

States of Ethnography: Colonialism, Resistance, and Cultural Transcription in Malaya and the Philippines, 1890s–1930s

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[The white man living alone among the Malays] has not yet learned that there is a great and marvelous book lying beneath his hand, a book in which all may read if they find but the means of opening the clasp which locks it, a book in which a man may read for years and never know satiety, which, though older than the hills, is ever new, and which, though studied for a lifetime, is never exhausted, and is never completely understood.

—Hugh Clifford (1927[1897]: 250–51)

Since the first arrival of the Portuguese in Eastern waters, the mind of the Malay has appeared to the European as a closed book. Both races have ever misunderstood and mistrusted each other. Out of mutual ignorance and fear have followed hatred, oppression, and retaliation. . . . this government is attempting to rear a new standard of relationship between the white man and the Malay. The success . . . will depend . . . on our correct understanding and scientific grasp of the peoples whose problems we are facing.

—David Barrows (*Report of the Philippine Commission* 1902: 870–71)

READING TRANSCRIPTIONS

The metaphoric reading of native life as an unopened book by two ranking colonial administrators and authoritative ethnographers in Malaya and the Philippines cannot be a simple coincidence. Clifford and Barrows represent two empires, one conservative and peaking, the other liberal and ascendant, meeting in “the Malay Archipelago.” Clifford was a product of the rugged and cultured education demanded of British aristocratic scions, while Barrows exemplified the rising American professional classes, holding graduate degrees in education and anthropology. Both men served well the metropolitan ideologies that guided the imperial hand: British Providence to provide good government to the Malay states; American manifest destiny to replace Spain

Acknowledgments: I am very grateful to George Steinmetz, Lydia Liu, Julia Adams, Jeffery Paige, Francis Lim and, especially, the anonymous reviewers of *Comparative Studies in Society and History* for their critical comments.

as the agent of civilization in the Philippines. Using their ethnographic readings, Clifford helped perfect the art of British “indirect rule” Malaya, while Barrows established the Philippine mass education system, the main thrust of the United States’ “benevolent assimilation.” Both men retired as decorated officers and established literati, Barrows as the President of the University of California and Clifford a literary figure after Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling.

Was ethnographic reading simply a function of imperial discourse, one when correctly done guaranteed one’s place in metropolitan society? Or was reading a more precarious process, complicated by the parleying of natives? By far, the central concepts in colonial studies are *inscription*, the writing and engineering of modernity unto colonized societies made legible through modern statecraft (Mitchell 1988; Scott 1998), and *hybridization*, the grafting of Western modalities of cultural life onto conquered lifeworlds (Bhabha 1994; Young 1995). But as the epigraphs suggest, there is a preceding hidden aspect in colonial culture that demands analysis. This aspect I call cultural *transcription*, the translating reading of native society to produce ethnographic knowledge that could be applied to inscriptive colonial administration and hybridizing education of native elites. The movement from reading in the initial colonial encounter to writing in the formation of colonial power has been noted as the transformation of intersubjective interactions between anthropologists and native subjects into the analytical objectivity of comparative anthropology. The Comaroffs (1988: 29) described this shift metaphorically as the change from the natives being seen in the “evangelist’s mirror” to their being “groomed for an image of themselves to be seen” in the “prism of the modern nation-state.” Deloria (1998: 93), analyzing the transformation of Lewis Henry Morgan’s literary Indians into ethnographic objects, writes that anthropology turned upon the tense contradiction of using the intimate insider approach of participant observation to build the outsider analytical system of comparative anthropology. Fabian calls this contradiction “the schizogenic use of time” since the coeval temporality that was experienced in the intersubjective moment of ethnographic research was denied in the later stage of anthropological theorizing and writing (1983: 21). My aim is to throw light on this process of objectifying reading as a process of cultural transcription that was complicated by the responses of the native subjects and suggest how it affected the subsequent inscriptions and hybridizations of the ethnographic colonial state.

