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# Philippine Studies and the Problem of "Representation"

*David Keck*



**Cultures and Texts: Representations of Philippine Society.** Edited by Raul Pertierra and Eduardo F. Ugarte. Quezon City and Honolulu: University of the Philippines Press and University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

**Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures.** Edited by Vicente L. Rafael. Manila and Philadelphia: Anvil Publishing, Inc. and Temple University Press, 1995.

**Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th Century Philippines.** By Benito M. Vergara, Jr. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995.

In different ways, each of these three books engages the problem of "representation," a problem which has become increasingly important for academics and social critics in the last several years. This term as it is variously used encompasses a series of assumptions or problematics: Can any "text" (be it a book, a ritual, or a laboratory report) be considered as a neutral, ordered text separate from the structures of control in which it was produced? How do texts inscribe or construct, whether implicitly or explicitly, certain power relations? What is the relationship between a representation of any kind and the thing or things it purports to actually represent? As shall be seen, the question of "representation" is inextricable from the old problematic of how knowledge and rhetoric are related. Directly or indirectly following Nietzsche's critique of Socratic claims about reason and knowledge, scholars engaged with the problem of representation are particularly concerned with the rhetorical (and often historically-determined) conditions underlying or circumscribing all forms of knowledge. That fifteen different authors have contributed to the volumes edited by Raul Pertierra and Eduardo F.

I would like to thank José M. Cruz, S.J., Joselito N. Fornier, Karin Lindt Gollin, and Fernando N. Zialcita for their assistance with this review. Remaining errors and problems in representation are my own.

Ugarte and Vicente L. Rafael, suggests that there is some basis for developing a general description of the issue of "representation" and some of its dynamics. The following review of the three books will be followed, then, by a brief consideration of how the problematic of "representation" in these books may contribute positively and negatively to Philippine studies as a whole.

In their Introduction to *Cultures and Texts* (hereinafter referred to as *CT*), Pertierra and Ugarte acknowledge the breadth of these essays' subjects. As with the volume edited by Rafael, readers will probably examine these essays selectively, as there is little coherence to each book as a whole. Fortunately, the editors' Introductions to each of these books provide good, crisp overviews of each article. For Pertierra and Ugarte, the unifying principles are the authors' interest in culture as an "ever-changing flux of interpretations" and in Filipino capacities to negotiate "often externally imposed institutions or understandings for their own internal needs" (*CT*, 1).

The first two essays in *Cultures and Texts* are unusual in that they both bear witness to what might be called the "comic" aspects of culture. These essays demonstrate that rituals create possibilities for overcoming or minimizing social barriers and conflicts. Teruya Adachi's "The *Morion* as a Stranger" investigates the rituals of Marinduque's Holy Week festivals. Outlining the different roles of Spanish traditions, modern tourism, liberation theology, and local social classes (among other factors), he provides a good description of the customs culminating in the annual reenactment of the martyrdom of the Roman centurion, Longinus. He argues that as the strange *Morion* in his unusual costume "is welcomed into the fold of society [which has specific class distinctions]. . . differences are momentarily elided or conflated." (*CT*, 41)

Paul Matthews' "*Compadrazgo*: Culture as Performance" critiques previous studies of sponsorship at baptisms and argues that the meaning of this ritual and its attendant festivities must be considered as well as its utility. Reacting in part to the functionalist approach of the Chicago School, he demonstrates that these events are not so much about securing the economic support of the child as they are an example of a "ceremony constituting culture as performance" (*CT*, 61). His informants, he notes, tended to remember the feasting and the social harmony of the celebrations more than the actual names of sponsors or specific instances of financial support. Both of these authors demonstrate that rituals allow people in a community to minimize social, economic, and even existential gaps. Far from being ironic representations emphasizing conflict, distance, or instability, the rituals here are comic representations affirming the values and aspirations of the society. As shall be seen, these essays are an important counterweight to many of the essays in *Discrepant Histories*, essays which seem to presuppose in "representations" ironic evidence of the discord and conflict characteristic of societies.

Benedict Anderson's "Hard to Imagine: A Puzzle in the History of Philippine Nationalism" provides a concise analysis of how Leon Ma. Guerrero's

English translation of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* seriously distorts Rizal's text. We see here how translations themselves are part of the problem of representation. Although new translations of the *Noli* may make this essay superfluous for future readers of Rizal, anyone who uses the Guerrero translation needs to read this essay. It shows how American changes in Philippine education as well as Guerrero's own relationships with *hacendados* and the church led him to de-fang the text and domesticate its critiques, critiques which could also have applied to Guerrero's own Philippines. This essay would also be useful for anyone teaching Rizal in a course, especially, perhaps, in a course mandated by the Philippine government, as it shows how an "official nationalism . . . as an emanation and armature of the state" has appropriated an author who could be one of its most severe critics (CT, 103).

