

La Revolución Filipina in the Age of Empire

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Let us, however, not forget the particular circumstances under which we are writing. . . . We shall speak, not as wrongly so-called “insurrectos,” but as “Americanistas” who have not ceased to be Filipinos. . . .

—Apolinario Mabini, “The Message of President McKinley”¹

What has happened. . . . is that strong foreign cultures have struck root in a new and fertile soil. . . . The process has not been at all the fancied “assimilation” [of foreigners]. Rather has it been a process of their assimilation of us—I *speak* as an Anglo-Saxon.

—Randolph S. Bourne, “Trans-National America”²

THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION & US IMPERIAL GEOPOLITICS

“Pacific Rim” or “trans-Pacific” discourse and the notion of an American “Pacific Century,” as late twentieth-century expressions of the American transnational, are not recent inventions, at least not in the ways 1990s critical work generally seems to have advened.³ U.S. Treaty of Paris Commission negotiator Whitelaw Reid, to cite just one example among many, strenuously advocated for Philippine annexation after the 1898 Spanish-American War “for American energy to build up such a commercial marine on the Pacific Coast as should ultimately convert the Pacific Ocean into an American lake, making it far more our own than the Atlantic Ocean is now Great Britain’s.”⁴ This kind of geostrategic American politics and discourse that posited the Asia-Pacific as its object of desire quickly began to operate and proliferate after the republic’s

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most articulate visionaries declared the USA's Manifest Destiny in the early nineteenth century, and more especially, after the republic survived its bitter sectional conflicts. Such a trans-Pacific American geopolitics discursively and actually reached its apotheosis in the multiple contexts and unusual occasions offered the USA by, first, the unequal treaty that was inked with the Hawaiian Kingdom; then the compromise with Britain and Germany over the disposition of the Samoan islands; and finally the extraterritorial leavings that were the spoils of the war with Spain. These key developments in the USA's trans-Pacific extraterritorialism notably occurred throughout and serially punctuated the last quarter of the nineteenth-century.

For Reid and many nineteenth-century American imperial ideologues (such as the irrepressible expansionist William Henry Seward, the fabled naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, and even later, the geopolitician of American frontierism, Frederick Jackson Turner, etc.), the Pacific was a vast space that kept the USA from the dream of a "China Emporium of American Commerce" and an envisioned relationship with Japan as the "spearhead for the commercial penetration of Northeast Asia."⁵ This vast Pacific needed to be overcome in a bounding cognitive leap, redrawn from its previous zonings in mercantile-capitalist and Exploration-era colonial cartographs, and effectively made over into—paraphrasing Reid, in Turnerian terms—maritime and archipelagic "frontiers" for an imperially emergent United States.

Indeed, amidst the immense oceanic expanse were insignificant looking island groups that could be used as naval outposts and "coaling stations," including the Philippine and Hawaiian archipelagoes (geographic clusters of which were to be formally annexed, on various pretexts, at various times, throughout much of the twentieth century, beginning with the nearly-simultaneous Philippine and Hawaiian annexations of 1898). Not for nothing then that the most distinctive American contribution to the burgeoning turn-of-the-century science of geopolitics—otherwise largely Germanic in its provenance and elaborations—was Mahanite navalism, which made of sea power and maritime territories an equally, if not more, significant plank of national and imperial expansionism.⁶

With some highly-contingent and creatively pragmatic maneuvers as a Pacific power, and with the conquest of the Philippines substantially consolidated by the 1930s, the United States subsequently managed to

establish and control a formidable *trans-Pacific* network of “200-Mile Exclusive Economic Zones” and a complex of naval-military facilities.⁷ These are currently constellated through Guam and American Samoa as “unincorporated territories,” the Northern Marianas as a “Commonwealth,” Hawaii as the only non-continental state, and the Republic of Belau as the last remaining “trust territory” of the federal union, including offshore bases in Okinawa, Japan, and East Asian subaltern territories like South Korea and Taiwan. Such territories, zones, and outposts constitute the world-system that is clearly dominated by the United States at present. It is an American world-system in the Asia-Pacific that is traceable to an extended history of American imperial desire and modern power geopolitics, the realization of which, as I contend in this essay, was fatally predicated upon the defeat and containment of the Philippine Revolution at the turn of the century.

The 1896–98 Philippine Revolution (first phase) came at the tail-end of the nineteenth-century nationalist struggles against Iberian colonialism in the Americas and effectively marked the end of the Spanish empire. But while it was the last of the Spanish Crown colonies to secede, the Philippines also became the site of what is generally acknowledged as the first modern and anticolonial revolution in Asia. That Revolution instituted an insurgent government by 1898 and a republic by January 1899, at precisely the points when Spanish power was being eclipsed by the arrival of the United States as a new player on the arena of global imperial politics. Led by politicized factions of the emergent mestizo and native bourgeoisie, it mobilized a largely peasant-based soldiery and a multi-ethnic mass base in strategic provinces and in the major islands. Like most nationalist movements, it had its own generous share of internecine power struggles, ethnic and class conflicts, bourgeois/folk messianism, Enlightenment conceits, and patriarchal-masculinist structures and idiolects.⁸ But what probably distinguishes it from others, even from the contemporaneous Cuban Revolution of 1895–98 (to which it invites immediate comparison), was its particular misfortune of being tightly constricted between the death rattle of an old colonial regime (Spain) and the birth pangs of a new imperial power (USA).⁹ Among the first to note the implications of this peculiar predicament of the Philippine Revolution was Apolinario Mabini, perhaps the most visionary, radical, and prolific of its organic intellectuals.