Transcription is hidden insofar as there are no transcripts left behind except the finished inscriptions and hybrid products of colonial rule. We can recover the process by, firstly, re-reading colonial ethnographic texts not as ideological inscriptions of metropolitan discourse but as postulations of hypothetical equivalences between incommensurable cultural terms. Secondly, because hypothetical equivalences are open to contestation, we are able to witness transcription through debates over “correct” ethnographic representation. Thirdly, by juxtaposing these debates with reflexive postcolonial scholarship on the

same societies, we can uncover the stakes involved in transcription. At first glance, this project is not unlike James Scott's uncovering of the hidden transcripts of resistance lurking behind cultural performances of political domination (1990). But colonial ethnography differed in two critical aspects. They did not conceal and negate power in prescribed ritual formats, but they revealed, translating native resistances into comparable explanatory terms of racial difference, and therein, generated prescriptive solutions for colonial rule and ritualized colonial power. Second, my focus is on transcription rather than transcripts. In Scott's formulation, transcripts are texts of resistance arising from historical experiences that are played out by social actors in a field of power. In my intervention, the central process of transcription refers to the textualization of native actions as resistance to produce the field of colonial power.

Two intersecting theoretical problems drive my inquiry. The first is the relationship between colonialism and ethnography. In the post-colonial period, critical anthropologists evaluated the role played by the discipline in colonialism and established that there was ideological affinity between the two (Gough 1968; Asad 1973). However, they did not establish the direct link between ethnographic representations and colonial rule. Thus, it remains possible to claim that there is little evidence of any actual relation between anthropology, ethnography, and colonial policy (e.g., King and Wilder 2003: 25–67). A recent renewed effort by Pels and Salemink (1994) provides five theses on ethnography as colonial practice. The theses move from the inner scope of disciplinary self-reflection to the outer realm of anthropology's relationship with colonial society but halt at the question of the direct link between ethnography and colonial power. The concluding thesis states that ethnography was significant for colonialism because it instituted representation as such, leaving us with the question: how were ethnographic representations integral to the exercise of colonial power?

My approach here reverses the direction of inquiry and takes as its object of analysis the ethnography practiced by colonial officials, thereby shifting the focus from the disciplinary history of anthropology (Kuper 1988; Asad 1991; Stocking 1992; Pels 1997) to the sociology of ethnographic production. By doing so, we can bring Asad's intervention on "cultural translation" to a powerful conclusion in line with his earlier critique. As Asad argues, anthropologists are engaged in cultural translation, which involves the reading of "implicit" meanings in native practices to systematically construct a cultural text of native society (1986: 161). This, Asad argues, is akin to the task of the psychoanalyst who has to unravel the implicit structure of the patient's unconscious, but the difference resides in the anthropologist "never" having authority to impose his translation on his subjects. But this difference is elided when we observe that many ethnographers were also colonial officials directly involved in the imposition of domination over the society being studied. Besides, professional

anthropology became involved in colonial rule through “applied anthropology” in late imperialism for the British case (Malinowski 1929) and from the beginning of American imperialism in the Philippines (Eggan 1974). The asymmetry is even more pronounced when we consider that the patient selects the psychoanalyst and may leave the relationship voluntarily, whereas the natives were selected for cultural translation and irrevocably trapped in the discourse of the colonial state.

Cultural translation must involve explicit frameworks that are derived prior to entry into the field. The reading of implicit meanings is therefore preordained and, historically pertaining to my study, was framed by racial and Social Darwinist theories derived from the assumption of Western civilization as a standard for cultural evolution (Stocking 1987). This has to be made clear because there are other modes of cultural translation that are not colonial, for example, Spivak’s (1993: 179–200) notion of translation as the politicized reading of rhetoricity, or James Clifford’s (1997: 11) radically contingent meeting of travelers inflected with “imperfect equivalences.” Also, in contrast to the hermeneutic key of linguistic translation that informed the transcriptions of earlier colonialisms (Rafael 1988; Cheyfitz 1991), the epistemic posture of late colonialism was dominantly sociological; that is, the reading of racial essence as materially and socially differentiated rather than nestled in the inner soul of the speaker. This is where native resistance enters into the picture. Cultural transcription was first and foremost the racialized sociology of native resistance to “the civilizing mission” explained by a natural, physiological lack. This is best uncovered by looking at the ethnographic writings of pioneering colonialists tasked with introducing colonial government to hostile native populations. I therefore begin my analysis by outlining the racialized sociological reading of native resistance by pioneering colonialists.

