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## **The Battle of Mactan and the Indigenous Discourse on War**

Jose Amiel Angeles

*The Spanish conquest of the Philippines is a neglected topic in Philippine historiography, with most interpretations, especially of its military aspect, being dated, biased, or cursory. This article revisits the conquest by focusing on the interaction of the Spanish and Filipino paradigms of warfare—what John Lynn calls a people's discourse on war. This discourse is a product of a people's history, geography, and culture and it affects such factors as how and why a people wage war. Through an examination of the Spanish and Filipino discourses on war, events of the Spanish conquest may be seen in their proper context, and the actions and motivations of the people involved are illumined.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Spanish conquest, warfare, indigenous culture, discourse on war*

When mention is made of the Spanish conquest of the Philippine islands in the sixteenth century, the first event that inevitably comes to mind is the Battle of Mactan. Every Filipino schoolchild knows the local chieftain, Lapu Lapu, who defeated a small force of Europeans under the command of the famous Portuguese explorer and conquistador, Fernão de Magalhães or Ferdinand Magellan. This battle has entered into the canon of Philippine history and, indeed, is etched in Philippine nationalist consciousness. Lapu Lapu is a national hero, and his victory over Magellan is extolled as a typical example of prehispanic Philippine martial prowess. The narrative of the battle is fairly well known, but bears repeating in brief. The analysis of this battle can also serve as a model for reexamining other battles during the Spanish conquest, since

the peoples of the Philippines would use the same tactics in later engagements.

In 1521 Magellan reached portions of the Philippine islands—which he named the Islas de San Lazaro and claimed for the Spanish crown—and promptly got involved in the rivalries of local chieftains. He had managed to secure the allegiance or submission of these chiefs, the most important being Rajah Humabon of Cebu. One chief did not submit: Lapu Lapu of Mactan (Cushner 1966, 23; Jocano 1975, 68). A justifiably famous man, Lapu Lapu is a remarkably shadowy figure. Pigafetta mentions him only once before the Battle of Mactan, introducing him as one of the chiefs of Mactan. It is not known if Magellan and Lapu Lapu had any contact prior to the exchanges that led to the battle itself. However, given that Mactan (as Pigafetta states) was very close to Cebu, and Lapu Lapu's settlement was just across from Humabon's port, Magellan was surely *at least* aware of Lapu Lapu. Did Lapu Lapu know about Magellan?

The immediate cause of the battle was apparently another chief from Mactan named Zula, who claimed to be unable to send the bulk of his tribute to Magellan because of Lapu Lapu, who denied the overlordship of either Humabon or the King of Spain (Cushner 1966, 23; Jocano 1975, 68). Zula asked for one boatload of Europeans to help fight Lapu Lapu, but Magellan decided to send three boatloads with sixty of his men, himself included. He personally led this small force, despite the protests of his crew (Pigafetta 1969, 87). He also brought Humabon and some of his warriors to witness what was supposed to be a European victory (Jocano 1972, 68).

On 27 April 1521 Magellan, coming from the main island of Cebu, arrived at Mactan three hours before dawn. With a local Muslim merchant acting as interpreter, Magellan gave Lapu Lapu a chance to capitulate, and the two exchanged threats involving their respective cultures' spears. Lapu Lapu was defiant and unsuccessfully tried to lure the Europeans into attacking his settlement prematurely, where pits had been dug as traps. Magellan and his men waited in their boats and only attacked in the morning.

The boats of the Europeans were unable to approach the shore, supposedly because of rocks or corals in the water, which also prevented

the large ships from supporting Magellan with their artillery. Magellan and his men had to wade “three crossbow flights” before they could reach the shore.<sup>1</sup> Magellan attacked with only forty-nine men, including himself, the equivalent of less than half of his remaining crew. They confronted Lapu Lapu’s much larger force that, in Pigafetta’s probably exaggerated estimate, numbered 1,500 men.<sup>2</sup>

The Mactan warriors formed themselves into three groups and attacked Magellan from both flanks and the front, shouting loud cries and brandishing their weapon (Jocano 1972, 68).<sup>3</sup> Magellan divided his small force into two and ordered his men to engage the local warriors with their arquebuses and crossbows. However, the missiles had little appreciable effect since the local fighters were at the extreme range of the Europeans’ projectiles. Furthermore, Lapu Lapu’s warriors dodged the bullets and crossbow bolts with great dexterity. Apparently, the shields of the warriors of Mactan were made of light materials and were easily pierced by the European missiles, but this had no effect on the warrior wielding the shield. Despite his best efforts, Magellan was unable to stop his men from wasting their missiles, and the Europeans kept up their missile fire for almost half an hour. In response, Lapu Lapu’s warriors subjected the Europeans to a heavy and demoralizing barrage of arrows, iron-tipped bamboo lances, fire-hardened sticks, and even stones. Pigafetta did not indicate at what range Lapu Lapu’s warriors threw these projectiles or how effective this barrage was, although the immediate fatalities they inflicted must have been minimal, given that only eight of the Europeans were killed in the entire battle, three of whom (Magellan and two raiders) were killed *after* this barrage. Perhaps this relatively low kill count could be attributed to the fact that the Europeans were wearing “corselets and helmets,” and missiles stood little chance of piercing armor (Tobler 2004, 195).<sup>4</sup> Magellan attempted to ease the pressure on his small force by sending two men to burn the houses of Mactan, which, however, did not distract or demoralize the local warriors.

After enduring the barrage for some time, Magellan was finally hit in the leg by a poisoned arrow. Pigafetta did not make it clear why Magellan was finally hit at this point—after enduring what must have been at least half an hour of fighting. Was this a lucky hit? Did the warriors of Mactan realize that the legs were better targets than the protected torso?

If the latter is the case, one wonders why the natives did not aim for the Europeans' legs immediately. Surely it would not have escaped the notice of Mactan's trained warriors—who also used armor themselves—that Magellan's legs were relatively undefended.

In any event, Magellan now called for an orderly withdrawal. Most of his men were shaken and demoralized, and beat a hasty and undisciplined retreat, abandoning Magellan with just six or eight men. Magellan tried to cover his army's retreat with his remaining men. Only now was he ineffectually aided by the large ships' cannons. Mactan's pursuing warriors aimed at the other Europeans' unarmored legs—providing proof only at this point that they had focused most of their attention on Magellan, who finally succumbed while wading to the boats, after fighting off repeated attempts at his person. Interestingly, only after Magellan had been injured and abandoned is there evidence that the warriors of Mactan fought with swords at close quarters.

Humabon then took command and ordered the boats to withdraw after the wounded had been rescued, although the dead bodies were left behind. According to Pigafetta, the battle cost the Europeans eight dead and a large but unspecified number of wounded. Four of Humabon's warriors were killed, although when and where these warriors were killed are not known. Possibly, they were killed when they tried to rescue the fleeing Europeans. Pigafetta's account mentions that the ships' cannons killed fifteen of Lapu Lapu's men but does not say how many casualties Lapu Lapu's warriors sustained during the heat of the battle itself.

### **Philippine Military Historiography**

Very little is actually known of this battle and much is lost to history, including such basic details as its exact location or whether Lapu Lapu personally fought in the battle. There are only two reliable documentary descriptions of the Battle of Mactan: the account by Antonio Pigafetta (1969, 87–89), and a very brief description by Fernando Oliveira (2000, 34–35).<sup>5</sup> Yet this lack of information has not prevented commentators from imputing a variety of possibly anachronistic motives to Lapu Lapu's actions. For instance, Uldarico Baclagon (1975, 3–4) ascribed to Lapu Lapu's actions such modern tactical considerations and concepts like

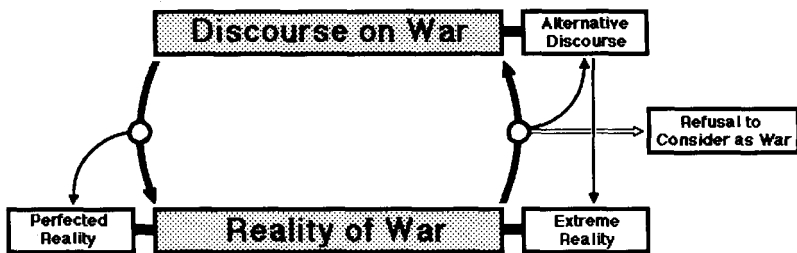
double envelopment, or the “principle of concentration of combat power.” The battle is especially (and understandably) beloved by practitioners of modern Filipino martial arts, who cite it as proof of the existence of martial arts like *arnis* (e.g., *Anima* 1982, 5)<sup>6</sup>—even if Pigafetta and subsequent chroniclers offer little solid evidence of hand-to-hand combat during the Spanish conquest. Despite being the most famous battle in Philippine history, it also seems as if the Battle of Mactan is among the most misunderstood. Historians have tended to evaluate the military actions of the prehispanic peoples in the Philippines through Western lenses. Such an approach is odd considering recent attempts to “lift the parchment curtain” in order to find the “voice” of Filipinos in history.

This article attempts to rectify the bias in Philippine military historiography by placing the Battle of Mactan in its proper perspective and by comparing and contrasting it with other battles that the islanders fought against Spaniards.<sup>7</sup> It is hoped that analyzing these battles will shed light on the prehispanic practices of warfare. Why did the islanders fight battles? Who fought in them? How did the islanders fight? What were the consequences of battle? Why did the local inhabitants win in Mactan but lose every other engagement against the Spaniards in the sixteenth century?

In order to answer these questions, this article briefly examines the notions of warfare of the prehispanic coastal settlements whose inhabitants, this article posits, had their own unique kind of warmaking distinct from that of the Spaniards. Following the cultural approach to military history that John Keegan is acknowledged to have pioneered, and used by such scholars as John Lynn and Geoffrey Parker, one should not assume that the Spaniards and the Philippine islanders were “obeying, even if unwittingly, the rules of some universal higher logic of war” (Keegan 1976, 21) or that the two cultures fought in ways that were “essentially alike” (Lynn 2003, xiv). As Lynn (*ibid.*) says, “a cultural interpretation is most likely to grant individuals and peoples their full personal, social, and cultural character”—which is especially relevant in the effort to recapture the Philippine “voice” in past events, as William Henry Scott (1982) and Reynaldo Ileto (1997) have sought to do.

Geographically, the study is limited to lowland coastal societies of Luzon and the Visayas, although mention will be made of the lowland societies in Mindanao that interacted with Villalobos. This study makes the important assumption that the lowland, coastal communities in the Philippine islands shared a common culture (albeit with variations), and that this culture was part of the greater cultural complex of insular Southeast Asia.