APOLINARIO MABINI (1864–1903) AND THE PREHISTORY OF THE
AMERICAN TRANSNATIONAL

In this essay, I engage the critical thought of Apolinario Mabini, as indicated in particular in his 1899 essay “¿Cuál es la Verdadera Misión de la Revolución Filipina? [What is the Real Mandate of the Philippine Revolution?],” published in the second volume of his *La Revolución Filipina*.¹⁰ *La Revolución Filipina* is typically read as, and for its, damning critique of the weaknesses or handicaps besetting the Revolution and characterizing Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo’s leadership, but it is, I would argue, much more valuable for its prescient foresight on and critical precautions against a future Asia-Pacific constellated and traversed by American empire-building and pragmatic geopolitics. For heuristic purposes I have framed this consideration in Mabini’s critical legacy by an epigrammatic reference to a related text that *Harper’s Weekly* published in its 26 May 1900 number, “The Message of President McKinley.”¹¹ In this polemic, it is noteworthy that a presumably anti-American voice like Mabini’s could “speak as an *Americanista* (Americanist)” without ceasing to be “Filipino”—a speech act from the past which, to my mind, offers a very early example of a perfect transnational trope.

I suggest that, in these and a number of other articulate and equable manifestations, Mabini effectively limned a nascent theory of American imperial geopolitics and pragmatics to explain the zero-sum investment developed by the United States in the containment and defeat of the Philippine Revolution, and in the making of its trans-Pacific empire which was to make this Revolution that empire’s first and most major casualty. But while he was devoted to this task of understanding the stiff price and destructive violence exacted by the USA as an emergent New Empire on *La Revolución Filipina*, it should be clear that Mabini was never exclusively nationalist even as he was reductively tagged by American antagonists as an “irreconcilable.” Merely a cursory review of his many writings shows that he had often argued against American imperialists with an amazing willingness and capacity, on his part, to inhabit the Other’s space and be empathetic to the Other’s stakes. In short, he always took seriously, and engaged closely, what the USA’s imperialist ideologues had to say regarding their advocacy for Philippine colonization: from President William McKinley in Washington, D.C., to campaigning American generals on the ground.

I then conclude with some preliminary speculations on the post-contemporary significance of Mabini and the Philippine Revolution in the

Age of Empire, including the central point that they have much to teach us about being truly trans-national/ists. Arguably, one can count Mabini's critical thought—and the momentous contexts within which he developed it—as properly constituting an important part of the “prehistory” of our transnational conjuncture and what distinguished Twain scholar and ex-ASA President Shelley Fisher Fishkin calls “the transnational turn in American Studies” in the present.¹² I elaborate this historic and political charge of Mabini's thought and the Philippine Revolution, which may rile those who insist on a technical definition of transnationalism as something specific only to our nominal present, in the discussion that follows.

Apolinario Mabini was born to a small landholding but perennially poverty-prone family in Talaga barrio, Tanauan town, Philippine province of Batangas on 23 July 1864. Undaunted by a difficult boyhood where he had to labor early to help his mother augment the meager family income, he nonetheless remained in frail health for much of his youth and life, up to his untimely death in 1903. His precocity in childhood and his brilliance as a part-time student were much remarked upon by contemporaries, as were his arduous struggles, through many interruptions and frequent self-supporting work, to obtain formal education through all levels of the Spanish colonial educational system. Mabini's educational achievements across an extended period (capping in his graduation with a licentiate in jurisprudence from the Dominican University of Santo Tomas in 1894 and his eventual admission to the colonial bar) are now the stuff of legend. Even more legendary was how he came to the notice of General Emilio Aguinaldo around the recrudescence of the Philippine Revolution in early 1898 with the return of Aguinaldo from his Hong Kong exile.¹³

Mabini served as a political advisor to General Aguinaldo from June 1898 to his formal appointment as the Premier of the republican cabinet and Minister of Foreign Affairs in January 1899 (he was replaced in this capacity four months from this date by Pedro Paterno, a leader of the conservative faction of the republican congress, owing to ideological disputes). Mabini drew up the plans for a provisional/transitional government on the local and central levels as the Filipino revolutionists made territorial gains against the Spanish colonial state at an accelerated pace from June 1898 onwards. He is also credited with the authorship of many of Gen. Aguinaldo's decrees, proclamations, and statements during the mid-to-late 1898 standoff of the “insurgents” with Spain and the American expeditionary and occupation forces.

It must be remarked here that for his propaganda and agitation work in the mid-to-late 1890s, he was initially imprisoned by the Spanish regime for nine months (from October 1896), and was only spared the harsher treatments that were meted to his colleagues after he was paralyzed by a stroke before the August 1896 revolutionary outbreak. Captured by advancing American forces in December 1899, a few months after the eruption of war with the Americans, he was eventually deported to Guam (after being held under extended house arrest) by a still-embryonic American colonial government as an “irreconcilable” in January 1901. He remained in exile on this island for two years and was only allowed to return to the Philippines after being compelled to take the customary oath of allegiance to the insular US government (the precondition set down by American proconsuls for his repatriation). Amidst these experiences, he produced an entire oeuvre that sought to give ideological guidance to the Revolution, to justify it in the terms of natural law and international jurisprudence, and to sustain partisan morale/fervor.¹⁴ Mabini died of cholera in relative obscurity almost three months after his repatriation in early 1903.