The second problem, which follows from the last point, is the location of native resistance in relation to the internal tensions of colonial discourse. The production of disciplined colonial subjects and reproduction of relations of colonial domination were fraught with contradictions and unstable representations (Stoler and Cooper 1997; Comaroff 1998). This acute instability of colonial discourse, I argue, was due to the vicissitudes of native reactions to imperialist intentions, reactions that were constructed in colonial discourse as resistance. Instead of treating resistance as a discrete analytical category for interpreting local reactions to political domination, I take resistance to be an empirical discursive category where the general strategies and everyday tactics employed by communities to oppose domination, strategies and tactics usually analyzed as resistance in themselves (Isaacman and Isaacman 1977; Scott 1985), are marked as resistance by the dominant forces so that the latter can know and deal with local reactions as such. This is my understanding of Foucault’s (1978: 95–98) treatment of resistance as internal to discursive field of power relations. Native agency stems not from the colonial

transcripts of modern statecraft but from what Brosius (1997) has aptly termed “prior transcripts,” preceding native transcripts that configure colonial transcripts. Rooted in pre-colonial native societies, the prior transcripts operate with their own social and cultural logic. Native agency was therefore just as complex and multidimensional as native society in the first instances of the imperialist encounter. When assimilated into colonial discourse and power, this complex agency becomes what Ortner (1995: 190) describes as the “ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance.”

Colonial discourse defines the construction of colonial society in the terms of sociological reference specified by imperial objectives and categories of difference. The policing of categories of difference, racial and juridical, defined the discursive operations of the colonial state (Stoler 1995; Benton 1999), but here I focus on the specific operations of ethnographic discourse in producing these categories of difference. The production of ethnographic knowledge played an integral part in the larger colonial discourse by reducing the vicissitudes and dissonance of resistance into determinate categories, without which the strategic calculations of colonial government would give unpredictable outcomes. Steinmetz (2002; 2003) has shown that ethnography served colonial policymaking by stabilizing the representations of native groups in colonial discourse. While I agree with Steinmetz’s argument that native resistance affected policy only “indirectly,” “insofar as it is noticed and interpreted by those in charge of the state, and not as a sheer material force” (2002: 145–46), it has to be qualified that native resistance had an important effect on the very frames of interpretation. Indeed, I argue, native resistance was not merely interpreted within ethnographic frames, but it was already translated and traced into ethnographic discourse, understood and preempted even before the event of its occurrence because it was constitutive of the categories of ethnographic discourse. In this sense, my analysis here reverses Ortner’s argument that resistance studies “are thin because they are ethnographically thin” (1995: 190). She is referring to contemporary resistance studies where intellectual anxieties concerning subaltern politics, authenticity and voice hamper the ethnographic thick description necessary for the proper study of resistance. But in colonialism, I argue, native resistance became legible precisely because rich ethnographic studies of native societies were conducted by colonial ethnographer-officials.

Because native resistance was always complex and constitutive of ethnographic categories, and because transcription is fundamentally the propositioning of hypothetical equivalences concerning native culture, ethnographic discourse had its own internal tension. On the one hand, consensus concerning native character was not guaranteed and ethnographer-officials with different agendas could disagree over the “correct” reading. On the other hand, dissensus on the native question could not be expected to last long if the colonial state, dependent on colonial ethnography as a stabilizing discourse, was to function

as an instrument of imperial rule. It is no coincidence that in both Malaya and the Philippines, ethnographic dissensus followed pioneer groundbreaking and consensual synthesis of conflicting views then followed to accord ethnographic knowledge with the established momentum of state formation. I look at these two phases in the second and third sections respectively.

