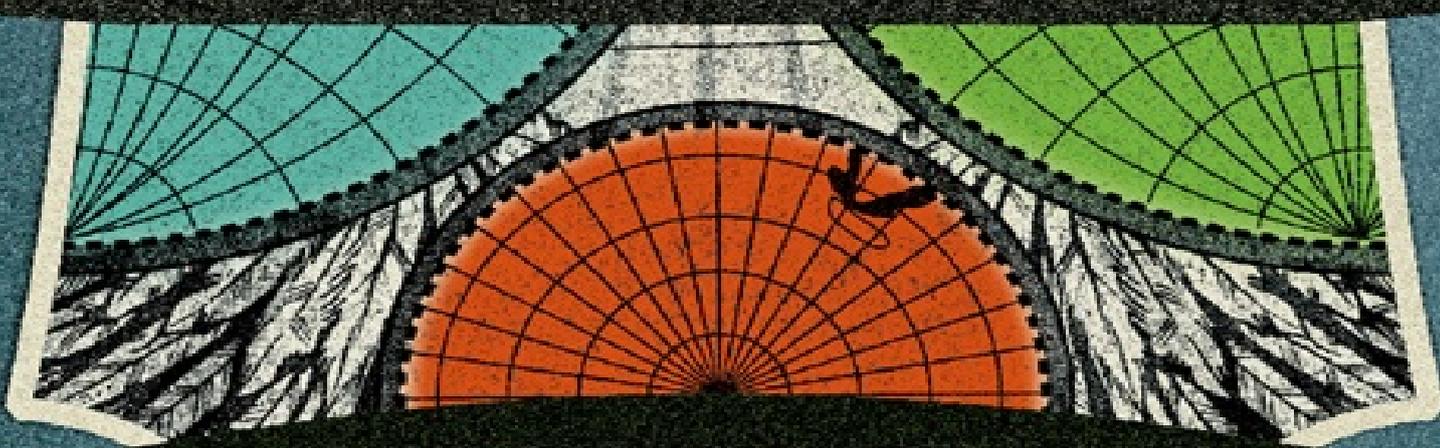


"EXCITING AND IMPORTANT." —GUARDIAN



THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

ANARCHISTS AND THE ANTICOLONIAL IMAGINATION



Benedict Anderson

The Age of Globalization

Anarchists and the Anticolonial Imagination



BENEDICT ANDERSON



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It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians.

We cannibals must help these Christians

Queequeg

In homage to Herman Melville

In memory of Tsuchiya Kenji

For Kenichiro, Carol and Henry

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Introduction

If one looks up at a moonless, dry-season, tropical night sky, one sees a glittering canopy of stationary stars, connected by nothing but darkness visible and the imagination. The serene beauty is so immense that it takes an effort of will to remind oneself that these stars are actually in perpetual, frantic motion, impelled hither and yon by the invisible power of the gravitational fields of which they are ineluctable, active parts. Such is the Chaldean elegance of the comparative method, which, for example, allowed me once to juxtapose “Japanese nationalism with “Hungarian,” “Venezuelan” with “American,” and “Indonesian” with “Swiss.” Each shining with its own separate, steady, unitary light.

When night fell in revolutionary Haiti, yellow-fevered Polish troops under General Charles Leclerc, sent by Napoléon to restore slavery, heard their adversaries in the near distance singing the “Marseillaise” and “Ça ira!” Responding to this reproach, they refused an order to massacre black prisoners.¹ The Scottish Enlightenment was decisive for framing the American anticolonial insurrection. The Spanish American nationalist independence movements are inseparable from the universalist currents of liberalism and republicanism. In their turn Romanticism, democracy, Idealism, Marxism, anarchism, even, late in the day, fascism were variously understood as globe-stretching and nation-linking. Nationalism, that element with the highest valency of all, combined with all these others in different ways and in different times.

This book is an experiment in what Melville might have called political astronomy. It attempts to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalisms on opposite sides of the planet. Following the collapse of the First International, and Marx's death in 1883, anarchism, in its characteristically variegated forms, was the dominant element in the selfconsciously internationalist radical Left. It was not merely that Peter Kropotkin (born twenty-two years after Marx) and Malatesta (born thirty-three years after Engels) anarchism produced a persuasive philosopher and a colorful, charismatic activist leader from a younger generation, not matched by mainstream Marxism. Notwithstanding the towering edifice of Marx's thought, from which anarchism often borrowed, the movement did not disdain peasants and agricultural laborers in an age when serious industrial proletarians were mainly confined to Northern Europe. It was open to “bourgeois” writers and artists—the name of individual freedom—in a way that, in those days, institutional Marxism was not. Just as hostile to imperialism, it had no theoretical prejudices against “small” and “ahistorical” nationalisms, including those in the colonial world. Anarchists were also quick to capitalize on the vast transoceanic migrations of the era. Malatesta spent four years in Buenos Aires—something inconceivable for Marx or Engels, who never left Western Europe. Mayday celebrates the memory of immigrant anarchists—not Marxists—executed in the United States in 1887.

