example of the special and enduring relationship between the United States and the Philippines.

In the photo in figure 61 my father shows how strong a soldier he is by holding me up with one arm. But I am not looking at him. Instead my gaze seems to be directed at the person taking the picture: my mother.

My artist-mother possessed an ironic sensibility and, although largely apolitical herself, could sense that things were not often what they appeared to be. The photo in figure 62 sums up my relationship with her throughout my childhood. She understood why my career developed practically in opposition to my father’s. In a sense I have merely fleshed out in this essay her sentiments about the man she loved, whose behavior she could decry as well as admire. She is the absent presence throughout this pictorial narrative of father and son (fig. 63) in the embrace of Uncle Sam.

Note

The initial versions of this paper were presented in March 2008 at two different places: first, at a conference in Tokyo on “American Nationalism and Empire in an Age of Globalization,” and then as a keynote lecture for the conference on “Philippine Palimpsests: Filipino Studies in the 21st Century,” University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It took its final shape, more or less, as a keynote lecture for the “International Conference on Postcolonial Praxis,” held at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, in July 2010.

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