THE RACIALIZED SOCIOLOGY OF NATIVE RESISTANCE

In the absence of a normalized field of power, pioneer ethnographers had to apply a force of attraction to draw the reticent native into the symbolic exchange relations of Western imperialism (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989). The pioneers employed two methods to draw in the native, to induce the native to speak voluntarily before a reading could be made. The first, practiced by the pioneering batch of British Residents attached to the courts of Malay rulers as lone imperial agents, and familiar to cultural anthropologists, involved speaking the native tongue, living amongst natives and participating in their practices. The most illustrious Residents, Frank Swettenham and Hugh Clifford, founded their ethnographic authority on two things. Firstly, both were involved in suppressing rebellions led by the Malay aristocratic ruling class, the *rajas*, in the first phases of British imperial expansion in the peninsula. Secondly, both published historical fiction and accounts that ethnographically depicted the Malays as a degenerate but picturesque people with a feudal civilization akin to medieval Europe, complete with the moral tale that racial regeneration could only be accomplished in a conservative manner that preserved Malay traditions (Vere Allen 1964).

The second was employed by the American colonial state in the Philippines, which began its existence as an intelligence-gathering unit at the periphery of the military government. The rejection of American “benevolent assimilation” by Filipino revolutionaries prompted President McKinley to appoint the fact-finding Philippine Commission. While a wide range of information was gathered, its main objective was to get to the truth of the hostile reaction to American overtures. The Commission’s mode of producing facts was semi-judicial, consisting of formal examinations of witnesses. Witnesses, both Filipino and Western, testified that the natives were inherently dishonest, despotic, imitative, superstitious, ignorant, and having no recognizance of political independence. The Commission considered these facts as evidence that the “average native” was still a child of civilization who had not been given “a fair opportunity to show what he can do,” held back by the medieval institutions of Spanish colonialism, and could therefore develop his potential under American tutelage (*Report of the Philippine Commission* (henceforth *RPC*) 1900: 41, U.S. National Archives (henceforth U.S.NA), record group 350, entry 91, vol. 1).

The two pioneer discourses shared an important similarity on the commensurability of native society to Western civilization but also differed on the

vector of the native's potential for civilization. Foucault (1994: 376–78) and Fabian (1983) have analyzed the commensurate aspect of anthropological discourse as the temporal location of native cultures in the historicity of Western civilization. Unlike Orientalist representations that saw the native as “incorrigibly inferior” and “radically different” (Chatterjee 1993: 33, 20), divided the world absolutely into two for “an unprecedented fixing and policing of boundaries” (Mitchell 1988: 167) or maintained “the separateness of the Orient” (Said 1978: 206), the depiction of native societies as *medieval* entities located on the evolutionary timeline of Western civilization simultaneously recognized and disavowed cultural difference. As a historiographic and literary convention of late colonialism, Medievalism was related to two interpolating cultural movements that mapped and deciphered the imperial universe of heterogeneous life worlds. The first is Darwinism, which in its nineteenth-century version fused moral philosophy, scientific naturalism, and ethnographic sociology. It represented natives as having attained a level of civilization between savagery and modernity. The heterogeneous life worlds of humanity were reduced, proportioned, and ranked against the common denominator of modern Western society. The consequent ranking was then explained by racial theory, by pointing to an attribute of Western character thought to be naturally missing in native character. In other words, colonial ethnographers transcribed the sociological character of native groups into the natural terms of racial biology and evolutionary temporality.