This book's temporal focus on the final decades of the nineteenth century has still other

justifications. The near-simultaneity of the last nationalist insurrection in the New World (Cuba, 1895) and the first in Asia (the Philippines, 1896) was no serendipity. Natives of the last important remnants of the fabled Spanish global empire, Cubans (as well as Puerto Ricans and Dominicans) and Filipinos did not merely read about each other, but had crucial personal connections and, up to a point, coordinated their actions—the first time in world history that such transglobal coordination became possible. Both were eventually crushed within a few years of each other, by the same brutish would-be world hegemon. But the coordination did not take place directly between the broken hill-country of Oriente and Cavite, but was mediated through “representatives,” above all in Paris, and secondarily in Hong Kong, London and New York. Newspaper-reading Chinese nationalists eagerly followed events in Cuba and the Philippines—as well as the Boer nationalist struggle against U.K. imperialism, which Filipinos also studied—to learn how to “do” revolution, anticolonialism and anti-imperialism. Both Filipinos and Cubans found, to different degrees, their most reliable allies among French, Spanish, Italian, Belgian and British anarchists—each for their own, often non-nationalist reasons.

These coordinations were made possible because the last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the onset of what one could call “early globalization.” The invention of the telegraph was rapidly followed by many improvements, and the laying of transoceanic submarine cables. The “wire” was soon taken for granted by city people all over the planet. In 1903, Theodore Roosevelt sent off a round-the-globe telegram to himself which reached him in nine minutes.² The inauguration of the Universal Postal Union in 1876 vastly accelerated the reliable movement of letters, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and books around the world. The steamship—safe, speedy, and cheap—made possible unprecedented massive migrations from state to state, empire to empire, and continent to continent. A thickening latticework of railways was moving millions of people and commodities within national and colonial borders, linking remote interiors to each other and to ports and capital.

During the eight decades between 1815 and 1894 the world was largely at conservative peace. Almost all states outside the Americas were headed by monarchies, autocratic or constitutional. The three longest and bloodiest wars took place on the periphery of the world system—civil wars in China and the United States, the Crimean War on the northern littoral of the Black Sea, and the horrifying struggle of the 1860s between Paraguay and its powerful neighbors. Bismarck’s crushing defeats of Austro-Hungary and France were achieved with lightning speed and without any huge loss of life. Europe had such vast superiority in industrial, financial, scientific, and military resources that imperialism in Asia, Africa, and Oceania forged ahead without much effective armed resistance, except in the case of the Mutiny in India. And capital itself moved quickly and pretty freely across existing national and imperial boundaries.

But beginning in the early 1880s the preliminary tremors were being felt of the earthquake that we remember variously as the Great War or the First World War. Tsar Alexander II’s assassination in 1881 by bomb-throwing radicals calling themselves The People’s Will was followed over the next twenty-five years by the killing of a French president, an Italian monarch, an Austrian empress and an heir-apparent, a Portuguese king and his heir, a Spanish prime minister, two American presidents, a king of Greece, a king of Serbia, and powerful conservative politicians in Russia, Ireland, and Japan. Of course, a much larger number of

attentats failed. The earliest and most spectacular of these assassinations were carried out by anarchists, but nationalists soon followed in their wake. In most cases the immediate aftermath was a mass of draconian “anti-terrorist” legislation, summary executions, and a sharp rise in torture by police forces, public and secret, as well as militaries. But the assassins, some of whom could well be described as early suicide-bombers, understood themselves as acting for a world-audience of news agencies, newspapers, religious progressives, working-class and peasant organizations, and so on.

Imperialist competition, till 1880 still largely between the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, was beginning to be intensified by such newcomers as Germany (in Africa, Northeast Asia, and Oceania), the United States (across the Pacific and into the Caribbean), Italy (in Africa), and Japan (in East Asia). Resistance was also beginning to show a more modern and effective face. In the 1890s, Spain had to send the hitherto largest military force to cross the Atlantic in its attempt to smash Martí’s insurrection in Cuba. In the Philippines, Spain held out against a nationalist uprising but could not defeat it. In South Africa, the Boers gave the British Empire the shock of its aging life.

Such is the general proscenium on which the main actors in this book played their various nomadic parts. One could put this point more vividly, perhaps, by saying that the reader will encounter Italians in Argentina, New Jersey, France, and the Basque homeland; Puerto Ricans and Cubans in Haiti, the United States, France, and the Philippines; Spaniards in Cuba, France, Brazil, and the Philippines; Russians in Paris; Filipinos in Belgium, Austria, Japan, France, Hong Kong, and Britain; Japanese in Mexico, San Francisco, and Manila; Germans in London and Oceania; Chinese in the Philippines and Japan; Frenchmen in Argentina, Spain, and Ethiopia. And so on.

In principle, one could open the study of this vast rhizomal network anywhere—Russia would take one eventually to Cuba, Belgium would lead one to Ethiopia, Puerto Rico would bring one to China. But this particular study embarks from the Philippines for two simple reasons. The first is that I am deeply attached to it, and have studied it, on and off, for twenty years. The second is that in the 1890s, though on the outer periphery of the world system, it briefly played a world-role which has since eluded it. A subordinate reason is the material available to me. The three men whose lives anchor the study—born within three or four years of each other in the early 1860s—lived in the holy time before the advent of the photocopy, the fax, and the internet. They wrote copiously—letters, pamphlets, articles, academic studies, and novels—in undeletable pen and ink, on paper that was expected to have a near-infinite life. (The United States Archives today refuses to accept anything xeroxed—it will become illegible within twenty years—or in electronic form—it will be unreadable or readable only at prohibitive cost, even sooner, thanks to the hurtling pace of technological innovation.)

Nonetheless, a study that, however superficially, takes one to Rio de Janeiro, Yokohama, Ghent, Barcelona, London, Harar, Paris, Hong Kong, Smolensk, Chicago, Cádiz, Port-au-Prince, Tampa, Naples, Manila, Leitmeritz, Cayo Hueso, and Singapore requires its own combinative narrative style. In this style there are two central elements: second (historically) is Eisenstein’s montage, while the first is that of the *roman-feuilleton* pioneered by Charles Dickens and Eugène Sue. The reader is thus requested to imagine that she is reading a black-and-white film or a novel *manqué* of which the conclusion is over the tired novelist’s horizon.