Raul Pertierra's own "Philippine Studies and the New Ethnography" goes right to the heart of the issue of what he calls the "crisis of representation". This crisis is the result of several converging factors. Anthropologists once could write confidently about their subjects without expecting these subjects then to read the books written about them. Moreover, an anthropologist (unfortunately, Pertierra refers more generally to an abstracted and nonexistent "Western Self") coming to the Philippines would not have had to contend with Filipino writings themselves. Now, "the Western-Self can no longer write about or speak for the non-Western Other without the latter's express authorization." (CT, 124) Further, prior to recent trends in philosophy and language theory, it was possible to believe that writing a text or, more generally, "representing" could be undertaken from a neutral, objective, distanced perspective which allowed for totalizing observations, theories, and presentations. Now, for many, any act of writing—any claim to knowledge—must highlight the author's awareness of her or his own embeddedness in power structures and specific cultural biases and the ways in which the language of the representation itself engages these power structures and biases.

To explore what this means for "representation" in anthropology, Pertierra examines two books, Jean-Paul Dumont's *Visayan Vignettes: Ethnographic Traces of a Philippine Island* (Chicago and Manila: University of Chicago Press and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992) and Renato Rosaldo's *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). Both texts, he finds, write reflexively, as the authors eschew distanced, objective, totalizing discourse in order to embody a "new ethnography" written from the perspective of a "positioned subject" (CT, 130). Such a subject confronts how he or she is changed in the process of research, and how his or her own biases may have created certain blinders. Significantly, Pertierra's criticism of Dumont—that his artful, impressionistic text does not substantively engage traditional anthropological and historical topics such as rituals, class, economics, and politics—is a testimony to the continuing relevance of "totalizing" discourse. Somehow, an ethnographic account which omits considerations of these areas will seem incomplete to most readers. The emphasis on the anthropologist's subjectiv-

ity has produced, perhaps, a wiser anthropologist, but not necessarily a more useful ethnography for others. Indeed, as Pertierra notes, it is not clear how a work like Dumont's is intended to complement other anthropologists' agendas. (This may account for Pertierra's criticism of both authors for their reluctance to engage Filipino writers on their subjects; such an engagement presupposes a cooperative relationship.)

Priscelina Patajo-Legasto's "Women and Contemporary Philippine Theater: 'Usapang Babae' or 'Women Speaking'" describes the participation of women in People's Theater, the links between Third World Feminism and traditional Marxist agendas, and the attempt to develop a "materialist feminism which views the women's and nationalist struggles as both conjoined and relatively autonomous" (CT, 146). The fact that many historians make careers out of demonstrating the inadequacy of overly-broad general categories (such as Marxism) suggests that subsequent, more extensive essays might benefit from greater precision in the use of certain terms. Still, she raises important questions about the role of gender, and specifically feminist, forms of representation.

The final essay in this volume, Andrei Adamkiewicz's "The Legitimizing Aspects of Colonial Discourse: A Philippine Example" examines "the different principles on which legitimation was based" as seen in Dean C. Worcester's *The Philippines Past and Present* (CT, 158). Although he claims that using some of the critical tools of Habermas, Ricoeur, and Foucault will help elucidate the text, it is not clear how these authors have helped him to achieve a greater understanding of "legitimation." Indeed, because he does not really address the interaction between text, author, and contemporary readers (both intended and unintended), it can be argued that he has overlooked the historical complexities both of the period and of the processes of legitimation themselves. As with some of the essays in *Discrepant Histories*, this essay does not really discuss the Whom of legitimation: whom does the text seek to convince in its effort to legitimate American colonization? Consequently, "legitimation" seems to be a property primarily of texts and not a complex process of human interaction, one involving readers or audiences as well as texts, diverse peoples with various hopes, anxieties, and resignations. (Adamkiewicz seems to gloss over this issue by saying that it was the Filipinos who needed convincing but that Worcester was influential for Americans. Specifically, how did Americans use this text when legitimating their rule in the Philippines?)