This study follows the conceptual framework formulated by John Lynn and used in his book, *Battle* (2003). Lynn (2004) offers a diagram to illustrate how, during warfare, the opposing cultures each have their own notion of warfare, and these notions of war interact to create the reality of warfare:



Source: Lynn 2004

“Discourse” is defined as “the complex of assumptions, perceptions, expectations, and values on a particular subject” (Lynn 2003, xx–xxi). A society’s “discourse on war” is its comprehensive image of ideal war as influenced by its larger body of culture.<sup>8</sup> This image of “ideal” war affects the way a society wages war and, therefore, determines the ensuing reality of war, including such important considerations as how a society will fight, what it will choose to value during warfare, or how many casualties a society is willing to sustain. However, the reality of war is never exactly like the society’s idealization of it. Lynn places great stress on the evolution of discourse and reality.<sup>9</sup>

As is well known, the Spanish conquest of the Philippine islands was not a continuous event. It probably began with Magellan’s expedition in 1521, and continued on with the expeditions of Loaysa (1525–1526),

Saavedra (1527–1529), and Villalobos (1542–1546), before “ending” with Legazpi’s expedition (1565–1572). The Spaniards fought the islanders of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao many times and in combats of varying intensity. Most of these combats were small-scale ambushes and skirmishes, or assaults on indigenous settlements. These small-scale actions cannot be defined strictly as “battles.” A battle may be defined as an armed engagement within a larger conflict that “must obey the dramatic unities of time, place and action” (Keegan 1976, 14). This study agrees with Felice Noelle Rodriguez (1999), who provides an invaluable ethnographic study of indigenous terminology and weaponry during the period of conquest, that certain elements—like specific actions on the part of the islanders—must be met before any combat can be considered a “battle” by lowland Philippine cultures. This study offers a framework for understanding these elements, and from this perspective, for the period covered, only four battles—Mactan (1521), Cebu (1565), Manila (1570), and Bancusay Bay (1571)—can be counted as true battles between the peoples of the Philippine islands and the Spaniards.

Did the locals consider the Westerners as outside their political and spiritual world and thereby adopt unusual strategies to deal with the Europeans, or as part of their spiritual and political system that had to be dealt with like any other aggressor? That the indigenous inhabitants of the Philippine islands were aware that Europeans were different from them is quite certain, although they could probably not always tell specific differences between Portuguese and Spaniards. There were several instances during the Spanish conquest when the islanders specifically mentioned the name “Castilla,” and Pigafetta makes it evident that Humabon was aware of the Portuguese—since the Muslim merchant tried to intimidate Humabon with the claim that the Spanish king was more powerful than the Portuguese king (Scott 1966, 46; Pigafetta 1969, 76; Saavedra 1903, 42; Legazpi 1965, 95; Cushner 1966, 71). However, did the Philippine islanders think of the Spaniards as being outside their system of power and treat them differently?

Rodriguez (1999, 42, my translation) is of the opinion that the indigenous peoples treated the Europeans differently: “It is certain that [the indigenous peoples] did not face the Spaniards as warriors. They faced the Spaniards as defenders of a world put in peril by the recent discovery



of a new world.” However, the evidence presented in this study suggests that the locals thought the Iberians were within the indigenous power scheme because the indigenous peoples’ responses to the Spaniards corresponded with their “normal” responses to aggressors. The locals did not show any of the shock that the inhabitants of the Americas faced upon encountering Europeans. As Filomeno Aguilar (1998, 34) conjectures, the inhabitants of the Philippine islands probably considered the Spaniards to be human, and, therefore, “they too, like the natives, would have possessed *dungan*.” The locals likely perceived the Europeans as part of their world, and were either challengers or potential allies of the local chiefs. In other words, the peoples of the Philippines adopted most of their usual strategies and tactics in battle when dealing with the Spaniards. In the case of Lapu Lapu and the people of Mactan, this lack of shock may have been compounded by possible familiarity with the Portuguese (as the people of Cebu certainly were).

### **Spiritual Potency and Warfare**

The indigenous lowland coastal peoples that the Spanish conquistadors encountered in the Philippine islands possessed a cultural framework quite similar to that of other Southeast Asian societies. The difference was that the indigenous Philippine coastal communities were smaller in economic and political scale, their chiefs politically weaker, and their notion of centrality and government less conceptually developed than similar societies in the region. This prehispanic Philippine culture has been described at greater length in other studies (Aguilar 1998; Junker 2000; Rafael 2000; Reid 1988; Wolters 1982), and so here only those aspects relevant to warfare will be discussed.

The lack of a central authority in the Philippine islands meant that a datu’s power and legitimacy did not come from an “independent physical power base” like “a specialized police force, standing army, codified law” or other means of coercion (Junker 2000, 66). Rather, for the lowland coastal cultures, legitimacy and authority came from a chief’s qualities and his ability to attract followers by using the language of the spirit world as a source of legitimacy, which was the highest authority the lowland people respected (Aguilar 1998, 56; Rafael 2000, 140–41). Politi-

cal authority was established through displays of what Benedict Anderson refers to as Power, or spiritual potency. Oliver Wolters (1982, 6) equates this spiritual potency to "soul stuff," which Aguilar (1998, 28) refers to by the Ilonggo term *dungan*. This spiritual potency conferred "acute intelligence, vast knowledge, indomitable willpower, and self-confidence" and "a robust physique, sharp mind, masterful oratorical style, good fortune, bravery" (ibid., 28–29)—in short, the tools needed to be an effective leader. However, there was a limited quantity of soul stuff in the cosmos. A chief was a "man of prowess" who had a concentration of power (Anderson 1990, 22–23; Wolters 1982, 6), and he had to compete with other chiefs who could undermine his authority by displays of power and potency.

In practical terms, spiritual potency was displayed through what may be seen as acts of "good governance" in a prestate society, including acts of arbitrating in disputes (Morga 1971, 271; Chirino 1969, 256; Scott 1994, 130). Gift giving, or sharing in the material benefits gained from spiritual potency, was also an important way of making vassals feel obliged to the chief (Aguilar 1998, 29). At the highest level of political and interpersonal relations, a chief created political ties and a vassal network by distributing rare, high-value objects, or "prestige goods," like Chinese porcelain, jewelry, and iron weapons (Junker 2000, 292–312). A chief also threw feasts for his followers, during which prestige foods like rice were eaten in abundance (ibid., 139). Perhaps the most important way a chief had to act (particularly as far as a study of military history is concerned) was to show "valor" or bravery in combat. This was especially important, since the indigenous spirit world and the social world were both fraught with conflict (Aguilar 1998, 56–57). Chiefs had to protect their followers, but also had to lead them to battle and victory (Morga 1971, 271; Scott 1994, 157, 221). Displays of "good governance" implied the possession of spiritual potency, and vice versa. Followers were attracted to individuals who could display spiritual potency for the simple reason that it expedited the basics of survival.

The power system based on spiritual potency and soul stuff was reflected in the rivalries and conflicts between the datu of different communities. The chiefs had to handle "external" relations the way they would "internal relations," or by attracting the chiefs of other commu-

nities as individuals and making sure they were attached to his person (Wolters 1982, 18). As Aguilar (1998, 56–57) puts it, “the dispersion of settlements became a spatial expression of relative *dungan* strength among the native chiefs.” Since vassals could shift allegiances to those chiefs who they thought were stronger in spiritual potency, a chief had to compete with other chiefs on an interpolity level simply to maintain his authority within the local community. There was no real difference between “internal relations,” or politics within a single community, and “external relations.”

The “perpetual competition,” together with the uncertainties of succession and lack of institutional stability, led to what Junker (2000, 88) calls “political cycling” as a successful chief could create alliance networks and increase in power, but then lose all of his gains and sink in importance if he failed to maintain his power base. Authority shifted from polity to polity, depending on a chief’s ability to project spiritual potency and attract followers (Wolters 1981, 17–18, 20; Junker 2000, 16).

Warfare, therefore, was another way for a chief to participate in the prestige culture and show his level of spiritual potency (Aguilar 1998, 28; Junker 2000, 336; Scott 1994, 153, 231; Charney 2004, 1–6). Warfare was not strictly a matter of external relations, but was also an important means for a chief to prove his legitimacy and prowess to his followers, which thus blurred the distinction between the private quarrels of duels and feuds with the “public” conflicts of warfare (Aguilar 1998, 64). The chief was obliged to defend his community, which was expected of any leader, but a good datu also had to lead his people in offensive attacks and raids (Scott 1994, 157). The spiritual reasons for warfare would also explain why the causes of war were normally associated with “prestige” or social standing (Rodriguez 1999, 136–37)—the chiefs went to war to either increase their display of prestige, or to avenge any attacks on their prestige and, therefore, their spiritual potency. The boundaries between the private family and the public community were also blurred because of the loose definition of kinship (Zialcita 2005, 57–58).

Some of these attacks, like slave raids, piracy, and attacks on rival ports and trade, seem to have been “economically motivated,” but they were really meant to further a chief’s participation and standing in the prestige culture (Junker 2000, 337; Rodriguez 2003, 151–53). Aside from

showing a chief's bellicosity and valor, raiding gave the chief booty and slaves, which he could disburse to his followers as prestige goods. Conversely, these raids destroyed a rival chief's resource base and reduced his ability to participate in the prestige culture.<sup>10</sup>

Indigenous warfare in the Philippine islands aimed to draw or keep people within a chief's alliance network through displays of spiritual potency; it was "aggregative" in that it aimed to consolidate and control people, as territory in and of itself was rarely the object of warfare (Carneiro 1994, 14; Scott 1994, 153; Andaya 1979, 23). This may instantly suggest slave raiding, but a chief could gain extra manpower and tribute simply by securing the allegiance of another chief, and did not always need to "collect" or physically transplant people.

### The Purpose of Battles

In many cases, the costs and risks of frontal combat would have outweighed the potential benefits. Indigenous warfare tended to avoid direct confrontation and combat. Observers have noted that Southeast Asians in general had a propensity for "deception" in combat and chose to avoid costly battles and confrontations because these were wasteful in lives and resources (Reid 1988, 123).<sup>11</sup> William Marsden (1966, 349, but also 378–79) has emphasized this in his description of the warfare of the Menangkabau: "although much parade attends their preparations for war and their marches . . . yet their operations are carried rather in the way of ambushade, and surprise of straggling parties . . ."

Anderson (1990, 44) has pointed out that "[m]assive destruction leads to local depopulation, disorder, and economic decline, and possibly later to guerrilla resistance," which ran counter to a datu's desire to either physically capture people or attract them as vassals. The conquest or absorption of a rival settlement was best accomplished through "diplomatic pressure, and other *halus* (smooth, civilized) methods of inducing recognition of superiority or suzerainty" (ibid., 44–45).<sup>12</sup> Often this could be done through intimidation or by trying to redirect trade toward the datu's ports. During the Johor-Jambi Wars in the late 1660s and early 1670s, the two sides frequently assembled large fleets, intimidated each other's capitals, and engaged in attacks on each other's naval trade routes but rarely

fought pitched combats (Andaya 1975, 90–91).<sup>13</sup> Dramatically, in the Chiang Mai chronicle, King Mangrai successfully attacked the powerful ruler of Haribhunjaya through a clever stratagem proposed by his clerk Ai Fa, who infiltrated the king of Haribhunjaya's court and subverted his rule (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1995, 18–20). Whether this event actually happened is debatable, but that this kind of stratagem is celebrated in epic says much of that culture's notions of warfare.