There is one further burden on the good reader. In the late nineteenth century there was yet no ugly, commercially debased “international language.” Filipinos wrote to Austrians in German, to Japanese in English, to each other in French, or Spanish, or Tagalog, with liberal interventions from the last beautiful international language, Latin. Some of them knew a bit of Russian, Greek, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese. A wire might be sent around the world in a matter of minutes, but real communication required the true, hard internationalism of the polyglot. Filipino leaders were peculiarly adapted to this Babelish world. The language of the political enemy was also their private language, though understood by less than 5 percent of the Philippine population. Tagalog, the native language used in Manila and its immediate periphery, was not understood by most Filipinos, and in any case was useless for international communication. Many native speakers of rival local languages, especially Cebuano and Ilocano, preferred Spanish, even though this language was, in the Philippines, a clear marker of elite, even collaborationist status. To give the reader the most vivid sense of a vanished polyglot world, this study quotes liberally from the different languages in which these people wrote to each other and to non-Filipinos. (All the translations in this book are my own, unless stated otherwise.)

The formal structure of the book is governed by its method and its objects. It has a clear-cut, if arbitrary, beginning in the quiet, remote Manila of the 1880s, and then gradually fans out across Europe, the Americas, and Asia towards an even more arbitrary *finis* for which no “conclusion” seems feasible. It is anchored, if that is the best word for it, in the young lives of three prominent Filipino patriots born in the early 1860s: novelist of genius José Rizal, pioneering anthropologist and polemical journalist Isabelo de los Reyes, and coordination organizer Mariano Ponce.

Chapters 1 and 2 are contrasting studies of two remarkable books: Isabelo’s *El folk-lore Filipino* (Manila, 1887) and Rizal’s enigmatic second novel *El Filibusterismo* (Ghent, 1891). They investigate the ways in which: (1) the anthropologist openly deployed the work of contemporary European ethnologists and folklorists, combined with his own local research, to undermine the intellectual credibility of the colonial authorities, both clerical and lay; (2) the novelist borrowed alchemically from key figures of the French, Dutch, and Spanish literary avant-gardes to write what is probably the first incendiary anticolonial novel written by a colonial subject outside Europe.

The following chapter begins the move away from amateur literary criticism to the field of politics. *El Filibusterismo* is still the main topic, but it is explicated through the filter of Rizal’s reading and experiences in Europe between 1882 and 1891, as well the fallout from his brilliant first novel *Noli me tangere*, which made him the symbol of Philippine resistance to colonial rule, and won him the bitter enmity of many in high places. It also deals with the political conflicts that sharpened among the Filipino activists in Spain. *El Filibusterismo* is argued to be a kind of global novel by contrast with its predecessor. Its characters are no longer simply the Spanish and their native subjects, but include nomads from France, China, the United States, and even, some personages suspect, Cuba. The shadows of Bismarck in Europe and East Asia, Nobel’s innovation in industrial explosives, Russian nihilism, and the anarchism of Barcelona and Andalusia are all apparent in its pages.

Chapter 4 covers the four years between Rizal’s return home in 1891 and his execution at the very end of 1896. It discusses above all the transformations in Cuba, and in the *émigré*

Cuban communities in Florida and New York, which made it possible for Martí to plan and launch an armed revolutionary insurrection in 1895 (and his successors' success in holding on at huge cost the gigantic expeditionary force sent to crush it). The opening of this attack occurred within a week of the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki (following Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895), which, by turning Taiwan over to Tokyo, brought the first Asian power within a day's sail from the northern shore of Luzon. Substantial sections are devoted to Rizal's abortive plan to create a Filipino colony in northeastern Borneo (interpreted in some important quarters as taking a leaf from Martí's Tampa book) and to his fraught relations with the clandestine Katipunan which launched an armed uprising against Spanish rule in 1896.

Chapter 5 is the most complicated. Two months before the outbreak of the Katipunan uprising, the bloodiest of many anarchist bombings took place in wartime Barcelona. The conservative regime of prime minister Cánovas responded with martial law in the city itself, massive arrests of people on the Left, and the practice of the grimmest tortures in the gloomy fortress of Montjuich. Among those imprisoned was the remarkable creole Cuban anarchist Tarrida del Mármol. On his release he made his way to Paris, where he launched an extraordinary crusade against the Cánovas regime, mainly through the pages of *La Revue Blanche*, then the most important avant-garde journal in France, perhaps in the world. Tarrida's long series of articles, starting shortly before Rizal's execution, linked together the fierce repressions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Barcelona, and the Philippines. Tarrida's crusade spread rapidly through the anarchist press in Europe and across the Atlantic, and soon developed powerful support from many other progressive organizations and journals. In Paris his key allies were Félix Fénéon and Georges Clémenceau: Fénéon, the driving intellectual force behind *La Revue Blanche*, was a brilliant art and drama critic, but also a committed anti-imperialist anarchist who did not hesitate to set off a bomb himself. Clémenceau, also a committed anti-imperialist, had been mayor of Montmartre under the Paris Commune, befriended many imprisoned anarchists, and worked hard, as journalist and politician, for the rights of workers. Both men played key roles in the Dreyfus affair which broke open in the autumn of 1897.