The second is Gothic Revivalism, which influenced late Victorian aesthetics and is closely allied to the Romantic reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. Its ghastly medievalist representations have been analyzed as reflecting the management of imperial anxieties concerning continental competitors and restless natives that functioned to construct British national identity (Brantlinger 1988; Schmitt 1997). While Darwinism was the dominant influence in the construction of natives as medievals, Medievalism naturally resonated with the dark medievalism of Gothic Revivalism. The dominant trope in Darwinism was sociological, captured in the description of native society as “feudal,” while the dominant trope in Gothic Revivalism was a dark, nostalgic, and sometimes carnivalesque “medieval” situation. The medievalism of Gothic Revivalism was present in both colonies, but it was peripheral to colonial state formation, and found largely in literary and travel writings and colonial exhibitions.¹ I focus here on the first movement and its dominant sociological trope in the cultural transcription of native resistance

¹ For example, Isabella Bird (1997: 142), who in 1883 published her classic Malayan travelogue, *The Golden Chersonese*, wrote, “Malacca fascinates me more and more daily. There is among other things, a medievalism about it. The noise of the modern world reaches it only in the faintest echoes; its sleep is almost dreamless, its sensations seem to come out of books read in childhood.” In the Philippines, the Philippine Carnival was organized annually by the colonial state, beginning in 1908, as an exhibition of Filipino socioeconomic progress under American rule and a carnivalesque

because of the close link of Darwinist-informed official ethnography to colonial state formation.

Though it may be more appropriate to apply it to the Gothic pole of colonial representations, I use the phrase, “medieval,” to denote the sociological trope of evolutionary native development because the phrase captures the commensurable temporalizing of native society. In most of the texts I analyze here, the word “feudal” is used to mark the racialized sociological origins of native resistance. But the inextricable relationship between the two terms is underscored by the ethnographic views of Philippine Commissioner and University of California professor Bernard Moses, and Hugh Clifford in his short stories. In a paper on colonial policy in the Philippines presented at the American Political Science Association in 1904, Moses (1904: 112) spoke on the uncertainty of “the awakening of the Filipinos out of their medievalism” because the development of Filipino labor was problematic due to the fact that Filipinos were agricultural smallholders or “attached to other persons in a traditional relation not greatly unlike that of feudal dependents.” In “The East Coast,” Clifford (1927: 3–4) described Malays as “living in the Middle Ages” before British interference and Malay society as presenting “a curiously close parallel to that which was in force in Medieval Europe,” each Malay state being ruled by its own sultan “under a complete Feudal System.” He therefore warned his readers to be cautious in the way they apply late-Victorian *fin de siècle* standards to a people whose ideas of the fitness of things are much the same as those which prevailed in Europe some six centuries ago.”

The most important shift from Orientalist to Medievalist representations was the shift from depicting the native as the incommensurable other to positioning the native as evolutionarily commensurable in the path of Western modernity. Commensurability meant that native societies were judged on both progress towards modern civilization and retrogression towards primitive stages. In this sense, we can speak of the “medieval slot” as a symbolic position standing between modern civilization and the “savage slot” that Trouillot (1991) has analyzed as the anthropological construction of otherness. But going beyond the modern-savage binary, I draw from Fabian’s (1983: 27) depiction of the distancing of modern colonialism as a linear graph drawn along the two dimensions of time and space extending from the “now” and “here” of Western civilization to the “then” and “there” of “savage society.” The medieval slot was situated between the two poles on the evolutionary continuum represented by the graph, neither too distant in time and space nor coeval and close to civilization.

celebration of fraternity replete with medieval-themed pageants and representations (see McCoy and Roces 1985: 24–25, 44–47).