THE AGE OF EMPIRE

The two epigraphs from Apolinario Mabini and Randolph Bourne with which I commenced this critical essay mark the turning point (1900) and the endpoint (1916) of a crucial period in modern history: what some writers have dubbed the epoch of “high imperialism” or what Eric Hobsbawm has called, in his magisterial book, the “Age of Empire,” roughly from the mid-1870s to the Great War (WWI). It was a period when, as V.I. Lenin has so famously put it, “the colonial policy of the capitalist countries has *completed* the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet [and] for the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future *only* redivision is possible.”¹⁵

Lenin was certainly referring to the global territorial annexations by a small corps of imperial nation-states which, as Hobsbawm (following Lenin) also acutely reminds us, were “capitalist core countries.”¹⁶ These capitalist countries, the most prominent being Great Britain, France, Belgium, and more lately, the emergent powers of Germany, Japan, and the United States, were then displaying ample signs of what the Russian cosmopolitan intellectual J.A. Novicow critically diagnosed by 1901 as the affliction of “kilometritis” (*kilométrite*), an “idolatry of square

kilometers.”¹⁷ The *locus classicus* for such characterization and comprehension of world history during this period is, of course, the now-canonical book by the liberal British critic of empire J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, upon which text Lenin based a substantive part of his theoretical formulations on “imperialism” as the “highest,” “special,” or “latest,” or more specifically, “monopoly,” stage of capitalism.¹⁸

Extrapolating from Hobson’s estimates—drawn from official sources and the *Statesman’s Year Book* of H.C. Morris—Lenin reckoned that, by 1900, 98.9% of Polynesia (sometimes called Oceania but actually meaning Pacific basin/island territories), 90.4% of Africa (especially after the Scramble of 1884–1886), 56.6% of Asia, and 27.2% of the Americas were placed under various (but largely colonial) forms of Euro-American dominion. Extending Hobson’s own periodizing arguments up to 1914, tweaking a bit Hobson’s geopolitical statistical data and supplementing them with updated information from the geographer A. Supan’s research, Lenin lists Great Britain as acquiring, on the eve of WWI, a grand total of 33.5 million square kilometers; France, 10.6 million square kilometers; Germany, 2.9 million square kilometers; the USA, 0.3 million square kilometers; and Japan, 0.3 million square kilometers, among the more noteworthy imperial expansions. It was in the context of this substantially accomplished inter-imperial and monopolistic appropriation of global real estate that Lenin famously advocated for a reading of the Great War as yet another momentous and immensely violent attempt at a *redivision* of the planet among the monopoly-capitalist powers.¹⁹

The Age of Empire was indeed a pure, and because of the epic slaughter through which it was accomplished by way of and culminating in WWI, *bloody*, spectacle in *kilométrite*. But as Hobsbawm acutely notes, “what is spectacular is not necessarily most important,” adding that for many thinkers since the 1890s and throughout this period (eventuating in Lenin’s grand synthesis), “what seemed a new phase in the general pattern of national and international development” singularly gripped their focus. In Leninist terms, what commended itself to contemporary analysts was “a new phase in capitalist development,” when Capital became financial in cast because of increasing monopoly and concentration, of which empire and the wars fought over it as a political form only seemed to be “the most striking aspects.” Furthermore, an indisputable fact about this period, beginning in the nineteenth century, was “the creation of a single global economy, progressively reaching into the

most remote corners of the world, an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movements of goods, money, and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the underdeveloped world."²⁰

It seems to me that, with few qualifications, Hobsbawm here could have just as well been describing our current transnational moment, with the difference that rather than a multipolar imperial regime as with the Age of Empire, the US now unilaterally and monopolistically rules the global roost, even with its coalition politics and maneuvers from the Gulf War of Bush I to the Iraq War of Bush II, to rein in the United Nations in the first, and "willing" others in the second.

MABINI ON THE TRANSNATIONAL CIRCUITS OF THE REVOLUTION

In estimating the ramifications of American intervention in the Revolution during the crucial month of August 1898, Apolinario Mabini wearily observed, "We have not yet finished the war with Spain, and we must not provoke another with America. We are not in a position to conduct two wars" (as quoted by journalist Leon Wolff).²¹ Wolff does not document this quote (almost certainly a paraphrase), which specifically refers to Mabini's forebodings about an untimely war between the Philippine revolutionary army and the American expeditionary and occupation forces after the latter outflanked and excluded the former in the notoriously scripted attack on Spanish-held Manila on 13 August 1898. Mabini recalls counseling General Aguinaldo "que procurase evitar a toda costa el conflicto, porque de lo contrario tendríamos dos enemigos y la consecuencia más probable sería la repartición de las Islas entre ambos [to avoid the conflict at all costs because otherwise we would be facing two enemies, and the most probable result would be the partition of the islands between them]."²² The extreme delicacy of the situation for the revolutionists, before and after the now infamous mock Battle of Manila which flagrantly excluded the Filipinos as combatants, drove Mabini to urge Aguinaldo to exercise prudence and tact in fending off, while also containing, the American advance(s).²³