Like *Cultures and Texts*, *Discrepant Histories* contains a mixed collection of essays which do not necessarily belong together. As Rafael notes in his lucid Introduction, however, many of the authors do share some common concerns and some common methodological doctrines. He suggests that these essays may be associated with the field of "cultural studies", an anti-establishment academic stance which has become more popular in recent years (DH, xiv). By and large, readers who enjoy this largely academic enterprise

which often concentrates on problems of representation may well enjoy some of these essays. Readers hostile to this type of inquiry are likely to be hostile to the book as a whole. Drawing variously from Foucault, new historicism, structuralism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and feminism, among other trends, cultural studies often invokes irony in support of its recovery of "oppositional knowledge" and its critiques of "the possibilities of stabilizing areas of knowledge" (*DH*, xv). It takes its mission to be, in part, to destabilize traditional forms of knowing and power. Hence, it is often interdisciplinary or even anti-disciplinary in its methods. Cultural studies shares with Renato Constantino's *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* an aversion to ideals about objective scholarship, preferring, like Constantino, to deploy scholarship in the service of contemporary political agendas. But whereas Constantino's work seeks to serve the cause of nationalism, cultural studies and its use of the hermeneutics of suspicion is primarily a critical method, one which eschews nationalism as well as imperialism, indeed one which only with great difficulty can be used to construct a viable ideological alternative.

The first essay in the collection, Benedict Anderson's "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams", was originally published in 1988. Its analysis of the political economy of Philippine elites is now dated, perhaps most notably by Paul D. Hutchcroft's "Predatory Oligarchy, Patrimonial State: The Politics of Private Domestic Commercial Banking in the Philippines" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1993) and the more specific studies of particular families in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* edited by Alfred McCoy (Madison and Manila: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994). Still, this essay deserves to be read as one of the early essays to recognize the continuities in the *mestizo* elite from the early American era to the presidency of Corazon C. Aquino. It would be inaccurate to call this a work of "cultural studies"; rather, it is a solid historical essay which draws together a number of crucial historical factors into a coherent overview of a class.

Reynaldo C. Ileto's "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order in the Philippines" shares the "cultural studies" agenda of challenging traditional forms of periodization. By showing similarities between the U.S. Army's military tactics in the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902 and the colonial government's tactics in the war against cholera of 1902-1904, and by showing the similarities between disparate forms of Filipino resistance from 1899-1904, he argues that the historiographical division between the fighting and the treating of the disease needs to be seen as part of the same continuum, not as something separated by arbitrary dating and illusory declarations of peace. Although he convincingly demonstrates that the war against cholera can be seen as an extension of the war against the "insurgents", it is also possible to take his same data and argue the opposite. That American military and medical personnel were willing to compro-

mise with Filipino needs and customs in 1902 and thereafter might well suggest that there was no longer a state of war and that a different set of relationships was beginning to emerge.

This essay shares with Warwick Anderson's "'Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man is Vile': Laboratory Medicine as Colonial Discourse" an interest in assaulting customary notions of American medicine and scientific know-how as a gift of benevolent colonialism. Both authors argue that colonial medical practices participated in and legitimated colonial control over the Philippines. Anderson concentrates on how the "representational practices" of American scientists in their use of "rationalist and seemingly value-neutral accounts of modern tropical medicine" in fact "served to consolidate racial hierarchies and define possible colonial categories of experience" (*DH*, 85).

Michael Salman's "'Nothing Without Labor': Penology, Discipline and Independence in the Philippines under United States Rule" takes aim at American systems of incarceration in the early colonial era and hopes to see how the prison might be a suggestive metaphor for U.S. rule in the Philippines. Following Foucault, who equated prisons with "a disciplined barracks, a strict school, [or] a dark workshop," Salman considers the prison as a form of total institution that aspires to the complete control of its inmates under the guise of benevolence (*DH*, 115). His explicit wish to move "beyond instrumental historical analyses of successes or failures" in the study of prisons and his speaking of penology without reference to crime, however, leads him to disregard real differences between Bilibid Prison and Iwahig Penal Colony (*DH*, 115). As someone who has taught undergraduate courses in both minimum and medium security prisons in a program which has succeeded in lowering the recidivism rate, I do believe that prisons can differ substantially from each another and that inmates do need to be considered in the context of their individual and collective biographies.

Rafael's own essay, "Nationalism, Imagery, and the Filipino Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth Century" examines Rizal's "El Amor Patrio," his dedication and letters to his mother, and photographs of Rizal in order to "illustrate the tensions between imagination and imagery" (*DH*, 136). Rafael rightly raises questions about photographs as problematic representations needing future historical consideration, but given the essay's dependence on specific theoretical approaches to photographs and texts, it is not clear how useful this essay will be in the future.