Like the convention of picturing natives as “ignoble” or “noble” savages going back to European colonial interactions with the natives of the Americas (Berkhofer 1979; McGregor 1988; Liebersohn 1998), Medievalism also vacillated between positive and negative valences, which I term as “model” and “degenerate” respectively. This is where the two pioneer discourses differed. Rafael (1995) describes American colonialism as a “special relation” between “parent and child.” In this assimilationist approach, the native was seen as a racially inferior human being that was at the same time a sign of a potential mature adult, a model medieval whose potential could be realized in the application of “white love” (Rafael 2000). A most vivid example is seen in Dean Worcester’s best-selling travelogue, *The Philippines Islands and Their People*, published at the height of the Spanish-American War. Worcester was a young University of Michigan naturalist who traveled extensively in the Islands for scientific research in the preceding decades. After the publication of his travelogue, McKinley appointed Worcester to the Philippine Commission based on his impressive knowledge of the Islands. In the book, Mateo Francisco, Worcester’s native companion during his expedition, is the sign of the Filipino’s racial prospects, the exemplary model medieval. Francisco lived in America for thirteen years, attached to the professor who led the first expedition. Complete with a portrait in a fashion normally reserved for white luminaries, Worcester described him as a “full-blooded ‘indio’” whose rather black skin he “had long since ceased to think” about, because his stay in America made him “a living demonstration of the capability for improvement possessed by the average native” (1898: 220). In contrast, Worcester disparaged Filipino *mestizos*, giving examples of how their “veneer of civilization was still . . . a trifle thin” (1898: 240). The American-aculturated full-blooded native was therefore a model medieval superior to the elite native of mixed descent.

On the other hand, British pioneer discourse represented Malays as degenerate medievals, the hastened regeneration of whom by liberal policies would only alienate and spark rebellions. Colonial society should therefore be modernized while preserving customary authority and cultural traditions. Clifford (1927: 3) argued that forcing Malays “to bear Nineteenth-Century fruit,” “to crush into twenty years the revolutions in facts and in ideas, which, even in energetic Europe, six long centuries have been needed to accomplish,” would cause them “to become morally weak and seedy, and to lose something of [their] robust self-respect.” That is, the imposition of hasty civilization would only serve to activate and further Malay racial degeneration. The response to this ethnographic transcription of rebellious Malays resistant to the British “protection” is best captured by Swettenham’s (1983: 186–87) conservationist approach: “to maintain or revive [Malay] interest in the best of his traditions, rather than to encourage him to assume habits of life that are not really suited to his character, constitution, climate, or the circumstances

in which he lives.” Doctrinally, this was later given expression as the “dual mandate” (Lugard 1965). However, this difference between American and British ethnographies is only a general tendency. American and British ethnographies were flexible in representing the natives as medievals between the two vacillating poles.

THE PHILIPPINE COMMISSION’S DIFFERENTIATION OF FILIPINO REVOLUTIONARY RESISTANCE

The Philippine Commission’s resolution of the problem of Filipino revolutionary resistance exploited its geographical distribution:

While the peoples of the Philippine Islands ardently desire a full measure of rights and liberties, they do not . . . generally desire independence. . . . If the foregoing statements regarding the attitude of the Filipinos toward independence seem to be in contradiction with the fact that some Filipinos are now engaged in resisting the sovereignty of the United States, it should be recalled that the Tagalog insurrection is an inheritance from Spain . . . and that [the idea of independence] is to-day a much weaker force than the selfish ambitions of leaders who deceive the misguided people. . . . Nor can it with any propriety be said that an insurrection confined to Tagalogs . . . has for its object the independence of the peoples of the Philippine islands. . . . And even among the Tagalogs the idea of independence is more or less superfluous appendage to the insurrectionary movement. For the rebellion (in which the United States has merely succeeded to Spain’s place) arose out of definite grievances and sought redress for definite wrongs (*RPC* 1900: 83).

“Tagalog” here refers to the regional dialect spoken by Hispanicized Filipinos in central Luzon. The use of this linguistic designation and regional identification by the Commission was part of its diagnosis of Filipino resistance as split along geopolitical and class lines racialized respectively as “tribe” and “blood.” Thus, even when revolutionary resistance began to spread from Luzon to the outlying islands, the Commission claimed it was because “armed Tagalogs had been sent in considerable numbers” and people joined “the Tagalog rebellion” out of fear (*RPC* 1900: 176–77). In this way, the revolution could be delimited as a mere rebellion among one of the Hispanicized “tribes.” At the same time, the innocence of the average native could be preserved, since the Commission read *mestizo* leadership of the revolution as the unscrupulous misguidance of full-blooded natives, whose grievances were, in any case, said to be really targeted at Spanish misrule rather than American benevolence. Thus, native ignorance could be reiterated and the argument that the native really wanted independence dismissed as patently untrue.