For in being (with the Cuban Revolution) the last of the epic nineteenth-century anti-Spanish national liberation struggles but also the first of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region now shortly facing the specter of a newly aspiring conqueror, the Philippine Revolution thus bore the double distinction of dissolving the Spanish imperium (its victory would

sound the final death knell for the once mighty empire) and portending future Asian nationalisms (being the first in Asia, it could supply the model for future others to follow). But this double distinction, correspondingly, required of the Philippine Revolution a double burden, a fact none or precious few of its historians and students, critically or affirmatively, ever seemed to have appreciated.²⁴ The double burden consisted in these: this Revolution's triumph was necessary to signal the decline of old-world colonialism in Asia even as it had to face, immediately and without rest, what the United States was to signify and exercise as a neo-colonial form of power in the century to follow.²⁵ For a Revolution so young, almost spontaneous in its occurrence, and a fledgling republic so fragile and not yet effectively consolidated, this double burden certainly proved much too much to bear.

Mabini recognized this inordinately symbolic weight and handicap of the Philippine Revolution with characteristic prescience. "Preguntad a Inglaterra, Rusia, Francia, Alemania, Holanda, Portugal y otras potencias ávidas de colonizar. . . . [Ask England, Russia, France, Germany, Holland, Portugal and other greedy powers]," Mabini wrote in 1899, and "y veréis cómo tiemblan todas por sus colonias habidas y las que aun esperan haber en el ansiado reparto de China. . . . [and you will see how greatly they fear for their colonial possessions and even those they expect to acquire in the covetous partition of China. . . .]" To Mabini's perspicacious mind, the Philippine Revolution—especially in its second phase as a war of resistance against the United States' invasion—served as the unacknowledged locus of these anxieties which he observed percolating among the great imperial nations. Concerning these powers's own largely unarticulated stakes in the outcome of the Philippine revolutionary conflict, Mabini continued: "Todas ellas saben mejor que nosotros que la Revolución filipina es contagiosa, muy contagiosa; que lleva en su seno volcánico el germen de la fiebre amarilla o de la peste bubónica, mortal para sus intereses coloniales. . . . [They all know better than we do that the Philippine Revolution is contagious, very contagious: it nurses within its explosive womb the seeds of epidemic disease deadly to their colonial interests. . . .]"²⁶

These other sources of hostility to the Revolution not only compounded the difficulties that the United States posed as an intervening power but also disabled all attempts by the revolutionists to secure international recognition of their active belligerency and provisional government.²⁷ Although foisted on the Revolution by circumstances beyond its leaders's

control, such a handicap with the imperial powers as faced it was something that Mabini felt the Revolution was required to accept as a necessary and inescapable given. Asking himself by what “true ends” (*el verdadero fin*) the Philippine Revolution was bound, he declares and interrogates, in tones both serious and suffused with half-mocking ironies:

. . . . nuestro humilde entender, tiene por único objeto y término final de sus aspiraciones *mantener viva y fulgurante, en la Oceanía, la antorcha de la libertad y civilización, para que, iluminando la noche tenebrosa en que hoy yace, envilecida y degradada la raza malaya, muestre a ésta el camino de su emancipación social.* ¿Que nos hemos vuelto locos y hemos dicho una necedad? ¿Que sostenemos una utopía, una quimera engendrada por nuestra imaginación enferma?

. . . . in our humble judgment, its singular objective and the ultimate purpose of its aspirations is to *maintain alive and aflame in Oceania, the beacon of freedom and civilization, so that its light shining in the dark night of our debasement as a Malayan people, will show the way to social emancipation.* Have we gone insane and said something nonsensical? Are we upholding a utopia, a chimera sprouting from our infirm imagination?²⁸

Mabini, then, was quite clear on what the Philippine Revolution represented to the Euro-American corps of empire-states. As he positively affirmed, “que puede constituir en día no muy lejano el dique insuperable contra sus ambiciones desbordadas [In the immediate future, (our Revolution) could constitute the insuperable dam against their deluvial ambitions].”²⁹

Little wonder then that in spite of a master plan and systematic campaign for legitimating their revolution/republic in the international realm and given these inter-imperial investments in their defeat, they naturally failed to elicit endorsements or even some form of assistance from supposed sympathizers like the German Kaiser and the Japanese Emperor. Sandwiched between two contending powers, more or less desired as potential subjects by others like Britain, and chronically pressed for funds, arms, and supplies, the Filipino revolutionists seemed doomed to “fail” from the beginning.³⁰ Recalling the almost-quixotic persistence with which the Filipino revolutionists battled against these odds while emphasizing the real and ultimate goal of their enterprise, Mabini, in another passage from *La Revolución Filipina*, declares:

Hemos luchado convencidos de que nuestro deber y dignidad nos exigían el sacrificio de defender mientras podíamos nuestras libertades, porque sin ellas la igualdad social entre la casta dominante y la población indígena sería prácticamente imposible, y así no lograríamos establecer perfecta justicia entre nosotros; pero sabíamos que no tardarían en agotarse nuestros escasos medios y que nuestra derrota sería inevitable.