In the Battle of Mactan the role of Zula, the mysterious chieftain, might have been one of dissimulation. This person was the apparent cause of the entire battle, yet he disappears from Pigafetta's account almost as soon as he is mentioned. Where was he during the battle itself? The translator, Rodrigue Lévesque (1980, 60), offers the intriguing possibility (but without proof) that Zula was sent by Lapu Lapu to lure Magellan into a trap. Another likely explanation for Zula's actions is that he was a rival of Lapu Lapu and thought to use Magellan to eliminate him. Nonetheless, it is interesting to speculate on a Zula-Lapu Lapu alliance.

Defensive responses to frontal aggression were too effective: flight placed the threatened people, who were the aggressor's main targets, out of reach. The forests of the Philippines were also ideal places of refuge because they were nearly impenetrable (Reid 1988, 2–3; Junker 2000, 61; Phelan 1957, 17–18). What the indigenous inhabitants considered wealth was also highly portable and their houses were easily rebuilt, which did not make them worth defending (Reid 1988, 122). Thus, inhabitants from such seemingly important and well-positioned settlements as Cebu or Manila chose to flee rather than stubbornly defend their settlements (Legazpi 1965, 102; Blair and Robertson 1903, 150). For much the same reasons, the people of Mindanao responded to attacks by fleeing or retreating from danger. A chief as powerful as Kudarat avoided battle with the Spaniards in 1643 (Laarhoven 1989, 35). Even the rulers of larger Southeast Asian settlements, such as Malacca in 1511, fled from what they perceived were superior forces (Parker 1988, 121–22).<sup>14</sup>

Weaker chiefs often chose to submit to, rather than resist, stronger chiefs. They could ransom themselves or their communities in order to maintain their authority (Rodriguez 2003, 159). Submission was not considered defeat. A weaker chief who attached himself to a more

powerful chief could partake of the benefits and protection of being a vassal of a spiritually powerful man. The tactic of submission was made doubly attractive by the fact that the indigenous Philippine system of power based on charismatic attraction through soul stuff did not encourage a chief to be despotic, which would alienate his vassals. For instance, one form of submission, or alliance-building, the *casi-casi* or blood compact, implied a union of equals (*ibid.*, 160–61).

Examining those settlements that accepted the challenge of battle during the Spanish conquest may help in determining why a datu would fight in frontal combat. Perhaps accepting battle was a chance to show spiritual potency, and was a very visible display of warrior prestige. This could be used to further a datu's cause, undercut his rivals, and attract more followers. It seems apparent, for instance, that almost all of the datu who accepted the challenge of battle during the Spanish conquest—Lapu Lapu, the Macabebe chief of Navotas, Soliman of Manila, and Tupas of Cebu—were not the *only* chiefs either in their immediate settlement or in the geographical area. Lapu Lapu and Soliman were likely involved in keen rivalries with the other datu in the area, and accepting the challenge of something so visible as a battle—and winning—would have added immeasurably to their prestige. This consideration may be inferred in the prebattle posturing of Lapu Lapu and the chief of Navotas: both men made very public displays of bellicosity during the run-up to their battles. Lapu Lapu repudiated in strong terms Magellan's orders to submit, which included the well-known Freudian riposte to Magellan's claim of the keenness of the European lances (Pigafetta 1969, 87; Jocano 1972, 68). The Navotas chief's challenge to Miguel Lopez de Legazpi was even more visible and dramatic: he sailed with a large fleet to Tondo and hurled a spear, and vocally announced his challenge (Licuanan and Mira 1990–1993, 3:359; Noone 1982, 409; Rodriguez 2003, 155). Even Soliman evinced this posturing during the negotiations with Legazpi. These displays could be seen as public shows of spiritual potency calculated to increase the chief's prestige.

One way of knowing that the islanders considered a particular engagement as a battle was the overwhelming show of force before the actual fighting. The indigenous peoples accepted the challenge of battle only when they had a clear advantage in numbers and had a high prob-

ability of victory (Rodriguez 1999, 87, 112). Pigafetta stated that Lapu Lapu had 1,500 warriors in the Battle of Mactan (Jocano 1975, 69). Legazpi fought around 2,000 warriors in Cebu (Legazpi 1965, 101; Noone 1982, 321). No exact figures were given for the Battle of Manila, although an anonymous chronicler claimed that Soliman had many warriors (Anon. 1965, 172–73). The people of a settlement in Mindoro were also quite numerous, although they did capitulate to Martin de Goiti because of his diplomacy (*ibid.*, 163). The accuracy of these numbers is suspect, but the figures indicate a likely advantage in numbers on the side of the islanders.

Battles, therefore, were not the last recourse of the desperate, but were the choices of strong chiefs who wanted to increase their prestige. During the conquest the indigenous peoples accepted the challenge of battle only when they had a perception of either strength or parity with the Iberians. Thus, there was rationality behind the decision when to fight or not to fight. Understandably, those settlements and datu that had a previous experience with European military power chose *not* to fight. The people of settlements in the Visayas (like Limasawa, Camiguin, and Cabailan) fled from the men of Legazpi's expedition because they had been the victims of a massive and destructive raid from the Portuguese, who had claimed to be Spaniards (National Historical Commission 1969, 1:404–6). Raja Matanda wished to surrender to Martin de Goiti, probably because of his experience of being defeated by the *Victoria* as a young man (Majul 1999, 78–79). When the Europeans returned to Manila a year after Goiti's expedition, the people of Manila fled straight away (Blair and Robertson 1903, 153).

### The Combatants

It is not easy to determine which sections of indigenous society fought in their battles. Generally, historians have divided the prehispanic Philippine social ladder into three: the *datu* class (*maginoo* in Tagalog society), from which the chiefs were drawn; next came the *timawa*, although Tagalog society had an additional group of people known as *maharlika* who seem to have occupied the same social tier as the *timawa*; and the slaves, the *oripun* in Visayan and *alipin* in Tagalog society.

Membership in these status groups could be very fluid because the social stratification of the cultures in the Philippine islands was also based on spiritual potency and levels of *utang ng loob* (Rafael 2000, 146; Aguilar 1998, 69). Social differentiation was determined by who controlled labor, rather than through a rigid economic differentiation. As such, there were no strict "social classes" in the Philippine islands; what existed were status groups where membership was achieved through displays of wealth, strength, or prestige. Every person could gather followers or debt peons and rise up socially; indigenous societies seem to have had an antipathy to manual labor (e.g., house building or agricultural duties), and "public life" was the most desirable form of life for the islanders (Wolters 1982, 8–9).

Anderson's definition of spiritual power makes it clear that power could be acquired by the *timawa* or even an *alipin*, and thus every person in indigenous society "believed that they, too, were capable of achievement" (*ibid.*). This study theorizes that participation in warfare was the most public and most prestigious act in prehispanic society, and thus wielding weapons and fighting in combat were practiced by *datu*, *timawa*, and any indigenous male that could, to show his status and prowess or to rise up in social rank. Participation in warfare was desirable because of the potential rewards: slaves, material bounty, and public validation of prestige and spiritual power (Reid 1988, 124; Wiener 1995). This culture of martial prestige was likely what motivated the warriors to fight better (Junker 2000, 348–49).

Given this kind of social ranking, it is difficult to say if the indigenous peoples had a dedicated warrior elite. Junker (*ibid.*, 126–27) described the *timawa* and *maharlika* as warrior elites, but the indigenous social hierarchy was too complex for this to be understood as an equivalent to the *bellatore* of medieval Europe or the samurai of medieval Japan. Some *timawa* may have occupied a "higher" social status than others, and performed more prestigious duties, usually war-related (Scott 1994, 222). The Tagalog *maharlika*, for instance, may have been warriors primarily (*ibid.*, 222–23; Junker 2000, 126). Although most *timawa* were agricultural in vocation (Scott 1994, 222), the Visayan *timawa* were generally warriors. However, they did have an elite group known as the *atubang sa datu*, or "one who faces the *datu*," who occupied and performed more presti-



gious public offices and duties than other timawa (Junker 2000, 127). There were even slaves in Visayan society, the *borohan*, who functioned as warriors and were almost indistinguishable from lower-tier timawa (Scott 1994, 134).

This is not to say that, in war and the battlefield, indigenous society practiced “equal opportunity” or was egalitarian. The datu, maharlika, and timawa at the top of the indigenous social scale probably had many of the same advantages of warrior-elites in other cultures. As the foci of debt-relations, social elites had more control over their time and could devote more of it to the prestigious duty of training for war than other social groups; they had more control over resources, and could thus afford the best weapons, armor, and nourishment (O’Connell 1995, 114). These elites would have dominated the battlefield, and some may have dominated even their own communities. In Visayan cultures, some warriors were tattooed even on their eyelids, as proof of their high level of martial prowess; Scott (1994, 20) posited that these men “constituted a Spartan elite” that intimidated enemy and neighbor alike.

What would have differentiated or ranked the warrior of an indigenous community would have been the level of training, the quality of his weapons, and the visibility of his participation in combat, all of which would have been dependent on a person’s ability to shift the debt-relations of society in his favor. It seems as if an individual’s physical location in the *karakoa*, or local warship, was a good index of social ranking.<sup>15</sup> The low-ranking timawa or oripun literally served in the lower rung as rowers, which was a far less prestigious task as it displayed less individualistic martial virtuosity and was tiresome, probably the military equivalent of manual labor. The elite datu and timawa served higher up, on the *karakoa*’s fighting platform, visible, and where they performed the prestigious duty of fighting with other warriors (Scott 1982, 79).<sup>16</sup> The islanders may have displayed a similar social ranking in their terrestrial battles, a possibility explored below in the discussion of how the islanders fought.<sup>17</sup>

However, is there any proof that the elite in lowland prehispanic Philippine cultures actually specifically trained for combat? In other words, is there proof of an indigenous Philippine “martial art” and martial warrior culture? That the indigenous peoples had some technique

and training in weapons handling may only be hinted at by scattered words from various Philippine languages that denoted specific combat techniques, like *pugot* (decapitation), *bungol* ("to grab someone from behind and cut his throat"), or *adyang* (close combat) (Scott 1994, 148, 154, 232, 249). Rodriguez (1999, 127–33) says that Juan de Oliver's *Declaracion de la Doctrina Christiana en Idioma Tagalog* mentioned the word *baca* as meaning "to throw rocks or spears or any other projectile," and *mooc* as the Tagalog word for close combat. Morga (1971, 204) commented that the islanders were highly skilled and dexterous with their daggers. Neighboring Southeast Asian cultures, with whom the peoples of the Philippine islands had much contact, also offer some proof of technique in weapons handling (Raffles 1965, 299, 344).