Oscar V. Campomanes's "Filipinos in the United States and their Literature of Exile" begins with the concern that "Asian American literature is remarkably under-theorized when compared to African American, Chicano, and Native American literatures" (*DH*, 185, n. 1). More specifically, leaving Filipino American writing "unmapped is to create exclusion, internal hierarchy, and misrepresentation in the supposedly heterogeneous field of Asian American cultural production" (*DH*, 159). His attempt to delineate different features of Filipino American writing in an effort to describe common inter-

ests and influences is important. However, what is also needed here is a consideration of how Filipino writers in America engaged and utilized the many important non-Filipino exile writers of the twentieth century. Such an analysis will help to distinguish the particular aspects of the Filipino American experiences of exile from the more broadly-shared ones.

Of all the authors under consideration in this review, Martin F. Manalansan IV holds the distinction of being the only one who is actually identified in the text as working with an institution other than a university. His "Speaking of AIDS: Language and the Filipino 'Gay' Experience in America" comes from his experience both as an anthropologist and as someone working with the Gay Men's Health Center in Manhattan. One wonders if the seriousness of this experience leads him away from the totalizing rhetoric and appeal to theories which some other authors seem to foreground. He concentrates on how the Filipino *bakla* (a specific term which cannot be easily translated) have developed a way of speaking about AIDS that creates specific possibilities both for coping with the disease and for prevention programs. Like this essay, Fenella Cannell's "The Power of Appearances: Beauty, Mimicry and Transformation in Bicol" considers the *bakla*, here in the context of ideas of beauty and Filipino negotiations with American ideals of beauty. As with several essays in *Cultures and Texts*, Cannell emphasizes the adaptiveness of Filipinos. She describes people whose lives exhibit the various traditions, changes, and negotiations that they have made as their images of performance and beauty have been influenced successively by Spaniards, Americans, and Manileños.

Jean-Paul Dumont's "Ideas on Philippine Violence: Assertions, Negations and Narrations" juxtaposes real violence with explicit denials of violence as seen in his field work on Siquijor. Unfortunately, the essay is all-too patronizing and displays little of the self-reflexivity for which Dumont is famous as an anthropologist. He labels his subjects who try to deny conflict and violence as "daydreaming of smooth interpersonal interaction" (*DH*, 268). Could it be that, in their own ways—in ways which Dumont cannot see—the people of this island are *struggling* for some degree of peace or at least some smoother interpersonal interaction? Telling are Dumont's own words as he imposes on Filipino resistance to family planning the Western public/private distinction: "To family planning, the peasantry objected—and still does—as government interference in their private life, although they were unwilling or unable to state it" (*DH*, 270). In other words, the Western anthropologist does know more than the native. A comparison with Paul Matthews' essay on *Compadrazgo* in *Cultures and Texts* is illustrative. He argues that resistance to family planning needs to be seen in the light of what children actually mean to a community. They "provide the opportunity for the affirmation and celebration of the existing social order, and . . . [having] many children make for numerous opportunities". Moreover, "children *are* the social order: they *embody* the future, while linking that future with the

past." (CT, 72, emphasis Matthews') The difference between an ironic and a comic perception of society could not be more clear. For one, conflict pervades everything and issues of control become paramount. For the other, celebration and hope are also dominant parts of social life.

The final essay in *Discrepant Histories*, Neferti Xina Tadiar's "Manila's New Metropolitan Form" examines how flyovers as a "system of representation" create a "medium of desire which helps to produce the effect of subjectivity" which, being "the site of political conflict and struggle" are an attempt to "institute a form of social order" (DH, 287, emphasis Tadiar's). The analysis of transportation planning in Manila is an important one. But one wonders if certain categories such as "capitalism" and the "state" have become fine literary constructions rather than historically-articulated realities.

The final book under consideration, Benito M. Vergara's *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th Century Philippines*, is at once encouraging and disappointing. It is encouraging because it explores a relatively unexamined source for Philippine Studies, but it is ultimately disappointing because it suffers from many of the same problems which several of the essays just discussed exhibit.

Vergara studies photographs produced for souvenirs, travel books, the official census taken by the colonial government, and the 1904 St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition and argues that these photographs and the way they were deployed in texts constitute a sophisticated form of representation that helped stereotype Filipinos and legitimate American rule. In particular, Americans using "the camera as an instrument of surveillance and display" produced images which reified notions of racial "inferiority, an unmanageable heterogeneity of people, and the presumed incapacity for self-rule" (DF, 4).

There are some strong aspects of this work. Chapter 2 on photographic theory is a useful, brief introduction to the deceptive power of photographs to convey "truth." He notes that "the illusion of truth effectively masks the mechanics of deceit" (DF, 10). Photographs, we need to remember, are constructed images—they are not neutral "eye-witness" experiences, even though they are often claimed and perceived to be such. They are produced, utilized, and experienced in specific historical circumstances with certain expectations of how their intended audience will view them. His attention to the actual taking of photographs produces some important insights (e.g. that lining up Filipinos for a posed photograph suggests the colonial process itself). It is not enough simply to look at an image; we need to inquire how that image was constructed. Similarly, he provides some good close readings of specific images. In some respects, this is a useful beginning to a sustained study of photographs for Philippine history.