[We have fought convinced that our dignity and sense of duty demanded the sacrifice of defending our freedoms for as long as we were able, since without them social equality between the hegemonic class and the native populace would be impossible in practice and perfect justice among us could not be established. Yet we knew that our sparse resources would be exhausted before long and our defeat was inevitable].³¹

Here the quest for “defending freedoms” and “perfect justice” activates the registers of post-Enlightenment thought endemic to late nineteenth-century Filipino nationalist writings. The goal of the Revolution resided in restructuring native society to make it equitable and perfectible for its future citizens who had formerly languished as hierarchized and debased subjects of a tyrannical colonial order.³² But what commands immediate attention is the tone of resignation to the anticipated defeat, which loss was deliverable not so much by dissension from within revolutionary ranks (recognized as contributive in itself) as by imperialist dissent from without.

This fatalistic tone counterpointed the triumphalism expressed in the secret correspondence, state papers, and the international propaganda generated by the revolutionary government and its various organs. But apart from following certain rhetorical stratagems and lines of reasoning that were adopted to represent the Filipino cause to a global audience, this “tone” also sought to sustain internal discipline and morale. As the revolutionary army, junta, and fledgling republic suffered setback after setback in their moves against American interventionist aggression, with no recognition of their political stature and status forthcoming from the other powers, this fatalism paradoxically acquired a certain moral resonance. Propagandists and ideologues like Apolinario Mabini, and broadsides circulated internationally by the Comité Central Filipino based in Hong Kong, made a virtue of weakness and disadvantage when the Revolution was arrayed against the formidable resources and yet symbolic (or political) handicaps of the colluding and competing empires. It

was as if, consigned to the margins of imperialist politics yet representing a central threat to inter-imperial interests, the revolutionists saw negotiation from disadvantage as enabling other strategies and forms of triumph. Again, as Mabini had so presciently recognized with the revolutionary recourse to diplomatic politics and reasoned discourse in the face of an aspiring colonizer increasingly set to adopt a genocidal war strategy, “Habiéndose despreciado la diplomacia como arma propia del débil, la lucha hubo de cesar solamente cuando los revolucionarios dejaron de tener medios para continuarla [As diplomacy has been dismissed as the weapon of the weak, the struggle would only cease once the revolutionaries exhaust the means to sustain it].”³³

The Revolution, in other words, was not simply going to be, and was never only, a Filipino affair, for it involved rather forbidding global complications beyond the overthrow of the Spanish theocratic state.³⁴ There were the United States and other powers with their differing investments in the simultaneous destruction and redemption of Spanish imperial prestige and in the redivision of the world’s territorial and economic spoils. Forced to accede to a reinsertion into the shifting global order of empire-states, the new nation could only bargain or negotiate for the moral and material resources needed for social reconstruction and political consolidation but which remained in the hands of powerful Others. The constancy with which strategists like Mabini and revolutionary organs like the Comité Central Filipino studied the international dimensions of the struggle that they coordinated can only strike us in the present as something marked by pathos and yet evincingly admirable. Familiar with international and natural law, steeped in post-Enlightenment humanism, and versed in international political affairs/developments, they mediated between the external forces and those within their ranks who preferred to view the Revolution as a purely domestic problem and exclusively a matter of internal consolidation. Their political cosmopolitanism decisively shaped the diplomatic and subsequent propaganda campaigns that were launched through the Junta/Committee in Hong Kong. This rhetorical line precisely undertook to make political-cultural capital out of the utter marginality that came with being a fledgling republic in the age of imperial nations.

As Mabini baldfacedly conceded, but with that characteristic sting from which many of his discursive foes smarted and for which he had earned, in the case of some, their grudging respect:

Es innegable que el Tratado de París legitima el traspaso a los E. U. de América de la acción de España sobre Filipinas. . . . Tomamos aquí por norma de la legitimidad, no la justicia absoluta, sino esa relativa establecida por el tácito consenso de las grandes potencias, bautizado para gloria y engrandecimiento de éstas y en perjuicio y ruina de las débiles con el pomposo nombre de derecho internacional, esa justicia relativa que suele santificar los más estupidas, cuya sanción reguladora es la razón de la fuerza y no la fuerza de la razón.

[We are unable to deny that the Treaty of Paris legalizes the transfer of Spain's control over the Philippines to the United States. . . . Thus we take as legitimate norm not absolute but relative justice, established and christened through the tacit consensus of the great powers, for their glory and aggrandizement, to the disadvantage and devastation of the weak, in the pompous name of international law. It is this relative justice that customarily hallows the most marvellous usurpations, whose governing sanction is the reason of force and not the force of reason].³⁵

SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

I first and dimly understood the word 'transnational' through independent reading and immersion in the prolific critical work of the late Filipino nationalist intellectual Renato Constantino, while starting out as an undergraduate major in Filipino language and Philippine literature at the University of the Philippines College (Baguio) in the late 1970s.³⁶ This was therefore long before its now lusty currency and proliferation as a term—at least, since the early 1990s—to describe the New World Order, and as a category of postmodern political and cultural critique. Constantino had used the term to identify and specify an omnibus organizational expression of late capitalism's global reach and its tentacular grips over the postcolonial Filipino economy: the 'transnational corporation' (or in his shorthand, the 'TNCs'). Along with a few farsighted contemporary analysts, Constantino sought to explicate, in a preliminary way, capitalism's new and flexible regimes of accumulation across national frontiers and in excess or abjuration of what used to be its national expressions and fealties (others would later call this kind of transnational capitalism, in the particular case of American capitalism, 'post-Fordist.'³⁷)

Reflecting upon Constantino's work now, I am struck by a haunting sense of *déjà vu*. Much of the descriptive and explanatory power of his

anti-imperial and anticapitalist critique seems to hark back to Lenin's, and Mabini's time, to the Age of Empire and its curious amalgams and disjunctions of economic and territorial monopoly. It was a time when the world was welded into one dominated by empire/s yet simultaneously and fitfully redrawn by bloody border wars. It was a time when a national liberation movement could be snuffed out at its infancy through the alliance of the great powers, otherwise divided amongst themselves by real and competing capitalist investments. It was a time when a New Empire, the USA, (or also more generally what Hobson called the 'new Imperialism') could spectacularly and uncompromisingly announce its advent, and begin to build its formidable edifice on that seemingly insignificant Revolution's mangled remains.