The chapter then turns to a consideration of the background to the assassination of Cánovas on August 9, 1897 by the young Italian anarchist Michele Angiolillo, which portended the collapse of the Spanish empire the following year. The key personality was Dr Ramón Betances, the legendary Puerto Rican conspirator for the independence of the Antillean colonies and enemy of both Spain and the voracious United States. The doctor was by no means an anarchist himself, but he found the most energetic European allies for his cause among Italian and French anarchists. The last two major sections pivot on the activities of Rizal's close friend Mariano Ponce, and on Isabelo de los Reyes. Ponce slipped out of Spain in the fall of 1896, and soon started to work as a key diplomatic and propaganda agent for the revolutionary Philippine government, first in Hong Kong, later in Yokohama. The book analyzes Ponce's remarkable correspondence with Filipinos and many kinds of foreigners—Mexico City, New Orleans, New York, Barcelona, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Singapore, and considers various indications of his impact, especially in Japan and the resident Chinese community there. Isabelo, on the other hand, was imprisoned shortly after the Katipunan uprising, and was eventually sent to Montjuich prison.

Barcelona, where he got to know and was impressed by the Catalan anarchist inmates. It was he who, on returning to Manila to face the new American colonial regime, brought with him the first copies of works of Kropotkin, Marx and Malatesta to reach his country. He practiced what the anarchists had taught him in organizing the first serious and militant trade union central in the Philippines.

It remains only to say that if readers find in this text a number of parallels and resonances with our own time, they will not be mistaken. At the 2004 Republican convention in New York, which was guarded by many thousands of policemen and other “security” personnel, the metropolitan police chief told reporters that the danger came not from Communists, or even from fanatical Muslims, but rather from anarchists. At almost the same moment, a monument to the anarchist Haymarket Martyrs was erected in Chicago. The *New York Times* smugly remarked that “only now have the passions sufficiently subsided” for the inauguration to take place. It is true, America really is a continent.

1. See the moving description in C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989), pp. 317–18.

2. Telegraphic transmission of photographs arrived just after the period covered by this book. In 1902, the German scientist Alfred Korn showed how it could be done, and by 1911 wirephoto circuits already connected London, Paris, and Berlin.

Prologue: The Rooster's Egg

In 1887, at the *Exposición Filipina* in Madrid, a 23-year-old *indio* named Isabelo de los Reyes living in colonial Manila, won a silver medal for a huge Spanish-language manuscript which he called *El folk-lore filipino*. He published this text in unwitting tandem with compatriot José Rizal (then aged twenty-five), who, after wandering around Northern Europe for some time, published his incendiary first novel, *Noli me tangere*, in Berlin that self-same year. This book helped earn him martyrdom in 1896 and, later, the permanent status of Father of His Country and First Filipino.

Who was Isabelo?¹

He was born on July 7, 1864 in the still-attractive northern Luzon archiepiscopal coastal town of Vigan—which faces Vietnam across the South China Sea—to parents of the Ilocano ethnic group, the vast majority of whom were, in those days, illiterate. His mother Leonora Florentino, however, was evidently a poet of some quality, so that at the Madrid and later expositions her poetry was displayed for Spaniards, Parisians, and people in St Louis.² This accomplishment did not save her marriage, and the six-year-old Isabelo was entrusted to a rich relative, Mena Crisólogo, who later put him into the grammar school attached to the local seminary run by the Augustinians. It appears that abusive behavior by the Peninsular Spanish friars aroused in the boy a hatred of the Catholic religious Orders which persisted a lifetime and had serious consequences for his career. In 1880, aged sixteen, he escaped to Manila, where he quickly acquired a BA at the *Colegio de San Juan de Letrán*; after that, he studied law, history and palaeography at the ancient (Dominican) Pontifical University of Santo Tomás, then the only university in all of East and Southeast Asia.



Isabelo de los Reyes (seated, right).



Binondo Square in Manila, circa 1890.

Meanwhile, Isabelo's father had died, and the boy, obliged now to support himself, plunged into the burgeoning world of journalism, contributing to most of Manila's newspapers, and

1889 even publishing his own, *El Ilocano*, said to be the first-ever solely in a Philippine vernacular. But while still a teenager, Isabelo read an appeal in Manila's Spanish-language newspaper *La Oceanía Española* (founded in 1877) asking readers to contribute articles to develop a new science, named *el folk-lore*, followed by a simple sketch of how this was to be done. He immediately contacted the Spanish editor, who gave him a collection of "folk-lore books" and asked him to write about the customs of his native Ilocos. Two months later Isabelo set to work, and soon thereafter started publishing—not merely on Ilocos, but also on his wife's township of Malabon, on the outskirts of Manila, on the Central Luzon province of Zambales, and in general terms, what he called *el folk-lore filipino*. It became one of the great passions of his life.

THE NEW SCIENCE

The question, naturally, is why? What was the meaning of *el folk-lore* for a clerically educated native youth in the 1880s? Much can be learned from the Introduction and first pages of his youthful masterwork.³ There Isabelo described folk-lore, albeit with some hesitation, as *ciencia nueva* (a new science), perhaps consciously echoing Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, which, thanks to the efforts of Michelet and others, had burst on the trans-European scene in the mid-nineteenth century. Isabelo explained to his readers, in both the Philippines and Spain, that the word "folk-lore"—which he translated ingeniously as *el saber popular*—had only been invented in 1846 by the English antiquarian William Thoms, in an article published in the London *Athenaeum*. The first folk-lore society in the world had been organized in London as recently as 1878—a mere six years before he started his own research.⁴ The French had followed suit nationally only in 1886—just as Isabelo was starting to write. The Spanish typically had been caught intellectually napping; when their turn came, they had not thought but to incorporate the Anglo-Saxon coinage into Castilian as *el folk-lore*. Isabelo was starting to position himself alongside pioneering Britain, above and ahead of the tag-along Peninsular metropole. He was like a fast surfer on the crest of the wave of world science and beetling progress, something never previously imaginable for any native of what he himself called this "remote Spanish colony on which the light of civilization only tenuously shines." This position he reinforced in several instructive ways.