None of these is direct or conclusive proof of a system of weapons handling that will nowadays be called a "martial art," but at least these scattered pieces of evidence point to a form of indigenous Philippine weapons training and some technique in their employment that would have necessitated proper training and equipment. Knowledge of this fighting style might have given the warrior an advantage over untrained or lesser-trained opponents. Unfortunately, it cannot be determined if social ranking influenced combat. Did, for instance, a datu or a timawa deign to fight an oripun?

### Indigenous Battle Tactics and Weapons

Following John Lynn's framework, indigenous behavior or tactics in the field of battle would have involved displays of spiritual potency and would have been a part of the local power-relational scheme. Combat of any kind was a form of spiritual confrontation, where the person with the greatest amount of soul stuff prevailed (Reid 1988, 124; Wiener 1995). This study postulates that wielding weapons and fighting in combat were "prestigious." The movements and the mentality behind a warrior's fighting method—or "martial art," to use an anachronistic term—lend themselves well to spiritual protocols and interpretations. Southeast Asian warriors considered spiritual preparation to be as important as the physical: "rulers and warriors achieved their success through ascetic and ritual preparation, meditation, magical charms, and their own

god-given sanctity" (Reid 1988, 125). Ileta (1997, 24–25) has claimed that spiritual power could be gained through "ascetic practices, prayer, controlled bodily movements and other forms of self-discipline."<sup>18</sup> Martial arts, in their essence, also involve controlled bodily movements and self-discipline.

Soul stuff was and still is supposed to have actual effects in combat. In Indonesia and Malaysia, *penjak-silat* masters (*guru*) were supposed to be endowed with so much spiritual power that they could kill from afar, take sword blows to the neck, or kill people with a touch (Draeger and Smith 1969, 181). Stamford Raffles (1965, 298) also noted that this belief in martial supernatural invincibility existed in Java. In the Philippine setting, spiritual power could be conferred by talismans, which, if worn, could render the wearer invincible or give him supernatural strength (Ileta 1997, 22; Medina 2002, 85). In the same way, weapons like the *keris* or *kris* were often endowed with supernatural powers. Fantastic powers aside, the islanders probably saw soul stuff even in an ordinary display of martial virtuosity since the advantage a trained, well-equipped elite warrior has over a rank-and-file combatant can be so overpowering as to make that elite seem like an invincible hero (O'Connell 1995, 114).

During battle the islanders were more concerned with intimidation in combat than with killing. This is not unique to indigenous Philippine culture, or even just Southeast Asian culture. Ceremony and ritualism play a large part in humanity's accepted conceptions of combat; throughout history, cultures often possessed forms of intimidation that helped demoralize an enemy or even decide a conflict without the need for violence (Keegan 1993, 175; O'Connell 1989, 17). Nonlethal intimidation would have been especially attractive to a culture in which people were the objective in warfare. In the indigenous Philippine setting, intimidation took the form of displays of spiritual potency (Reid 1988, 124).

The tattoos of the Visayan cultures were probably a form of intimidation since they were applied to show bravery in combat, or "valor."<sup>19</sup> A large army in itself might also have been a display of spiritual potency since only a chief with great spiritual potency could muster large numbers of followers (*ibid.*, 123).

The coastal peoples of the Philippine islands went out of their way to present an intimidating appearance. Pigafetta recorded that the people

of Mactan shouted loudly as they attacked (Jocano 1975, 69). The people of Cebu wore their full, showy, and intimidating panoply of "many plumes and varicolored headdresses [that] were waving." The people of Cebu also cried out and shouted loudly and brandished their weapons in a threatening manner (Legazpi 1965, 101–2). The warriors of the settlement in Mindoro beat drums, blew horns, rang bells, and donned showy and elaborate headdresses (ibid., 163). The people of Manila did not perform such displays immediately before the battle, but they did visit the Iberians and, with haughty mien, "did things which the Spaniards did not often tolerate" (ibid., 172).

When it came to actual fighting, it should be realized that the indigenous peoples still attempted to intimidate rather than kill their opponents, unless they were trying to take heads. This is only logical, given that vanquished opponents are generally more useful alive than dead. This was reflected in how they used their weapons, including their gunpowder weapons (Tarling 1999, 1:44; Legazpi 1965, 102). Pigafetta's (1969, 87) description of the Battle of Mactan indicated that the locals primarily fought with barrages of missile weapons thrown at extreme range. The warriors of Mactan threw missile weapons of all sorts at Magellan and, the armor of the Europeans notwithstanding, these weapons did not cause many casualties. The people of Cebu, in the Battle of Cebu in 1565, hurled spears at the Iberians "by divisions of threes . . . and returning again to their station, going and coming as in a game of *canas*" (Legazpi 1965, 101–2). The Macabebe had ship-mounted culverins during the Battle of Bancusay Bay, but failed to hit any of the Europeans or their local auxiliaries (Blair and Robertson 1903, 157). Possibly the men of Manila were caught by surprise, which was why their initial missile barrage was limited to just three cannon shots that, however, failed to hit anything (Licuanan and Mira 1990–1993, 3:318). Scott (1994, 149–50) argued that the indigenous warriors were capable of throwing these spears with great accuracy—which perhaps suggests that they *could* hit their enemies if they wanted to.

Employing missile weapons in a relatively nonlethal fashion gave the average warrior some meaningful combat-value without asking him to engage in lethal hand-to-hand combat (O'Connell 1989, 38–39). The use of missile weapons enabled a datu to field large and visually impressive

armies without really exposing his warriors to serious harm. Possibly, the missile barrage was itself intended to intimidate and confuse—it certainly achieved both effects in Mactan.

While the indigenous missile barrage was usually ineffective against the Europeans, its efficacy against the forces of other indigenous settlements is harder to establish. The European chroniclers mentioned that the local warriors used shields, which were large and rectangular and may have been a good defense against missiles—possibly, their constant labeling of these shields as *paves* (pavises) also indicates function, as pavises were defenses against missiles (Krieger 1926, 96–97). The indigenous shields certainly proved effective against European missile weapons during the Battle of Mactan, especially because the warriors bearing these shields also jumped around and dodged the European projectiles with great agility (Pigafetta 1969, 87). It is probable that the missile barrage was nonlethal against other local warriors, which would be similar to combat in other Southeast Asian cultures.

There is a significant lack of hand-to-hand combat in the narrative of the Spanish conquest. This seems odd considering all the swords, spears, helmets, armors, and daggers that the chroniclers noted, or the culture of headtaking that was so integral to indigenous warfare. At best, there were hints of close-quarters combat. An anonymous chronicler also recorded what could have been close-quarters combat when Martin de Goiti's auxiliaries attacked the fleeing Macabebe after the Battle of Bancusay Bay (Blair and Robertson 1903, 157).

The logical explanations for this lack of description of hand-to-hand combat during the Spanish conquest are that the chroniclers either simply refused to note them down or forgot to note them down, or it was just those particular sources used in this study that did not note down any incidents of close-quarters combat, but other sources dealing with the Spanish conquest might have had. These do not seem likely, however. The Iberians came from a culture that highly prized close-quarters combat, and the chronicles of the conquests in the Americas were careful to note hand-to-hand combat when it happened. Many of the chroniclers had keen eyes for military matters, if they were not military men themselves who would note such details as the designs of fortifications and weaponry.

Perhaps Margaret Wiener's (1995, 199) explanation that in Southeast Asian warfare one fought an enemy with a superior form of his power may be applied to the indigenous warriors of the Philippine islands. When fighting the Spaniards who used firearms and missile weapons, one used firearms and missiles as well. The people of Cebu did not use guns possibly because they did not have any.

Another explanation for the possible lack of hand-to-hand combat might be that the indigenous weapons were used merely to intimidate but were not "true" weapons. The kris was rather useless in actual combat, but had great spiritual power (Frey 1986, 2; Draeger and Smith 1969, 173; Wiener 1995, 199–201). Also, Krieger (1926, 106–7) mentioned that the locals sometimes used light and ineffective metals for some suits of armor and helmets.

However, there is some reason to believe that indigenous weapons were not useless or merely ceremonial. Indigenous Philippine swords like the *kampilan* were often sturdy and made of steel (Scott 1994, 148; Rodriguez 1999, 210). The indigenous armor could also be reasonably effective (Scott 1994, 151–52). The locals would surely not have bothered with armor, which could weigh twenty-five pounds and must not have been cheap (Krieger 1926, 106–7), if they had no need for them. However, no tests have been made to see how well a *kampilan* could cut or how strong was the rope armor.

If the indigenous cultures engaged mainly in nonlethal skirmishing, how were battles between indigenous inhabitants of the Philippine islands decided?

There is the possibility that battles were *not* decided, or that nobody came out the clear winner. Stalemated warfare was common in archipelagic Southeast Asia, and Charney (2004, 10) suggests that this is why peacemaking rituals, like the *casi casi*, were important to Southeast Asian warfare. The conflict had to be resolved *somehow*.

However, in other Southeast Asian cultures, these skirmishes served as a screen and a backdrop for duels between opposing leaders and their immediate entourages. In the Chiang Mai chronicle, for instance, a series of elite duels is claimed to have decided the battle of Prince Khram against Phraya Boek (Wyatt and Aroonrut 1995, 48–51).<sup>20</sup> Two chiefs in Johor, Daeng Parani of the Buginese and Raja Kecil of the

Minangkabau, even arranged to fight a duel to decide the whole war because their warriors fought so poorly (Andaya 1975, 303).<sup>21</sup> As the person who had the most at stake, the datu was, or ought to have been, the most willing to expose himself to danger and fight the decisive battle at close quarters (O'Connell 1989, 36–37; Reid 1988, 124; Charney 2004, 11). The chief of Bone, Arung Palakka, certainly exemplified an almost reckless bravery in battle—that occasionally almost cost him his life—which he needed in order to restore his *siri'* or “sense of self-respect and honour,” which was the basis of his power (Andaya 1981, 70, 73–99, 119–20).

A battlefield duel of elites with a backdrop of lesser warriors would have been the perfect manifestation of “continuous achievement” and spiritual prowess, the ultimate terrestrial display of Philippine social ranking in combat. Unfortunately, until more records are found this question cannot be answered conclusively.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, perhaps the example of Sulawesi may suggest that the collection of booty after, or even during, a battle was an important component of indigenous warfare. Arung Palakka allowed his men to loot and plunder after the successful sacking of the settlement of Sombaopu (to the chagrin of his nominal Dutch superior, Admiral Speelman), and was always concerned with the disbursement of spoil among his followers. The urge to loot sometimes dictated the course of battles, which had a “tendency . . . to transform quickly into individual raiding parties” (*ibid.*, 133–34). Even in combat, the needs of prestige culture were paramount.

## Resolution and Aftermath

To summarize the points presented using Lynn's framework, the warfare of the coastal peoples of the Philippine islands was therefore a logical component of their culture at large. This sort of warfare involved displays of spiritual potency, or soul stuff, as part of inter- and intracommunity power rivalries in which local chiefs were engaged. Datu did not have the need, willingness, or the means for sustained campaigns of annihilation or conquest. In this context warfare had a tendency to be indirect, avoiding direct confrontations even in the field of battle, and there was a general unwillingness to sustain heavy casu-

alties. Even headhunting might have served to limit casualties and display prestige, or spiritual potency. The weapons, tactics, and strategies employed by the indigenous warriors reflected their concerns and cultural mores.