But it was also a time, especially at its provisional endpoint of 1916, when an American, a citizen of the emergent New Empire, could go against the tide and seek to overturn his own country's now-calcifying nationalist, militarist, and imperialist shibboleths.

In the late 1990s, while on a visiting faculty appointment at New York University to help organize a conference and book project dealing with the Philippine-American War of 1899 and contemporary Filipino transnational and diasporic formation, I was alerted, in the research I conducted for this particular project, to an even earlier use of 'transnational.' I refer to the immensely insightful 1916 essay, "Trans-National America" by the American public intellectual and antiwar activist Randolph Bourne.³⁸ Bourne had used the term to critique nationalist or assimilationist visions and fictions of America, in light of the "dissensus" which he saw characterizing American society over, and in the wake of, President Woodrow Wilson's abandonment of neutrality during the Great War (WWI). He also used it as a startling modifier on that proper name, America, so as to reflect what he deemed was a much more complex and multivocal process of American national formation than that allowed by the prevailing nationalist American theory of assimilation. In calling this other and ideal America 'Trans-National,' Bourne boldly advocated for a conception of the United States as something strikingly global in microcosm, given its already and markedly multinational population at the time.³⁹ Correspondingly, he challenged Americans, especially the young, to abandon the "parochialism and provincialism" of their elders, and to actively cultivate an outlook or self-image of "cosmopolitanism" that eschews the "national self-feeling" induced by what he sneeringly dubbed the "orthodox nationalistic game."⁴⁰

From the midpoint of Mabini's moment (1900) to the endpoint of Bourne's (1916), the Age of Empire also produced, perhaps necessitated, the incipient kinds of radical transnationalism and critical cosmopolitanism that either figure embodied, each in his own ways and specific circumstances. As should be obvious from their examples, and the latter-day's case of Renato Constantino, there is nothing unprecedented or even radically new about our current usage and understandings of transnationalism and the term transnational, at least in that species of current transdisciplinary writing which construes our conjuncture as an epochal break from periods long past and presumably forgotten.⁴¹

NOTES

¹ Apolinario Mabini, "The Message of President McKinley," *Harper's Weekly*, 26 May 1900, 490.

² Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," in *History of a Literary Radical and Other Papers* (1916; New York: S.A. Russell, 1957), 278.

³ Arif Dirlik, ed., *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); Arif Dirlik and Rob Wilson, eds., *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁴ Entry for 16 September 1898, in H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *Making Peace with Spain: The Diary of Whitelaw Reid (September-December 1898)*, (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1965), 29.

⁵ Richard Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 174-75; see also the now-classic study of nineteenth-century American imperialist ideology and ideologues by Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

⁶ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 225-26.

⁷ Zones within two hundred miles surrounding the Pacific islands or island chains under some form of federal control by the United States (either through trusteeship or commonwealth status) are considered "exclusive" to the USA. See Robert C. Kiste, et al., eds., *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 239-40.

⁸ See Florentino Rodao and Felice Noelle Rodriquez, eds., *The Philippine Revolution of 1896: Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001).

⁹ The Cuban Revolution was eventually negotiated through the Platt Amendment of 1901-02 (implemented in/after 1903), probably owing to the shrewd wisdom of Elihu Root who maintained to McKinley and the imperialist hawks in that administration that the United States was not militarily equipped and politically capable of conducting two counter-insurgency wars on the Philippine and Cuban fronts at that point; for more on the patent unpreparedness of the U.S. War Department and armed forces in war footing, see Oscar Campomanes, "Casualty Figures of the American Soldier & the Other," in Luis Francia and Angel V. Shaw, eds., *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999* (New York and Manila: New York

University Press, Anvil, 2002), 135–36, and 154n13. See also Louis Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires 1878–1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983) for a critical account of the equally tragic fate of the extended Cuban Revolution.

¹⁰ Mabini, *La Revolución Filipina, con otros documentos de la época*, comp. and ed., Teodoro M. Kalaw, vol. 2 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1931).

¹¹ Mabini, “The Message of President McKinley.” It is not known who translated this piece from the Spanish, but essays addressed by Mabini to a number of American periodicals or US government and Philippine colonial government organs and officials between 1899 and 1902 were typically mediated by the translation assistance provided by the Comité Central Filipino in Hong Kong—the Aguinaldo government’s foreign policy and international propaganda bureau, or his American correspondents who were sympathetic to the revolutionary cause or moved actively in US anti-imperialist circles.

¹² Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 17–57.