On the one hand, he was quick to mention in his Introduction that some of his research had already been translated into German—then *the* language of advanced scholarly thinking—and published in *Ausland* and *Globus*, which he claimed were the leading European organs in the field. *El folk-lore filipino* also judiciously discussed the opinions of leading Anglo-Saxon contemporaries on the status of the *ciencia nueva*, politely suggesting that they were more serious than those of Peninsular Spanish *folkloristas*. He must also have enjoyed commenting that "Sir George Fox" had been in conceptual error by confusing folklore with mythology, and some Castilian contemporaries had been in similar error by muddling mythology and theogony.⁶

On the other hand, the newness of this *ciencia* had a special colonial aspect to it, which he did not hesitate to underline. He dedicated his book to "Los folkloristas españoles de la Península, que me han dispensado toda clase de atenciones" (the Spanish folklorists of the Peninsula, who have tendered me every manner of consideration). Isabelo's Introduction

spoke warmly of “colleagues” in Spain—the boards of directors of the journals *El Folk-Lore Español* and the *Boletín de la Enseñanza Libre de Madrid* in the imperial capital, and the *Boletín Folklórico* in Seville—who had kept him abreast of research in the Peninsula that ran parallel to his own work.

The Peninsularity—so to speak—of these colleagues was regularly underlined, as well as the Peninsularity of their research. Without explicitly saying so, Isabelo (rightly) insinuated that no colonial Spaniards or creoles were doing anything comparable in the Philippines. This suggestion, of course, permitted him to position himself as a far-ahead-of-the-colonial-master pioneer of the new universal science. To explain this peculiar situation Isabelo resorted to an ingenious device—certainly made necessary by the violent, reactionary character of the clerically dominated colonial regime of the time. He described a series of courtly exchanges he had had in the Manila press with a liberal-minded (almost certainly Peninsular) medical doctor and amateur litterateur, who had contributed to local newspapers under the pen name Astoll.⁷ This move allowed him to quote the Peninsular as admiring Isabelo’s courage and imagination but feeling deeply pessimistic about his chances of success in the face of the overwhelming indifference, indolence, and mental stupor in the colony. “Here the only things that grow luxuriantly are cogon grass and molave—two tenacious local weeds.”⁸ And when Astoll finally broke off their exchange in despair, Isabelo, who had indirectly raised the question of why “certain corporations” (meaning the Orders) had contributed nothing, commented that in the circumstances “prudence warrants no other course.” Into the mental darkness of the colonial regime, then, Isabelo saw himself as bringing the light of modern Europe.

Newness came in still another guise in *El folk-lore filipino*, and this was related to the idea of *ciencia*. The Introduction contains a most interesting discussion of the larger debate on the scientific status of folklore studies. Isabelo had fun noting that one faction of the Peninsular *folkloristas* was so impatient to turn *el folk-lore* into a theoretical science that its members soon could no longer understand one another—opening the way for a much-needed international discussion, in which the Anglo-Saxons appeared both more modest and more practical. At the other extreme were those Spanish folklorists who were merely sentimental collectors of vanishing customs and conceptions for some future museum of the past. Isabelo made clear what he himself thought folklore was about, and how he saw its social value. In the first place, it offered an opportunity for a reconstruction of the indigenous past that was impossible in the Philippines by any other means, given the absence of pre-Spanish monuments or inscriptions, and, indeed, the near-absence of written records. (When Rizal tried to do the same thing later, he saw no other way to proceed than to read between the lines of the work of the best of the Spanish administrators of the early Conquest era.) Serious research on customs, beliefs, superstitions, adages, tongue-twisters, incantations and so on would throw light on what he referred to as the “primitive religion” of the pre-Spanish past. But—and here the young Ilocano sharply distinguished himself from amateur *costumbristas*—he also underlined the importance of comparisons. He confessed that before the completion of his research he had been sure that the neighboring Tagalogs and Ilocanos were *razas distintas* (distinct races) on account of their different languages, physiognomies, behavior and so on. But comparison had proved to him that he had been wrong and that the two ethnicities were clearly derived from a single source. The implication of the title *El folk-lore filipino* was that

further research would show that all the indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago had common origin, no matter how many languages they now spoke or how different the present customs and religious affiliations. All this meant that, *contra* the colony's cleric historiographers, who began their narratives with the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest, the real history of the archipelago and its *pueblo/pueblos* (here he hesitated often) stretched further back in time, and thus could not be framed by coloniality.