The coastal peoples of the Philippines, therefore, fought with the Spaniards in a consistent manner. In all of the battles of the Spanish conquest, from Mactan to Bancusay Bay, the indigenous peoples started the fight by first parlaying with the Spaniards, often attempting to intimidate them through visual display or bellicose words. Then they would skirmish with the Spaniards at long range, using all sorts of projectile weapons, from rocks to firearms.

Also, the datu and his followers were unwilling to sustain high casualties, given the primacy of labor control in local politics. The aggressive European tactics coincided with the local aversion for shock combat, and susceptibility to intimidation from such weapons as guns and cannons. Every time the Spaniards charged, the historical records reviewed thus far indicate that the inhabitants of the Philippine islands fled. Since possession of the battlefield was among the goals of Europeans in battle, the Europeans could usually claim victory.

It is harder to ascertain whether the locals also believed that the Spaniards had won these battles, as they had different notions of "victory," notions that did not necessarily involve the capture of physical settlements or the extermination of their enemies. True victory lay in the incorporation of more people into a ruler's alliance network. Flight was not necessarily the reaction of a defeated party, but a proactive endeavor meant to create a "victory" for the fleeing datu by denying the attacking datu any new slaves or followers. Defeat in a battle was still defeat, but it was only defeat of a sort—it displayed the losing datu's inferiority in spiritual potency to his competitor.

This may explain why most of the battles with the Europeans were not in any way "decisive" as the peoples of the Philippine islands did not submit to the Europeans immediately after being defeated. The locals resisted, as their discourse on war dictated, for days, sometimes weeks, after major battles. However, if the locals did not consider the loss of a settlement or eviction from a battlefield as an out-and-out defeat, why did Tupas, Soliman, or Matanda *eventually* submit to Legazpi? Because



battles were arenas of spiritual conflict, the islanders likely saw European tactics as displays of greater potency that gradually undermined the enemy chiefs' self-confidence or gradually eroded their authority. The Europeans accomplished their battlefield victories with small groups of men facing more numerous opponents; they were not hit by any projectiles; they attacked bravely and frontally; and they had large ships, large cannons, imposing steel armor, and weapons and noisy guns. The islanders could have understood all these as proof of greater European spiritual potency. However, as stated in the previous section, the Spaniards still had to negotiate with datu like Tupas or Lakandula—they still had to actively court the datu's followers and claim his power. At least now they could attract the locals with proof of their martial prowess (Zialcita 2005, 50–51). The example of the Portuguese in Malacca may provide an instructive parallel: they quickly conquered the settlement of Malacca, and the indigenous settlements and politics around them soon recognized their military superiority. However, they failed to engage in building alliances, and thus became just one more power among many in the region of Malacca and Johor (Andaya 1975, 20–22).

Given that it is not known how battles between two indigenous forces were resolved, the aftermath of indigenous battles is not easy to determine. The evidence of the Spanish conquest suggests that a victor still needed to find ways to use his prestige and employ diplomacy to force a capitulation. Unfortunately, it cannot be known how an indigenous coastal datu used a battlefield victory, since the aftermath of the only battle that the indigenous peoples of the Philippines won, the Battle of Mactan, is not known. It is interesting to note that, when Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's expedition returned to the Visayas, Mactan no longer played an important role in local politics, and Lapu Lapu had mysteriously disappeared from the historical record. However, the Legazpi expedition returned to Cebu at least fifty years after the Battle of Mactan. Anything could have happened in that span of time.

There is somewhat more evidence when it comes to how the coastal peoples of the Philippines reacted to defeat in battle. Tupas, Soliman, and the chief of the Macabebe all fled from the advancing Spaniards, and hid in the mountains or forests of the Philippines. We know that Tupas's and Soliman's authorities stayed intact, and they had to be en-

ticed to surrender. Still, both men were clearly impressed by Spanish military might and reacted accordingly. Soliman fled from the Spaniards when they returned to Manila in 1571 (Blair and Robertson 1903, 153), while Tupas attempted to use what he clearly saw as the superior Spanish military strength to his advantage after he had entered into an alliance with them (Cushner 1966, 83; Noone 1982, 355–56). At the very least, these examples imply that the aftermath of battles were still understood in terms of spiritual potency and alliance building.

This picture of warfare in the Philippine islands is not complete. Some crucial details are missing because of the limitations of the available data. Nothing is known of how command was effected in battle, if the datu was present during combat, or how logistics were arranged. The efficacy of indigenous weaponry and the exact nature of indigenous martial arts are largely a mystery. There is a big gap in our knowledge of how the coastal peoples of the Philippine islands resolved their battles.

### **The Backgrounds of the Conquistadors**

The picture cannot be completed without describing the Spanish side of the equation. How did Magellan's forces fight, and why? This is a broad question that runs the risk of encompassing many topics, like early modern European military history, military theory in general, and the history of the early modern Iberian conquests overseas. It is, however, a surprisingly neglected question when it comes to treatments of the Battle of Mactan. Popular or established accounts, even ones focusing mainly on military history, seem to tacitly assume that the reader knows how Magellan will fight and can dismiss the European methods with a handful of generalizations. The *Kasaysayan* series (Arcilla 1998, 31 see also 82) says that "indigenous weapons were no match for European artillery and the fighting tactics of the invaders," without stating what these tactics were, or why artillery should confer an advantage. The *Filipino Heritage* series (Roces 1977–1978, 859, 898) and Carlos Quirino's *Filipinos at War* (1981) offer much the same statements.

Who were the Europeans that came to the Philippines in 1521? What sort of martial background would they have brought with them?

The documents in the Blair and Robertson series give Magellan's *capitulaciones*, or capitularies, or the contracts between Magellan, the Falerio brothers, and the Spanish Crown. To wit: Magellan's contract included careful elaboration of what profits Magellan could pocket, and which would go to the state. Like all good commercial contracts, it made provisions for a form of death insurance, or who was to benefit from Magellan's work after his passing. It also gave Magellan a monopoly on the area for a certain number of years—a stipulation that made sense in view of the fact that, because this was a freelance commercial contract and not a carefully controlled crown initiative, other mercenary companies could make inroads on Magellan's market if he did not try to seek legal shelter (Magalhães 1903, 251–52).

Because it was clearly a commercial contract, Magellan in this sense was not much different from the many mercenary adventuring companies that went to explore the New World (Elliot 1963, 58–59), or even the mercenary adventuring companies that operated in Europe itself, such as the *Landsknechte*, who were also frequently employed by the Habsburgs (Showalter 1993). As it was during the Reconquest, the Spanish crown's financial position and continental commitments meant that its foreign ventures necessitated the private investments of the conquistadors (Kamen 2002, 39–40, 84) or the financial collateral offered by foreign banking houses, like the Fuggers (ibid., 55–56). This commercial context is important because it impinges on Magellan's motives and, therefore, on his and his men's "discourse on war."

These motivations explain the "whys" of the Magellan expedition's discourse on war. Like other conquistadors, Magellan and his men had very material expectations. They wished for their exertions to be rewarded with the life of a nobleman, either in the form of an *encomienda*, or, in Magellan's case, a right and monopoly to trade,<sup>23</sup> and not with mere land to toil (Elliot 1963, 65; Parry 1990, 50; Restall 2004, 33–35). The conquistadors dreamed of becoming hidalgos or even grandees, of entering into the ranks of the nobility through their bravery and skill at arms. A settler in Mexico best described the spirit behind the Iberian overseas enterprises: "*here you are always in charge, and do not have to work personally, and you are always on horseback*" (Kamen 2002, 131, italics in original). The motivation to become a hidalgo and the attendant martial

culture spread throughout Spanish (especially Castilian) society to a remarkable degree. Spanish nobility had never been a closed caste, and the circumstances of the *Reconquista* had allowed for the existence of either nonnoble “knights” called *caballeros villanos*, or for the rise of commoners into the ranks of the nobility (Reilly 1993, 146–47; Barber 1970, 15–16; Lomax 1978, 99–100; Elliot 1963, 32). This chance to become a nobleman and live the noble lifestyle would have certainly appealed to the foreign sailors in Magellan’s fleet as well. The mores of chivalric culture, like bravery in battle, likely helped motivate the Europeans in combat as well.<sup>24</sup>

What all this meant was that Magellan and his men were *not* salaried employees of the Spanish crown. His capitularies did not stipulate any form of regular salary, but offered him a share of the profits instead. The crown was the main investor in the venture and, to use modern business jargon, probably had controlling interest, but the crown was not Magellan’s “boss.” This may explain why Magellan felt no compunction towards flouting his orders so brazenly. For instance, Magellan was not allowed to discharge his firearms in order not to frighten the natives—but did so precisely to impress Humabon. Magellan was certainly *not* ordered to ask for the submission of any native rulers; on the contrary, he was to maintain the most amicable of relations with them (Magalhães 1903, 257–58). Magellan was most likely flouting his orders primarily due to profit motive: perhaps it was out of a desire to quickly set up trade routes and create tributaries so the venture would pay off right away. Also, as a private contractor, he may not have felt bound to strictly follow the orders of the crown—at least less likely than an army officer, although the question of military discipline in early modern Europe is a difficult one to answer.<sup>25</sup>

This leads directly to the next point. Magellan’s men were apparently *not* soldiers, if by that one means “trained, salaried, permanent, veteran soldiers with uniforms and standard-issue weapons” (Restall 2004, 32). Nowhere in Magellan’s instructions and contracts does it state that the crown would provide him with members of its very nascent standing armies—an institution that was only slowly beginning to develop, anyway, with the reforms of Gonsalvo de Cordova (Howard 1976, 32–33). And Magellan’s capitulaciones generally tended to stipulate with some exacti-

tude what the crown was to provide—in this case, materiel rather than manpower (Magalhães 1903, 252).

However, just because they were not *soldados* did not mean that Magellan's men were not raised in a martial culture—far from it, given how martial and chivalric culture had diffused throughout Iberian society, as John Guilmartin (1991) has argued. This essay, however, agrees with Matthew Restall (2004, 33) that Guilmartin overstated his case. Further, the martial training and culture, or the “militarily useful skills” that Guilmartin claims were widespread in Spain—and which Restall further argues were widespread throughout Europe—does not necessarily imply training as a professional soldier. The question is, if they were not soldiers, what of fighting did they know?