But future scholars should be aware of certain problems with this text, some of which, to be fair, would have required a much more sustained inquiry than a short study would allow. An examination of early American

colonial photography needs a greater consideration of how American experiences of war photographs in the Civil War and of indigenous tribes of American Indians influenced both how photographs were taken a generation later in the Philippines and how they were viewed in the United States. Similarly, although Vergara mentions photography and exhibitions during the Spanish era, he does not explore how the photographic studios in Manila in 1898 influenced American photography. Apparently, one American company plundered an existing studio—was that the extent of the interaction? One suspects that the question deserves more merit than it is given here.

His use of the all-encompassing “the colonial narrative” may well obscure the historical particulars of American colonial experiences. Warwick Anderson’s contrast between medical personnel of authority and “subordinate American colonizers” (e.g. footsoldiers, blue-collar men, and women) already suggests that “the” colonial experience may well contain different narratives (DH, 102). It would seem that it would make a difference to a person’s expectations and experience if one came to the Philippines to shoot gugus, exploit raw materials, prepare Little Brown Brothers for democracy, convert heathens (or Catholics) to Christianity, or teach English. Vergara’s claim to having relocated the photographs he studies in “their historical context” is not altogether convincing as his reconstructed context is too circumscribed (DF, 154).

In his consideration of how Filipinos reacted to the intervention of American photography, Vergara clings too tightly to a simple problematic of “resistance.” His own examples reveal Filipinos negotiating a number of different relationships with Americans. Muslims on display in St. Louis took the opportunity to purchase guns for themselves, while others obtained souvenirs of their trip to America which raised their own status in the Philippines. The photographs included in the book reveal a number of expressions on Filipino faces—many of them quite unhappy, but others proud, happy, or serious. One senses that responses to American photography were quite varied. Benedict Anderson’s essay on the Filipino elite likewise demonstrates that Filipino responses to American colonialism took many forms—collaboration, resistance, and even exploitation of the American system itself.

Finally, the book suffers from the problem of excessive foregrounding. It is primarily in the footnotes where one discovers how American encounters with and uses of *Ilustrados*, Muslims, and Filipino honor students were part of the complex series of interactions which were really happening at the time. Marginalizing these historical subjects oversimplifies the presentation of how Filipinos were actually understood and represented. Such a selective arrangement of the historical picture is all too easy when the problem of representation itself is in the foreground. By concentrating on selected texts as produced constructions and not on texts as actually received by diverse audiences, and by focusing on representation itself and not on how specific representations provide clues to actual historical people, events, and proc-

esses, it becomes somewhat easier to avoid messy historical variations. (Directly or indirectly, such a concentration on representation draws legitimacy from Foucault's own avowed lack of interest in history as it may have actually occurred.) As the history of Christianity's relationship to the Bible makes clear, however, it is not simply what the Bible "says" but also how different historical communities have read the very same text in various ways which constitute what the Bible's historical role has been as a representation both for and of Christians.

In general, in my opinion, the essays and books under review which most successfully grapple with the problem of representation are the ones which illuminate the great many complexities of the Philippines' past and present. Basic dichotomies such as colonizer-colonized or resistance-collaboration are too simple and call for detailed, historical elaboration. Texts which are treated without reference to how they were read—and to how different audiences responded or might have responded to them—are not profitably illuminated. Essays that recognize the importance of local variations and the tensions between Manila and the provinces provide more adequate representations of the Philippines. Unfortunately, many of the essays in these volumes prefer to foreground rather univocal notions of colonialism or textual theory. This, I believe, is all too easy when "representation," a subject evoking hermeneutics, is one of the central problematics.

At the same time, highlighting "representation" as a problem yields important results. Many of the authors in these books demonstrate an acute sensitivity to the particulars of texts, and evoking these details is a crucial element in the serious study of the Philippines. In addition, a greater variety of historical records, artifacts, and sources are studied here. Lab reports, flyovers, photographs, the ritual-making of a mask of a Roman centurion—by calling attention to these as revealing examples of human activity, it becomes much more difficult to engage the subjects of Philippine Studies without reference to the great variety of events and happenings which together bear witness to human vitality. Moreover, it becomes impossible to ignore the basic questions of gender, translation, power relations, etc., inherent in representations. As a consequence, authors become more self-aware and self-reflexive as they write, and this should, one hopes, lead to greater honesty in revealing authorial presuppositions.