THE RICHES OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

On the other hand—and here Isabelo radically distanced himself from many of his Peninsular colleagues—the new science could not and should not be confined to sentimental excavation of the quaint. *El folk-lore filipino* is above all the study of the contemporary, in particular what he had termed *el saber popular*. (Today, we would use the term “local knowledge”.) This *saber* was real knowledge, not “lore,” with its musty, antiquarian connotations. He offered the hypothetical example of a *selvaje* (wild man, perhaps a savage) in the forests near his home region of South Ilocos who might any day (accidentally, Isabelo said) discover that a certain local fruit provided a better antidote to the cholera bacillus than that currently manufactured at the instance of the Spanish medical scientist Dr Ferran.⁹ The framing for such claims was the absence of serious scientific knowledge about almost everything in the Philippines. For example, *Flora de Filipinas*, a new compilation by some Augustinian friars, was very far from complete.¹⁰ The indigenes had a much deeper knowledge of medicinal plants, of flora and fauna, of soils and climatic variations than did the colonialists, and this huge reservoir of knowledge, contained in the *saber popular*, was still unknown to the world. The Philippines thus appeared not merely as a region containing a mass of exotica unknown to Europeans, but also as the site for a significant future contribution to mankind, springing from what the common people knew, in their own languages, but of which Spanish had no conception. It was exactly the “unknownness” of the Philippines that gave its folklore a future-oriented character that was necessarily absent in the folklore of Peninsular Spain. It was also, however, the living specificity of the Philippines that positioned it to offer something parallel and equal to that of any other *país*, to humanity. This is the logic that would much later make the United Nations both possible and plausible. So far, so clear. Too clear, probably. For Isabelo's text, under the bright lights of its major themes, is not without its shadowy complications. We might provisionally think about them under three rubrics.

First, what was Isabelo to himself? To begin with, it is necessary to underline an ambiguity within the Spanish word *filipino* itself. During Isabelo's youth this adjective had two distinct senses in common parlance: (1) belonging to, located in, originating from, Las Islas Filipinas (2) creole, of the locally born but “pure Spanish” social stratum. What it did not mean is what *filipino* means today, an indigenous nationality–ethnicity. One can see how much things have changed over the past century if one compares just one sentence in Isabelo's Introduction with its recent translation into American by two Philippine scholars. Isabelo wrote: “Para recoger del saco roto la organización del Folk-Lore regional filipino, juzgué oportuno contestar al revistero del *Comercio* y, aprovechando su indirecta, aparenté sostener que en Filipinas había personas ilustradas y estudiosas que pudieran acometer la empresa”.¹¹ This literally means: “To save the organization of the Folklore of the region of the Philippines,

judged it the right moment to rebut the view of *El Comercio*'s reviewer, and, taking advantage of his insinuation, I pretended [presumed??] to maintain that in the Philippines there existed enlightened [*ilustradas*] and studious persons capable of undertaking the task." The published translation—completely anachronistic—has: "I tried to defend the establishment of Filipino Folklore by answering the accusation of the columnist of *El Comercio*, by bravely stating that there are indeed Filipino scholars ready and capable of undertaking the task."¹² When Isabelo was thinking of a sort of global folklore which included the regional portion of the Philippine Islands, and spoke of enlightened persons in the Philippines—no ethnicity specified—the translators have omitted "regional" to create a folklore of the Filipinos, and substituted for "enlightened persons" the novel "Filipino scholars."

FOREST BROTHERS

In *El folk-lore filipino*, Isabelo did not describe himself as "a Filipino," because the national usage was not yet familiar in the colony. Besides, *un filipino* was then exactly what he was not: a creole. He did, however, describe himself in other ways: sometimes, for example, as an indigene (but never by the contemptuous Spanish term *indio*), and sometimes as an Ilocano. In a remarkable passage he argued: "Speaking of patriotism, has it not frequently been said in the newspapers that, for me, only Ilocos and Ilocanos are good?... Everyone serves his *pueblo* to his own manner of thinking. I believe I am here contributing to the illumination of the part of my own *pueblo*." Elsewhere, however, he insisted that so strict had been his objectivity that he had "sacrificed to science the affections of the Ilocanos, who complain that I have publicized their least attractive practices." Luckily, however, "I have received an enthusiastic response from various savants [*sabios*] in Europe, who say that, by setting aside a misguided patriotism, I have offered signal services to Ilocos, *mi patria adorada*, because I have provided scholars with abundant materials for studying its prehistory and other scientific topics relating to this ... province [*sic*]."¹³

Rizal opened his enraged novel *Noli me tangere* with a celebrated Preface addressed to his motherland, which included these words: "Deseando tu salud que es la nuestra, y buscando el mejor tratamiento, haré contigo lo que con sus enfermos los antiguos: exponíanlos en los gradas del templo, para que cada persona que viniese de invocar à la Divinidad les propusiese un remedio" (Desiring your well-being, which is our own, and searching for the best cure [for your disease], I will do with you as the ancients did with their afflicted: exposed them on the steps of the temple so that each one who came to invoke the Divinity would propose a cure).¹⁴ And in the last poem he wrote before his execution in 1896, he too spoke of his *patria adorada*. But was it Isabelo's?

There is a beautiful sentence in the Introduction to *El folk-lore filipino* in which Isabelo described himself as "hermano de los selváticos, aetas, igorrotos y tinguianes" (brother of the forest peoples, the Aeta, the Igorots and the Tinguians). These so-called primitive people, most of them pagan before the twentieth century dawned, and many never subjugated by the Spanish colonial regime, lived and live in the long cordillera that flanks the narrow coastal plain of Ilocos. In his boyhood, Isabelo would have seen them coming down from the forests in their "outlandish garb" to trade their forest products for lowland commodities. To this day a form of Ilocano is the lingua franca of the Gran Cordillera. No one else in Isabelo's time

certainly no one who counted himself an *ilustrado*, would have spoken in such terms of the forest-dwellers who seemed, in their untamed fastnesses, utterly remote from any urban, Hispanicized, Catholicized milieu. (And in those days Isabelo did not speak of any other ethnic groups in Las Filipinas as his *hermanos*.) Here one begins to see how it was possible for him to think of his province as a big *pueblo* and a *patria adorada*, since in the most concrete way it linked as brothers the “wild” pagans of the mountains and a man who won prizes in Madrid. Here also one detects an underlying reason why, in his proto-nationalist striving, Isabelo went to folklore rather than the novel or the broadsheet. Folklore—comparative folklore—enabled him to bridge the deepest chasm in colonial society, which lay not between colonized and colonizers—they all lived in the lowlands, they were all Catholics, and they dealt with one another all the time. It was the abyss between all of these people and those whom we would today call “tribal minorities”: hill-people, nomadic swidden-farmers, “head-hunters,” men, women and children facing a future of—possibly violent—assimilation, even extermination. Out of *el folk-lore*, child of William Thoms, there thus emerged a strange new brotherhood, and an adored father/motherland for the young Isabelo.