¹³ Mabini was commended to Gen. Aguinaldo through the intercession and glowing endorsements of fellow Batangueño and eventual revolutionary emissary to the United States, Felipe Agoncillo. Agoncillo was much impressed by Mabini’s early politicization and independent propaganda/agitation work, from Mabini’s involvement in radical freemasonry through his membership in the fraternal organization *Cuerpo de Compromisarios* and the ill-fated *La Liga Filipina*. On his background, education, and early political activities, see the prizewinning biography by Cesar Adib Majul, *Apolinario Mabini, Revolutionary* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1970; Manila: National Historical Institute, 1993), 10–20, 32–71.

¹⁴ Mabini’s extant writings and selected correspondence are compiled in *La Revolución Filipina*, 2 vols. Other epistolary documents, written in his various capacities outside of and as part of the revolutionary movement/government are collected in *Las cartas políticas de Apolinario Mabini (con prologo y notas)*, comp. and ed., Teodoro M. Kalaw (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1930).

¹⁵ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914*, (New York: Vintage, 1989); Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916; New York: International Publishers, 1990), 76.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, 56, 50–61.

¹⁷ Quoted in Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 229. This exclusive circle is expanded here or there by Hobson, Lenin, and Hobsbawm to include minor, unevenly developed, or “preindustrial empires” like those of Italy; Portugal (adding more, as Hobsbawm notes, to her “ancient African colonies”); Spain (“a net loser to the USA,” but following the cession of the Philippines and transfer of Cuba and Puerto Rico to the USA, “still managed to pick up stony territory in Morocco and the Western Sahara,” in Hobsbawm’s satiric words); tsarist Russia (whose expansionism was “unique,” according to Hobsbawm, for its was “secular” and involved movement into “contiguous” territories while losing some to Japan, and in Hobson’s characterization, “principally Asiatic”); and the Netherlands (which, observes Hobsbawm, either “failed or refused” to acquire more and merely extended its dominion over much of the Indonesian archipelago that it already “formally owned”). See Lenin, *Imperialism*, 78; Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, (New York: James Pott and Co., 1902; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 21; and Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, 59.

¹⁸ Hobson, *Imperialism*.

¹⁹ Lenin, *Imperialism*, 76, 80, especially 9. From this comparative tabulation, we see pretty early indications of the exceptionalist forms of empire-building in Japan and the

United States as, in the apt words of University of Tokyo international relations scholar Kiichi Fujiwara, “latecomers in colonialism” whose expansionism would significantly depart from the norm of territorial imperialism established by their British and French predecessors, or more classically, the Spanish and Portuguese. In the case of the USA, I have argued elsewhere that its traumatizing experience as the ambivalent tyranny in the second, or “Philippine-American War,” phase of the Philippine Revolution, challenged to a near-genocidal and -suicidal stand-off by anticolonial Filipino resistance, compelled it to delimit its imperial ambitions and to reformulate its aspirant suzerainty in a modality that critics would recognize as “neocolonialism/imperialism” in the twentieth century and, arguably, up to the present. See Fujiwara, “Two New Empires: Japan and the United States as Latecomers in Colonialism,” in *Proceedings of the Symposium: The Philippines-Japan Relationship in an Evolving Paradigm* (Manila: De La Salle University Yuchengco Center, 2006); Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Post-colonialities,” *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1995), 146, 158–64; and Campomanes, “1898 and the Nature of the New Empire,” *Radical History Review* 73 (Winter 1999), 135–37.

²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, 59–60; 62.

²¹ Wolff, *Little Brown Brother* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 135.

²² Mabini, *La Revolución Filipina*, 309–10.

²³ John Foreman writes of the series of redeployments through which the U.S. generals usurped, on the pretext of alliance tactics, the siege positions that the Filipino revolutionary army had established around Manila where the Spaniards had rallied for their last stand. As he recounts, “the Filipinos were ordered not to attempt to take Manila by assault, to haul down their republican flag in the bay, to evacuate one point after another, to give up their trenches to the American troops, to abstain from co-operating against the Spaniards the day Manila was taken, and (under the threat of force) to remove their outposts farther and farther away from the city.” Foreman, *The Philippine Islands* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 52.

²⁴ Of the handful of American Filipinist historians who have sought explanations, on a sustained basis, for the defeat of the Philippine Revolution at the hands of the United States Army, Glenn May, Brian Linn, and John Gates are the most typical, with Linn and Gates additionally attributing American victory to the benevolent intentions of the colonizers. All three and a few others practically echo the arguments of John Farrell, made in 1954, that the power mania of, and political intramurals among, the Filipino revolutionary leaders, along with the absence of a true nationalism among their followers, spelled doom for the Filipino independence movement from its very outset. Unwittingly, even a critical scholar like Benedict Anderson ended up ratifying these highly problematic or reductive interpretations in a much-anthologized essay. Filipino historian Teodoro Agoncillo endeavored to dispute these kinds of historiographic reductionism, attributing Filipino loss to American political cupidity and military brutalities, but stopped short of holding some Filipino revolutionists responsible for the strategic reverses that the Revolution suffered as the war of conquest and resistance (1899–1902) trudged to its fatal end. See May, *A Past Recovered: Essays in Philippine History and Historiography* (Quezon City, RP: New Day, 1987), 76 and 81; Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1973); Farrell, “An Abandoned Approach to Philippine History: John R. M. Taylor and the Philippine Insurrection Records,” *Catholic Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (January 1954), 388–89;

Anderson, "Cacique Democracy," in Vicente Rafael, ed. *Discrepant Histories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); and Agoncillo, *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City, RP: University of the Philippines Press, 1960).