Leaving aside the possibility of some conquistadors learning on the job, training in martial arts was actually quite widespread throughout Spain, and indeed throughout most of Europe—which must be mentioned since so many of Magellan's crew were not Castilian. J. Christopher Amberger (1998) highlighted the world of fighting guilds in England and in Germany, which had a ranking and certification system very similar to the medieval guild, and which produced “masters of arms.” That a similar system of combat existed in Spain in the fourteenth century may be deduced from an unedited historical document presented by Jose Perez Gestoso (1901), which lists “Maestros de las armas,” including the famous Francisco [sic] Roman, who was “Maestro de las Armas de sus Majestades [presumably Charles V (who officially ruled as Charles I of Spain), since Roman was active in the 1520s] e maestro examinador mayor [of several other masters]” (*ibid.*, 5; see also Anglo 2000). These fighting guilds taught their martial arts to a wide cross-section of society, and not just to nobles or mercenaries. Thus, late medieval and early modern European society, as both Restall and Guilmartin have argued, was thoroughly infused with martial skills. Witness, for instance, Chaucer's Miller, who carried a sword-and-buckler, a weapons combination for which the earliest fighting manual extant was likely written by and for *monks* (Forgeng 2003).

What these masters taught, and what most fight schools in Europe taught, however, was personal combat—Gestoso's work describes the masters as *esgrimadores*. It is likely, for instance, that what was commonly

taught in Spain was the sword-and-shield style that enabled Spain to field large forces of *rodeleros*, warriors so called because of their shields, the *rodelas*. These were the same *rodeleros* so admired by Machiavelli, but which were abandoned by Gonsalvo de Cordova after encountering the more corporate style of warfare practiced by the Swiss with their pikes (Howard 1976, 33). It is interesting to note that the conquistadors did not abandon the sword-and-shield style of fighting.<sup>26</sup> This is possibly because there was no need to keep enemy natives at arm's length (Guilmartin 1991) but another possibility is that the sword-and-shield system was what the conquistadors knew, and not the pike-and-shot system. The latter system requires drill, discipline, and teamwork, and these could only be taught by the professional training system of a standing army (Morillo 1995). The fighting guilds may have taught general martial skills, but they did not necessarily teach military skills, like teamwork.

Still, given this training, Magellan's crew would likely have been acculturated to the general fighting style of western Europe. For reasons unclear, the peoples of western Europe chose to fight in a confrontational, face-to-face manner that was lethal and less concerned with sport, captive-taking, or ceremony (Keegan 1993, 332–33; Anglo 2000, 34–39; Parker 1988, 121; O'Connell 1989, 48; Hall 1997, 15). In the immediate battlefield, combat was usually decided through shock action, where the two opposing forces fought each other at close quarters until one side broke and abandoned the field. The origins of this preference for face-to-face combat in Europe are not known. This style of fighting may have arisen from the Roman past, although the Germanic tribes who came after the Romans and the Celts who came before them were already predisposed to fight at close quarters. Missile weapons were not unknown to western Europe, but were generally integrated into the philosophy of face-to-face battle, and usually not used in an evasive hit-and-run style. For example, technical limitations aside, whenever the bow or crossbow was used in Medieval Europe, it was usually used by infantry standing still, loosing volleys of bolts or arrows at incoming enemies in order to disorder their ranks in preparation for melee combat.

In a tactical sense, the goal was usually an attempt at causing the disintegration of the enemy force's cohesion. The immediate goal was to either evict the enemy from a plot of land or the destruction and dis-

persal of enemy forces. Both involved shock combat and thus, in almost all of the battles of the later Spanish conquest, the conquistadors would advance and attempt to engage the indigenous peoples of the Philippines in hand-to-hand combat, while being given covering fire with small firearms or the large ships' guns. It is notable that the Europeans failed to do any of this in Mactan.

Then there is Magellan himself.<sup>27</sup> What sort of training and military experience did he have? As a page in the royal court in Portugal, Magellan would have been trained as a knight, and would have been taught at least the basics of martial arts and possibly even some notion of command (Daniel 1964, 14–15). His later experiences would be of more significance: Magellan joined many of the earlier Portuguese expeditions to Asia, starting with Dom Francisco d'Almeida's expeditions to India and Africa, and the expeditions to Malacca. He was with Alphonso d'Albuquerque's expedition that captured Malacca. One puzzling, and seemingly ill-advised or nonsensical, decision that Magellan made was to attack Lapu Lapu's large force with such a tiny one of his own. At first glance, this seems either amateurish or a case of misplaced jingoism. But in light of Magellan's experiences, the decision makes far more sense: the Portuguese victories in Asia were all won by tiny forces against overwhelming opposition. Some of this opposition came from societies or cultures that were undoubtedly better-equipped, larger, or better-organized than Lapu Lapu's. Indeed, the Iberians had faced worse odds when fighting the Aztecs and the Incas; both were well-organized, sanguinary, and bellicose societies. By 1521 Magellan was an experienced military commander, and perhaps his decision to face 1,500 with forty-nine men was taken with that experience in mind. Indeed, Maximilian of Transylvania looked back on the Battle of Mactan and commented that Magellan's decision was not unreasonable, given that "in quite recent times, two hundred Spaniards in the island of Yucatan put sometimes two or three hundred thousand men to flight" (Nowell 1962, 296).<sup>28</sup>

### **Cohesion in Battle**

The Spaniards had several advantages in the New World that helped contribute to victory, like technology, cultural shock, and disease.

However, none of these advantages would have been of any avail if the Spanish forces did not have the wherewithal to stick together and aggressively confront the enemy or defend against him. Besides, Magellan's expedition (and subsequent expeditions) had none or few of these advantages when it confronted the inhabitants of the Philippine islands.<sup>29</sup> The winning element in both the New World conquests and in the Philippines was therefore *cohesion*, or that which kept the Europeans together in or out of battle. As John Keegan (1976, 175) explains of armies in general:

Inside every army is a crowd struggling to get out, and the strongest fear with which every commander lives—stronger than his fear of defeat or even of mutiny—is that of his army reverting to a crowd through some error of his own making. For a crowd is the antithesis of an army, a human assembly animated not by discipline but by mood, by the play of inconstant and potentially infectious emotion which, if it spreads, is fatal to an army's subordination.

The question of cohesion involves group bonding, and it is a question of what keeps an army or armed force of men together. Therefore, what creates cohesion? Stephen Morillo (1995) elucidates:

The answer is deceptively simple: trust. Each man in the formation must trust his neighbor not to run away. How is trust achieved? It may be a result of the social origins of the formation: neighbors from the same polis, canton, or other small polity may know and trust each other from long association on and off the battlefield. But practice and experience are crucial even for such naturally cohesive groups, and even more so for formations drawn from heterogeneous backgrounds. Normally, an infantry unit gains cohesion through drill and through experience.

On the one hand, trust can be created by training together, through the creation of *esprit de corps*, an advantage that a standing army would have, thus. On the other hand, the conquistadors of Iberia were not part of a standing army, and their cohesion was likely the result of different factors. S. L. A. Marshall's (1947)<sup>30</sup> classic study of men in combat sug-



gests that cohesion in battle is primarily a function of small units: "it is therefore to be noted as a principle that, all other things being equal, the tactical unity of men working together in combat will be in the ratio of their knowledge and sympathetic understanding of each other" (*ibid.*, 150). According to Marshall, most fighters or soldiers are impelled to fight and stay together primarily because of the dynamics or pressures of the immediate, small group in which they fight. Therefore, standing armies do not necessarily have a monopoly on cohesion, and the various conquistador groups that the Spanish crown employed likely found their own ways of generating cohesion.

The simplest reason could be that the conquistador's cohesion was, as Morillo argued, a result of the experience of fighting together over time. Another could have been the feeling of isolation—of being strangers in a strange land—and knowing or feeling that the only people they could really trust or turn to were fellow Europeans. A form of "peer pressure" may also have helped motivate the men into fighting and staying together, as the conquistadors would have been ashamed of looking cowardly, or "unchivalric"—generally, they would have been afraid of failing in the shared cultural norms of the group. The need to accomplish a common task may have helped also, especially if the common task was basic survival (Lynn 2003, 252–53). Finally, the conquistadors may have held together because of personal ties. Patronage would have been the most important (Restall 2004, 38–43), although one cannot discount the personal ties that could develop between leader and follower because of charismatic leadership.

The forces of Cortez, for instance, could apparently attain a high degree of cohesion. Cortez was said to have

highly praised the captains and companions who had been with him in the conquest of Mexico, saying that they were able to suffer hunger and hardship, that wherever he summoned them he could do heroic deeds with them, and that, even when they were wounded and in rags they never failed to fight and to capture every city and fortress, however great the risk to their lives. (Elliot 1963, 64–65)

This is not to say that the conquistadors formed these bonds automatically—Cortez was almost undone by the many conflicts within the

Spanish ranks. Success for a conquistador, therefore, relied in part on his ability to keep his men together and motivated. As shall be explained later, a breakdown in cohesion was likely what determined the outcome of the Battle of Mactan.

### **The Spanish Discourse on War**

Far more could be said of the European or Spanish discourse on war. Questions of political background, notions of power, religious motivations, and others have not been answered.<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this essay, these elements are not necessary, since only the immediate tactical environment is important in a study of the Battle of Mactan. Still, a thumbnail sketch of the conquistador's discourse on war can be drawn.

First, the primary motivation of the men in the expedition—from Magellan to the rank and file—would have been material. Either they were aiming for a share in the profits, or in trade, or perhaps for a chance to live the *hidalgo* lifestyle. This is part of the Iberian tradition of the Reconquista, where the values of the *hidalgo* had spread throughout Iberian society. Presumably, even the non-Iberians among the crew may have felt like they had a chance at rising up in the world by joining a Castilian-sponsored endeavor.

That being said, an important aspect of the Magellan expedition's discourse on war was that the men were likely not professional soldiers. They were likely trained in fighting, and imbued with martial spirit (through the diffusion of chivalric values), but they would have lacked the teamwork, *esprit de corps*, coordination, and unity of a professional army unit. Still, the men of Magellan's expedition would have fought in the lethal close-quarters style prevalent in Europe, and the conquistadors secured victory through shock action by closing with the enemy.

The Europeans, especially the Iberians, had several advantages in their discourse on war when they fought their indigenous opponents in the Americas or Southeast Asia, but the key requirement to victory would have been cohesion. Because of the "amateur" nature of the men of these expeditions, none of the advantages of martial culture, technology, or cultural shock (when these were present) would have been of any avail if the conquistadors did not hold together in battle or if they did not

have the moral strength to stand against an attack or to charge in the face of overwhelming odds. There were several ways of generating this cohesion, ways which were not mutually exclusive.

This, then, was how and why the men of Magellan's expedition ideally would have fought. However, as John Lynn argues, reality often upsets the conceptual discourse on war, and this is what would explain Magellan's defeat.

### **The Battle of Mactan in Context**

Why did Magellan lose the Battle of Mactan? The indigenous and European battle culture and tactics in this battle were not much different from those in later battles of the Spanish conquest of the Philippine islands, so there must have been something unique about the Battle of Mactan.

Initially, I was inclined to blame Magellan for tactical mistakes. It seemed like a very poor decision to face an overwhelming force of indigenous warriors with just forty-nine men and no local auxiliaries. However, further research and reflection showed that this decision was not so dubious or amateurish after all. Magellan was a very experienced commander, and had fought and prevailed against Moors, Africans, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asians, often against overwhelming odds. He could be excused for thinking that the Battle of Mactan would be no different.