STRANGE BEAUTIES

What were the deeper purposes of the folklorist’s work in Las Islas Filipinas? Apart from its potential contributions to the modern sciences, and to the reconstruction of the character of the “primitive man,” we can uncover three which have a clear political character. First, there is the possibility—the hope—of local cultural renaissance. With a certain sly prudence, Isabelo allowed Astoll to speak on his behalf:

Perhaps folklore will provide the fount for a Philippine poetry [*poesía filipina*], a poetry inspired by Philippine subjects, and born in the mind of Philippine bards [*vates*]. I can already hear the mocking laughter of those braggarts who have made such fun of you. But let them laugh, for they also laughed at other manifestations of the *pueblo’s* genius [*ingenio*], and then had to bow their heads in confusion before the laurels of [Juan] Luna and [Félix] Resurrección. And these traditions and superstitious practices which you are making known could one day inspire great poets, and enthusiastic lovers of the strange beauties of this rich garden.¹⁵

Elsewhere Isabelo quoted Astoll once again:

If Sr de los Reyes’s studies and investigations make connections to pueblos como *el filipino* [like the Philippine one? or is it perhaps even the Filipino one?] where the character of the indigenes [*naturales*] has been depicted solely by the brushstrokes of dull-witted daubers, one can see how much potential value they have for the future.

Here Isabelo’s work, printed in Manila, could open up the possibility of a great flowering of literary and poetic talent among the *naturales*, a talent before which boorish Peninsulars and creoles would have to hang their heads in confusion. This is the normal hope and strategy of anticolonial nationalists: to equalize themselves “up” with the imperialists.

The second of Isabelo’s purposes would be to subvert the dominance of the reactionary Church in the colony, and is best shown in a wonderfully deadpan chapter entitled “Ilocano Superstitions that are Found in Europe.” It opens in this vein:

Taking advantage of the folkloric materials gathered by D. Alejandro Guichot and D. Luis Montoto in Andalusia, by D. Eugenio de Olavarría y Huarte in Madrid, by D. José Pérez Ballesteros in Catalonia, by D. Luis Giner Arivau in Asturias, by Consigliere Pedroso with his *Tradições populares portuguesas* in Portugal, as well as others, I have drawn up the following list of superstitions which I believe were introduced here by the Spaniards in past centuries. The list should not surprise anyone, given that in the early days of Spanish domination the most ridiculous beliefs [*las creencias más absurdas*] were in vogue on the Peninsula.¹⁶

Mischievously, the list begins thus:

When roosters reach old age or have spent seven years in someone's house, they lay an egg from which hatches a certain green lizard that kills the master of that house; according to the Portuguese and French, however, what hatches is a snake. If it spots the master first, the latter will die, but that fate will strike the former if the master sees the snake first. The Italians and the English, as well as some Central Europeans, believe it is a basilisk that is hatched. Father Feijóo says: "It is true, the rooster, in old age, really does lay an egg." The Portuguese and the Ilocanos, however, agree that what is in the egg is a scorpion.¹⁷

Other irresistible examples are these: "To make sure visitors do not overstay, Ilocanos put salt on their guests' chairs. The Spaniards place a broom vertically behind a door, while the Portuguese put a shoe on a bench in the same spot, or throw salt on the fire." "In Castile, and in Ilocos, teeth that have fallen out are thrown onto the roof, so that new ones will grow." "According to the people of Galicia, if a cat washes its face, it means that rain is coming; the Ilocanos say it will rain if we give the animal a bath." "The people of Galicia say that a gale is coming when cats run about like mad; people in the Philippines substitute cockroaches for these cats." Finally: "Sleeping with the headboard facing the east is bad for Ilocanos. But for Peninsulars (Spaniards and Portuguese) it is good. All three agree that a headboard facing south is unlucky."

One can see why Isabelo felt a *singular placer* in dedicating his book to Peninsular folklorists, since they had offered him the scientific materials that would demonstrate the "ridiculous beliefs" of the conquistadors, and prove that, if the colonialists sneered at Ilocano superstitions, they should recognize many of them as importations of their own: and the bizarreness in Ilocano folk beliefs had easy analogues in the bizzarries of Iberia, Italy, Central Europe, even England.

The third aim was political self-criticism. Isabelo wrote that he was trying to show, through his systematic display of *el saber popular*, those reforms in the ideas and everyday practices of the *pueblo* that must be undertaken in a self-critical spirit. He spoke of his work as being about "something much more serious than mocking my *paisanos*, who actually will learn to correct themselves once they see themselves described." In this light, folklore would be a mirror held up before a people, so that, in the future they could move steadily along the road toward human emancipation. It is clear, then, that Isabelo was writing for one and a half audiences: Spaniards, whose language he was using, and his own *pueblo*, whose language he was not using, and of whom only a tiny minority could read his work.