²⁵ Felipe Agoncillo, introduced in an earlier note as Mabini's backer, and who was then coordinating the Hong Kong Junta of the revolutionary government, precisely advised Aguinaldo and Mabini to be very cautious in mulling over "the best solution to our political problem, *which is an exceptional case in history.*" Felipe Agoncillo to Apolinario Mabini, 2 August 1898, in J. R. M. Taylor, comp. & trans., *The Philippine Insurrection against the United States* (1906; Manila: Eugenio Lopez Foundation, 1971), vol. 3, 262–64; emphasis added. As one 1900 local circular ("to be forwarded from one post to another by the Revolutionary Military Service") asserts, "Those who have said that the Philippine Revolution is unparalleled in History were not mistaken in their statement." By this time, however, "exceptionalism" is redefinable in terms of the tenacity of "the lower class of people" who persisted in their resistance even as many of their elite leaders were surrendering to the Americans. "To the Local Chief of Ligao and Lieut. Col. of the 2nd Battalion," (from the General Headquarters of Military Operations, Albay [in Southern Luzon, Philippines]), 13 June 1900, signed by Lieut. Col. Eugenio Rabiell, in Taylor, *Philippine Insurrection*, vol. 5, 362.

²⁶ "¿Cuál es la Verdadera Misión de la Revolución [What is the Real Mandate of the Philippine Revolution?]," (1899) in Mabini, *La Revolución*, vol. 2, 56–57; see also Cesar Adib Majul, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (1957; Quezon City, RP: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), 80–81.

²⁷ This was the conclusion of more discerning members of the Hong Kong Junta of the revolutionary government. Even before or as the McKinley administration dispatched American troops to the Philippines to "aid" the Filipinos in their insurrection against Spain, to "protect" them from other rapacious powers, and "to maintain peace and order" in the interregnum between Spanish defeat and American annexation, this pragmatic estimate of their political circumscription punctuated their official/secret correspondence and their internal as well as international communication work. See especially the 4 May 1898 minutes of the Junta, in Taylor, *Philippine Insurrection*, vol. 1, 505–10.

²⁸ Mabini, *La Revolución Filipina*, vol. 2, 56, emphasis in the original.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 57.

³⁰ The German, and (to a limited extent) Japanese, "bogeys" were invoked by American imperialists in agitating for the annexation of the Philippines, with much encouragement from British publicists who expressed a right of preference to the erstwhile Spanish colony after the United States. Although American diplomatic historians have sought and been unable to establish the extent of continental or Japanese imperialist designs on the Philippines in a postrevolutionary scenario, they generally agree that the agitation against rival interests accomplished enough political work to rally editorial and public opinion in the United States toward not only annexation but also an Anglo-American rapprochement or alliance against rival empires. Combined with the rampant Anglo-Saxonism of the time, this USA-UK reconciliation over the lingering bitterness of the 1776 American revolutionary break and the Venezuela border dispute of 1895 between the two countries apparently served enough notice to other powers not to poach on Philippine waters or risk the combined ire of Uncle Sam and John Bull.

³¹ Mabini, *La Revolución*, 269; also, his now famous riposte to Maj. Gen. J.F. Bell, "Contestación de Mabini," 31 August 1900, (Spanish text in Mabini, *La Revolución*, vol. 2, 194–199) which is published, and canonized in Philippine letters, as "In Response to General Bell" in Bienvendio Lumbea and Cynthia Nograles Lumbea, *Philippine Literature: A History and An Anthology* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1982).

³² Majul, *Political and Constitutional Ideas*, 19–39; 70–91.

³³ Mabini, *La Revolución*, vol. 2, 269.

³⁴ The Spanish colonial state that was established in the Philippines is conventionally and correctly designated in Philippine historical studies as “theocratic” given the inseparability of the Church, especially the Spanish friars and religious corporations, from the business of government. An alternative term is “frailocracy.”

³⁵ Mabini, *La Revolución Filipina*, vol. 2, 54.

³⁶ I refer to several series of critiques of neocolonial political economy and US economic domination of the Philippines that he produced and issued, in the form of handy pamphlets, with the collaboration of his wife Letizia Constantino. The classic text through which to get introduced to Constantino’s ideological orientation and highly-influential work of critical decolonization is his quite gripping account of contemporary and historical US hegemony in the Philippines and Filipino resistance to it, *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness* (White Plains, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1978).

³⁷ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (New York: Routledge, 1989).

³⁸ The NYU conference and book-writing project, conducted under the auspices of NYU’s Asian/Pacific/American Program and Institute, has now become the tome *Vestiges of War*, edited by Francia and Shaw.

³⁹ “The first international nation,” as he called the United States, or even more interestingly, “a federation of world cultures.”

⁴⁰ Bourne, “Trans-National America,” 284–85.

⁴¹ On our current conjuncture (which goes under the rubric “transnational,” among others) as an epochal break from modernity, the baldest and most specific statement is by Antonio Negri, Thesis 4: “The periodization of capitalist development shows that we are the beginning of a new epoch.” Negri, “Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today,” trans. Michael Hardt, *Polygraph* 5 (1992), 141. See also his full-scale and now controversial exposition and elaboration of the twenty theses on Marx and certain of his other “post-Marxist” ideas in his collaboration with Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), where he argues that we are now under a global regime that has no national center and whose governance of planetary life bespeaks a radically new form of “sovereignty” that networks the world without being specifiable and accountable to it.