Other reasons could involve technical ones. The terrain also worked against Magellan. The people of Mactan were on the beach, while Magellan and his men had to wade a considerable distance before reaching the shore. Both the crossbow and the arquebus suffered from considerable performance degradations when wet. Add to this the fact that it was April, the height of the dry season, and even if it was early morning the Europeans' armor might have tired them more quickly by trapping heat and humidity. Walking through water, with a sandy bottom, would also be difficult and tiring. The accuracy of the Spanish missiles must have been further degraded by the weariness of the troops.

Nevertheless, later Spanish expeditions also fought in harsh or difficult terrain. Legazpi's men had to approach the shore in boats and

establish a beachhead under fire before coming to grips with the warriors of Zula. Martin de Goiti had to cross open ground that sloped uphill to attack a fortified Manila. Juan de Salcedo attacked fortifications with high walls and moats. Thus, while terrain and other physical features could have been a factor in Magellan's defeat, it was not one that could not be overcome.

In terms of weaponry, although the European weapons can arguably, on an "absolute" scale, be said to have been more "advanced," the circumstances might have negated many of these weapons' advantages that may have helped lead to Magellan's defeat. Magellan chose to engage the people of Mactan in a long-range missile duel with crossbows and arquebuses. The aimed, full-power range of a crossbow was about sixty yards to seventy yards, although when it was pointed upward and shot as suppressive fire its range was about 350 yards. The great advantage of a crossbow was its power, which was most advantageous against armored opponents. The warriors of Mactan were apparently not heavily armored, and relied on agility for safety. This negated the power advantage of the crossbow, and even put the crossbow at a disadvantage because of its extremely slow reloading time. The arquebus, or the matchlock, had many of the same limitations. It too was very slow-firing and inaccurate, and had the added penalty of being potentially dangerous to the gunner, because the arquebus operated by touching a lit fuse to powder that could sometimes explode (Peterson 1956, 10–13). Magellan further negated his advantage in weaponry because he was unable to use his ships' large cannons because he chose to attack at low tide, when the ships could not anchor near enough to the shore for their guns to be useful, although too much can be made of this. Early cannons were very inaccurate and had extremely low rates of fire.

However, if his missile weapons failed him, Magellan could have always ordered a charge to engage in close combat. Early missile weapons like these were inherently inaccurate, and really only useful in large numbers. The conquistadors won most of their victories at the point of the sword or the spear, yet Magellan failed or was unable to order a charge.

Why he was unable to order a charge is likely directly linked to the reasons why he and his men were unable to overcome the terrain. What Pigafetta's account indicates clearly was that there was a *breakdown of*

*cohesion*. The men refused to listen to Magellan's orders and continued to expend their missiles futilely, and when asked to withdraw the force disintegrated, leaving Magellan with only a handful of men. Perhaps Magellan was unable to overcome the terrain or order a charge because his shaken and demoralized men could not perform maneuvers that required such a high level of cohesion, morale, and dedication.

This essay postulates that the main reason why Magellan was unable to successfully lead his men in combat was that his leadership had already been called into question before ever engaging the enemy. The Castilian majority of the crew, especially the officers, resented Magellan for being a Portuguese even *before* they had left Spain (Magalhães 1903, 254). Magellan had tried to put as many Portuguese men in the crew, but was prevented by the crown. His capitulaciones specifically stated that he could only take a limited number of Portuguese sailors with him (*ibid.*, 260). As stated previously, personal ties were extremely important, and Magellan was aware of this, hence his attempt to put men loyal to him in the boats.

On the voyage itself, "Magellan's captains had boasted to their friends that if the Portuguese captain caused any trouble they would kill him" (Cushner 1966, 15). The expected mutiny broke out on 2 April 1520. The ringleaders were mainly Castilian, but it also included a French priest. The mutineers almost succeeded in commandeering the fleet's vessels, but Magellan managed to reassert his control. However, he had to forgive most of the mutineers due to manpower problems (*ibid.*, 16). There is a note of irony in the fact that Juan de Cartagena, one of the two whom Magellan marooned in Patagonia for instigating the mutiny, was instructed by Charles V to ensure that there was "concord among the persons in charge" (Carlos I 1903, 290).

Whatever the case may be, the mutiny highlights Magellan's lack of authority, the distrust his men had in him, and the lack of cohesion and bonding on the part of the crew. That he had to forgive most of the mutineers would not have helped, as it would have kept discontented men in the ranks and given them time to nurse their grievances. The end result was that in combat Magellan was unable to keep his men together. Except for a handful, like the loyal Pigafetta, most of Magellan's men did not accept his command, and during the Battle of Mactan the Europe-

ans lost their cohesion and acted like a panicky crowd. Leadership, as S. L. A. Marshall (1947) made clear, is the essential element in combat, as it prevents the breakdown of discipline and order, and gives the men purpose and direction.<sup>32</sup>

The Battle of Mactan can then be better understood as Magellan's defeat rather than a local victory first and foremost. Given better cohesion, equally small numbers of Spaniards could and did defeat similar numbers of local warriors who were using the same tactics.

This is not to deny Lapu Lapu and his men their bravery or their due. Unfortunately, the complete lack of sources from the native side means that we are simply unable to determine what it was that Lapu Lapu or his commanders did right. For instance, it may perhaps be argued that Lapu Lapu or his commanders somehow prevented the flight of the warriors of Mactan in the face of the Magellan expedition's volleys of missiles, although in the later battles of Legazpi and his ilk the peoples of the Philippines tended to flee when the Spaniards charged, not because of their missile fire. Until more can be determined, we will not know how Lapu Lapu commanded his troops (if he did at all). Thus, it has to be concluded that the warriors of Mactan did not do anything out of the ordinary. They followed the native discourse on war, and for the first and only time it led to victory against the Spaniards.

The irony is that the Battle of Mactan is often viewed as a typical example of the battles between the peoples of the Philippine islands and the Europeans. In fact, it was the one exception, the one battle that the peoples of the Philippine islands won. The Spaniards faced similar situations in the battles of Manila and Cebu: they too were greatly outnumbered, had to attack across the water, and fought against people who skirmished and avoided hand-to-hand warfare. The Spaniards also fought in combats that could be considered relatively tougher than the Battle of Mactan: Salcedo's attacks on fortresses, ambushes, and the naval battle at Bancusay Bay were all difficult fights, where the peoples of the Philippine islands fought hard. However, because of the better leadership of Salcedo, Legazpi, Sauz, and Goiti, who all made better use of some innate characteristics of the conquistador's discourse on war, the Spaniards militarily "won" every single one of these engagements. Legazpi, Goiti, or Salcedo all had the benefit of motivated and cohesive

forces—often more of them too, and they were also wise enough to enlist indigenous support.

## Conclusion

The Battle of Mactan was the clash of two different conceptions of battle and combat. First, there were the warriors of Mactan, who followed their risk-averse, aggregative, display-oriented, skirmish-style discourse on war. Then there were the Europeans under Magellan, who followed the materialistic, confrontational, aggressive style of the conquistadors. The interaction of the two produced what John Lynn calls in his chart “the reality of war.”

In future engagements, the peoples of the Philippines reacted to the aggressive Spanish shock tactics by running away, only logical given their aversion to casualties and the reading of displays of spiritual potency in warfare. This would be the “normal” reality of war, and, because the conquistador’s discourse on war frequently defined a tactical victory as possession of the battlefield and the dispersal of enemy forces, the later conquistadors could often claim victory.<sup>33</sup> Thus, by happenstance almost, the Iberian tendency to advance coincided with the indigenous notions of casualty aversion, a product of cultural and material conditions.

However, von Moltke famously said that no plan survives first contact with the enemy, and the Magellan expedition was unable to carry out their ideal notion of battle because of an internal failure of cohesion. The result was defeat, and, ironically, the Battle of Mactan was the only “decisive” native victory in the Spanish conquest of the sixteenth century, since Magellan’s death forced the Europeans to leave the Philippine islands in the interim. The Europeans were given no chance to adapt and create what Lynn calls an “alternative discourse on war” to account for their lack of cohesion.

Ironically, therefore, the Battle of Mactan was actually *atypical* of the Spanish-native engagements during the Spanish conquest. While the peoples of the Philippines fought in roughly the same way as they would in later engagements, the Europeans did not fight in Mactan according to their own discourse on war. Yet, the Battle of Mactan, as the most

famous of all the engagements in the Spanish conquest, is perceived to be illustrative of prehispanic Philippine martial ability.

The Battle of Mactan has become the local version of the Battle of Isandhlwana. It too has become the basis of a historical and nationalistic legend. Much is made of the Zulu victory in Isandhlwana but their defeats in Rorke's Drift or Ulundi are less emphasized.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the similarities between Isandhlwana and Mactan are striking. The case can be made that, like Magellan, it was essentially Lord Chelmsford's weak leadership that cost the British the battle, since similar Zulu tactics in the Battles of Rorke's Drift and Ulundi ended in disaster for the Zulus (James 1995, 257–58; Holmes 2001, 1021–22). Another similarly legendary, but atypical, battle is Hannibal's victory at Cannae (Goldsworthy 2000, 42–91), which was also caused by weak leadership on the part of the Roman commanders, especially Varro. In both these battles the defeated parties lost because of faults in leadership, cohesion, or bad luck, but would then go on to defeat their enemies because of the qualities of their material culture, like superior organization or a brutal and resolute approach to combat. In other words, culture would prove the key to victory, and, like Mactan one can see these battles as exceptions, perhaps even exceptions that prove the rule. Whenever the Spaniards, for instance, could properly deploy their discourse on war, the indigenous discourse on war could not attain victory, at least tactically.

One final note must be made of the relationship of warfare during the Spanish conquest and warfare in other parts of Southeast Asia in roughly the same period. This is important because Michael W. Charney (2004), in his *Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300–1900*, has recently challenged most of the old theories of warfare, especially those laid down by Anthony Reid. Charney argues that widespread killing and siege warfare were far more common than Reid and others have given credit for. However, the records of the Spanish conquest do not support this theory for the Philippines. Warfare and conflict in the Philippine islands were certainly not bloodless, since headtaking and ritual sacrifice were part of combat. Yet, the warriors of Luzon and the Visayas were far too quick to escape from the Spaniards, and did not defend their settlements stubbornly, even important ones like Cebu or fortified ones like Manila.



They made no concerted attempts to retake these settlements after they had been captured. Although the people of Cebu did try to infiltrate the Spanish lines, this did not take the shape of a serious assault, and Visayan efforts slackened further after the Spaniards built a palisade.