Where did Isabelo position himself in undertaking this task? At this juncture we finally come to perhaps the most interesting part of our enquiry. For most of the hundreds of pages of his book, Isabelo spoke as if he were not an Ilocano himself, or, at least, as if he were standing outside his people. The Ilocanos almost always appear as "they," not "we." For

example: “There is a belief among *los Ilocanos* that fire produced by lightning can only be extinguished by vinegar, not by water.” Better still:

Los ilocanos no pueden darnos perfecta idea acerca de la naturaleza de los mangmangkík, y dicen que no son demonios, según la idea que los católicos tienen de los demonios.

The Ilocanos cannot give us a complete idea about the nature of the mangmangkík, and they say that they are not devils according to the Catholics’ idea of what devils are.¹⁸

Isabelo here placed himself in the ranks of world folklore’s savants, peering down at “the Ilocanos” from above, and dispassionately distinguishing their superstitions from the parallel credulities of “the Catholics.”

At the same time, a number of passages have a rather different tonality. At the start of the exposition of his research results Isabelo wrote:

The Ilocanos, especially those from Ilocos Norte [Northern Ilocos], before starting to cut down trees in the mountains, sing the following verse:

Barí, barí!
Dika agunget pári
Ta pumukan kami
Iti pabakirda kami

Literally translated these lines mean: *barí-barí* (an Ilocano interjection for which there is no equivalent in Spanish), do not get upset, *compadre*, for we are only cutting because we have been ordered to do so.

Here Isabelo positions himself firmly within the Ilocano world. He knows what the Ilocano words mean, but his readers do not: to them (and by this he intends not only Spaniards, but also other Europeans, as well as non-Ilocano natives of the archipelago) this experience is closed. Isabelo is a kindly and scientific man, who wishes to tell the outsiders something of this world; but he does not proceed by smooth paraphrase. The reader is confronted by an eruption of the incomprehensible original Ilocano, before being tendered a translation. Better yet, something is still withheld, in the words *barí-barí*, for which Spanish has no equivalent. The untranslatable, no less; and beyond that, perhaps, the incommensurable.

Isabelo suspected, I am sure, that his Spanish was not perfect, and might be laughed at by “dull-witted daubers” and “braggarts.” He probably was also aware that the particular folklore methodology he was using might be doubtful in its systematics, and perhaps was soon to be superseded as science continued its grand world progress into the future. But he had *barí-barí* in particular, and Ilocano in general, safely up his intellectual sleeve. On that ground he could not be contested. However, he needed to show, or half-show, his trump. This is the satisfaction of the tease: Dear readers, here is Ilocano for you to view, but you can only see what I permit you to see; and there are some things that you are actually incapable of seeing.

There is still a third position, which complicates matters further. In a chapter on “Musical Songs and Dances,” Isabelo wrote the following:

The lyrics of the *dal-lot* are well worth knowing. The *dal-lot* is composed of eight-line stanzas, with a special Ilocano rhyming scheme which you can see from the following refrain:

Dal-lang ayá daldal-lut

Dal-lang ayá dumidinal-lot.

I transcribe it for you, because I do not know how to translate it, and I do not even understand it, even though I am an Ilocano. It seems to me to have no meaning.¹⁹

But it remains “well worth knowing” because it is authentically Ilocano, perhaps even because it is inaccessible to the puzzled bilingual author himself. Isabelo leaves it at that. No speculations. But there is an intimation, nonetheless, of the vastness of the *saber popular*.

Three ill-fitting situations therefore: Outside (they cannot give us a complete idea); Inside (there is no Spanish equivalent of *barí-barí*); and Outside Inside (even though I am an Ilocano myself, I do not understand this Ilocano-language refrain; but I am telling this to “you,” not to “us”).

COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

From the end of the eighteenth century down to our haggard own, folklore studies, even not always selfconsciously defined as such, have proved a fundamental resource to national movements. In Europe, they provided a powerful impulse for the development of vernacular cultures linking especially peasantries, artists and intellectuals, and bourgeoisies in the complicated struggles against the forces of legitimacy. Urban composers foraged for folk songs, urban poets captured and transformed the styles and themes of folk poetry, and novelists turned to the depiction of folk countrysides. As the newly imagined nation community headed towards the magnetic future, nothing seemed more valuable than a useful and authentic past.

Printed vernaculars were almost always central. Norwegian folklorists would write “New Norse” (against Danish and Swedish) to recuperate the Norwegian *saber popular*; Finns would write in Finnish, not Swedish or Russian; and the pattern would be reiterated in Bohemia, Hungary, Rumania, Serbia, and so on. Even where this was not entirely the case—striking example is the Irish revivalist movement which operated both through Gaelic and through a colonially imposed English well understood by many Irish men and women—the ultimate object was national self-retrieval, “awakening” and liberation.

At first sight, Isabelo’s endeavor strikes one as quite different, as he was writing as much as anything for non-nationals, and in an imperial language, which perhaps 3 percent of the *indios* of the Philippines understood, and maybe only 1 percent of his fellow Ilocanos could follow. If in Europe folklorists wrote mostly for their *paisanos*, to show them their common and authentic origins, Isabelo wrote mostly for the early globalizing world he found himself within—to show how Ilocanos and other *indios* were fully able and eager to enter that world on a basis of equality and autonomous contribution.

Isabelo’s study also marks his country off from the many neighboring colonies in the Southeast Asian region. In these other colonies, most of what we can informally classify as “folklore studies” was carried on by intelligent colonial officials with too much time on their

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