Perhaps this proves that the peoples of the Philippine islands were caught by surprise by the Spaniards after all, although this does not seem likely given previous knowledge of the Portuguese by the peoples of the Visayas in 1521, and seems especially unlikely by the time of the Legazpi expedition, when the natives were fully aware of the Spaniards (but still fought in the same way as in Mactan). What may perhaps be the case is that European contact, especially with the Dutch, was what caused the escalation in the level of violence in warfare for the rest of Southeast Asia—an argument that Charney (2004, 21) himself suggests. It is possible that prolonged contact with Europeans would have changed Philippine approaches to war as well. Unlike the peoples of Java or Thailand, the peoples in Luzon and the Visayas did not have intensive military contact with Europeans, and they also accepted Spanish authority much too quickly for them to adapt or learn from European methods of warfare *during* the conquest period. It would certainly be interesting to track Spanish influence on native warfare *after* the Spanish conquest and see if the peoples of the Philippines ever created an “alternative discourse on war” when they perceived that the Spaniards had managed to establish their control over the islands and needed to be resisted.

Or another possibility may be that the more established or more powerful Southeast Asian cultures in Vietnam, Thailand, or Java had more resources, were more politically advanced, and were more centralized, which was why they fought differently from the peoples of the Philippines. The chiefs of Luzon and the Visayas could simply not afford to waste manpower, and likely did not have the coercive power to compel their followers into accepting massive casualties in combat. This would then bring Philippine prehispanic warfare closer to warfare of “primitive” peoples, and perhaps the peoples of Luzon and the Visayas showed how war was fought in Southeast Asia before the formation of large polities. This study does not try to contradict Charney *per se*, but it is suggesting that if Charney is to be accepted then the example of the Battle of Mactan suggests that, contextually, the peoples of the Phil-

ippines may have been different from most of Southeast Asia in some respects, while still following the broad contours of warfare in that region (for instance, a similar emphasis on ruse and trickery or on economic attacks).

Whatever the case may be, this study has endeavored to examine the Battle of Mactan by taking its circumstances into account. In the end, it must always be remembered that warfare does not exist in a vacuum, and battles must be understood in their proper cultural and historical context if they are to be of any value to the present or the future.

## Notes

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1. This vague reference could mean anything from 180 yards to 1,080 yards (Peterson 1956, 10). Perhaps the example of Hans Delbruck may one day be followed, and if the actual site can be found a survey can tell how far it was that Magellan and his crew had to wade.

2. This figure is close to the "two thousand" warriors with which Tupas of Cebu would later oppose Legazpi.

3. Pigafetta makes vague references to indigenous formations. It is hard to determine if Lapu Lapu's warriors really did form up into three sections, or if there were simply too many of them that they naturally surrounded the Europeans. It is *possible* that Lapu Lapu had actual combat formations if he was in contact with the warfare styles of, say, the Bugis in Bone or the Siamese, who theoretically had formations in battle (Charney 2004, 6–8).

4. If these figures are to be believed, then the warriors of Mactan were still able to destroy almost ten percent of Magellan's forces—or five out of forty-nine. However, these casualties were inflicted only after the barrage had been

sustained over a period of time, and with the locals enjoying the benefit of great numerical superiority, which still suggests a relatively ineffectual barrage.

5. Maximilian of Transylvania's account of the Battle of Mactan does not coincide with Pigafetta's or Fernando de Oliveira's and, given the rest of his descriptions of the voyage, is likely not very reliable. Maximilian composed his account of the voyage by interviewing the survivors of the expedition. Pigafetta's account is of course accepted as fairly accurate. The man was a veteran, having served in the galleys of the Knights of Rhodes, and could probably be relied upon to understand what was going on in combat. Further, his account of the voyage is filled with remarkably precise details. Unlike Maximilian of Transylvania, Pigafetta was an eyewitness.

6. Many martial arts websites make this claim e.g., Watchful Eye-Defensive Tactics n.d.; Bergamo n.d.; Sabayan Kali 2006. This argument does not diminish the dedication to martial expertise by these practitioners.

7. These other battles are only rarely mentioned in Philippine history books. For instance, the fifth edition of Agoncillo and Guerrero's *History of the Filipino People* (1977) and Corpuz's *The Roots of the Filipino Nation* (1989) do not mention the battle fought in Cebu in 1565 at all. Rather vaguely, both works simply state that Legazpi arrived in the Philippine islands and somehow secured the city of Cebu.

8. This study defines "culture" as the specific worldview of an identifiable social group, like the sixteenth-century coastal communities of the Philippine islands, or of a subgroup of a larger society, like the Spanish conquistadors. This worldview is the product of the society's history and, because it influences society's actions and responses, culture therefore influences history. Culture is also influenced by a society's physical circumstances or the "permanently operating factors" mentioned previously. Included in "culture" are literature, language, technology, philosophy, ethics, religion, social structure, and forms of governance, among others.

9. As a corollary, "war" is defined as a "cultural phenomenon" that is a product of human social structures (Carneiro 1994, 6). Therefore, warfare involves groups of people, not mere individuals, and these groups are "politically independent." Warfare is goal-oriented, organized, and premeditated, not a burst of mindless violence (O'Connell 1995, 5; Lynn 2003, 331). The potential list of goals or objectives in war may encompass "some political, social, economic, religious, ideological, or cultural purpose" (Lynn 2003, 331).

10. The disbursement of prestige goods may also have been important during or immediately after combat itself, as it was in Sulawesi (Andaya 1981, 133–34).

11. Michael Charney's (2004, 18–22) recent work on Southeast Asian warfare contradicts Reid's theory, however. He mentions documentary evidence that may contradict the notion that Southeast Asians avoided casualties. He also mentions

Gerrit Knaap's argument that perhaps warriors in combat would not be so rational and calculating in the heat of battle. However, Charney adds that it was probably the widespread introduction of European weaponry and exposure to invading Europeans—especially the Dutch—that allowed or encouraged the escalation in the levels of violence in warfare. Charney still does not discount the notion that killing was also ritualistic. However, the evidence of the Spanish conquest does not suggest that the peoples of the Philippines engaged in widespread killing in battle.

12. Militarily, these methods could include slave-raids, the famous *mangayaw* or *gobat*, or ambushes, or attacks on ports and other economic resources. Diplomatic means may include intermarriage or simple diplomatic alliance. These other methods are extensively covered in Angeles 2006, Rodriguez 1999, and Junker 2000.

13. Leonard Andaya (1981, 184) also comments that in South Sulawesi battles were rare and did not involve many casualties.

14. Again, Charney (2004, 73–74) rebuts this theory and shows that Southeast Asians did engage in furious siege warfare. Yet the available evidence of the Spanish conquest suggest that in the Philippines, at least, Reid's theory that native defenders fled from opponents they perceived as superior, or did not defend their fortifications with much persistence, holds true. The potential uniqueness of Philippine warfare relative to Charney's new ideas on Southeast Asian warfare will be explored at the end of this study.

15. In many other cultures, notions of social ranking followed the warriors into combat itself (O'Connell 1995, 114).

16. Placing the elite warriors on an elevated platform also served practical purposes: elevation added power to their missiles, made them harder to hit, and lessened the force of missiles thrown at them from a lower position. Rowers on the main deck were more vulnerable to enemy missiles. Placing elite warriors on the upper deck could only have served to strengthen notions of spiritual potency.

17. In Maguindanao, social ranking certainly influenced booty distribution in naval raids. The datu and the other high-ranking men on the boat received a fixed share of the slaves, while the warriors were more assured of booty and slaves than the rowers (Laarhoven 1989, 162–63).

18. Iletto was describing the "peasant" interpretation of Catholic values. However, he himself links this notion of "power" with Anderson's concept of "power" in Javanese society and history.

19. It certainly worked quite well on Alcina (1668/2000, 142): "I confess that they [the tattoos] caused me much horror and revulsion, of the kind which is only natural."

20. Elite duels in the battlefield can be found elsewhere in this chronicle. They are also mentioned in Prince Damrong's (2001) famous account of Thai battles against the Burmese.

21. However, Raja Kecil did not think he could defeat Daeng Parani because of the latter's maille armor, and Raja Kecil subsequently shot Daeng Parani through the chest instead. This did not work in Raja Kecil's favor because Daeng Parani's Buginese continued the fight, this time with greater ferocity (Andaya 1975, 303–4). Perhaps it was because Raja Kecil did not show his spiritual prowess through the accepted rituals of the duel?

22. Some local epics like the *Lam-ang* depict duels between chiefs or heroes in them. It is tempting to use these as proof of the existence of a dueling culture in the prehispanic Philippines. This, however, is not entirely feasible until these epics can be properly situated in their historical contexts.

23. In medieval Europe, a fief could include a grant of, say, a mill or a bridge or any other money-generating item, and did not just involve grants of labor and land. Some fiefs were sums of cash outright, the so-called "money fief." Thus, Magellan and his crew perhaps may be seen as engaging in enfeoffment, which could mean being raised up to the knightly class if the recipient was not already a nobleman.

24. The values of chivalry were especially widespread in early modern Spain.

25. It was precisely because Magellan and other conquistadors were so uncontrollable that the officers of the Legazpi expedition became, in part, salaried employees of the state.

26. The Legazpi expedition brought swords and shields, for instance. Further, it is highly unlikely that the men of the Legazpi expedition used pikes—a weapon that can be twenty feet long—when they rowed ashore in boats during the taking of Cebu, or when they clambered up a slope and squeezed through the gunports of the fortifications of Manila, for instance.

27. For Magellan's life, see Daniel 1964; Nowell 1962; Stanley 1874; Zweig 1938.

28. This was in retrospect because Maximilian of Transylvania, the author of the quote, was speaking long after 1521, and knew of Cortez's victories against the Aztecs. Maximilian claimed that this was Magellan's speech before the Battle of Mactan, which is hardly likely since Magellan would not have been aware of Cortez's conquests—which were happening either concurrently, or happened afterwards.

29. Given that the people of Cebu were aware of the Portuguese, or that gunpowder was widely available in the area (even if it was not used by the Visayans), it is hardly likely that the men of Lapu Lapu were faced with any kind of cultural or technological shock. The bravery the natives displayed during the Battle of Mactan also speaks against shock or surprise of any kind.

30. Marshall had studied combat in the Second World War, but his work has often been used for other periods. Note, for instance, Lynn's use of it for the armies of Louis XIV or those of the early French Republic.

31. However, they are part of my Master's thesis (Angeles 2006) on which this article is based.

32. Perhaps Magellan can be faulted for not using Humabon's troops. However, given that he was unable to keep the Europeans together, the addition of native troops was likely not to have helped. These troops would have had even less reason to stick with Magellan. The situation might even have been exacerbated by the tendency of native troops to quickly withdraw in the face of imminent defeat.

33. Whether these were "actual" victories in a broader strategic sense is far more debatable, because Legazpi still had to find ways of attracting Tupas and the other ostensibly "defeated" chiefs in order to secure his objectives. This is covered in greater detail in Angeles 2006.

34. In the Battle of Isandhlwana 22,000 Zulus overwhelmed 1,400 British soldiers and killed all but 60. In the Battle of Rorke's Drift 149 British soldiers held off and defeated 4,000 Zulus. The Battle of Ulundi was the final battle of the Zulu War, and broke the back of the Zulu Nation.

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