In addition, the Commission contrasted Tagalogs with Filipinos of the Visayas island group. The native republic set up in the island of Negros under American auspices was taken as an example of the inherent peace-loving nature and civilizational potential of Filipinos. The Commission held up Negros as a “lesson,” its inhabitants being “exceptionally prosperous and enlightened,” having “the good sense to keep out Tagalog adventurers and

retain control of their own affairs, adopting for themselves a somewhat complicated form of government and electing officials and a congress" (*RPC* 1900: 179). In other words, the Visayans were model medievals while the Tagalogs were degenerate medievals.

Real differences between Filipino resistance in Luzon and the Visayas were due to the frontier character of the latter. Iletto (1998: 79–98) elucidates the structure of Hispanicized Filipino society as consisting of three realms: the most hegemonic emanated from the parish church in the town center, the second was the *mestizo* space of the municipal authorities, the third was centered on the mountains where a popular hybrid animist-Catholicism catered to both peasant commoner and *mestizo* elite. Uprisings against Spanish rule were sprung from the third realm against the first and second realms. In the stalled 1896 nationalist uprising, the revolutionaries drew from third-realm symbolisms of the Passion of Christ to mobilize the masses. The 1898 uprisings became revolutionary when the three realms were united in the nationalist cause (Iletto 1979: 96).

Beginning in 1896, the third realm in Negros was in open revolt against Spain (Aguilar 1998: 168–78). Then, in 1898, the *mestizo* leaders of Negros established a provisional government in the name of the revolution. The important difference is that the Negros leaders were mostly landlord-planters in a largely *hacienda* society while the *mestizo* leaders in Luzon belonged to a complex class society, and were variously capitalists, landlords, middle-class professionals, and bureaucrats. Furthermore, the peasants of Luzon, who made up the revolutionary army, were mostly tenants of friar-owned plantations, while *mestizo* Filipinos held land in the frontier islands. To consolidate their power over the peasants, the Negros planters sought U.S. protection and declared an autonomous republic. Under American guidance, the planters drew up a constitution and elected a civil governor. Subsequent planter conflict with the peasantry and internal power struggles led to the imposition of full American control. While the establishment of the Negros republic signified for the Commission that the native would recognize American benevolence given the right conditions, its subsequent failure was yet another important piece of evidence that the Filipinos did not presently have the racial capacity for self-government, even "under the most favorable circumstances" (*RPC* 1900: 180).

There was something more fundamental at work in the discursive operations of the Commission than the crafting of coherent justifications for imperialism. Differences in socioeconomic class existing between Luzon and the outlying islands were racialized by the Commission as Tagalogs versus Visayans, while the sociological differences Iletto outlined as the three realms were cast as a racial struggle between retrograde Spaniards, degenerate *mestizos* and ignorant natives. Thus, Frank Bourns, a surgeon and intelligence officer in the U.S. Army who was involved in establishing the Negros republic, testified

to the Commission that native police deserters who joined the peasant revolutionaries were mainly Tagalogs, the revolutionaries were religious fanatics borne out of native superstition, and the continuation of Spanish colonial abuses under *mestizo* administration exacerbated the situation (*RPC* 1900: 356–57), thus semantically capturing the whole spectrum of sociological differences with racial signs. American pioneer ethnography was therefore already ambivalent despite the tendency to emphasize the general potential of Filipinos as model medievals to advance quickly in civilization under American rule. Pioneering ethnographers like Bourns and his close friend and former naturalist colleague, Commissioner Worcester, as we shall see later, split the Filipino population into various regional-cultural and class categories and racialized the sociological divisions as model and degenerate medievals to explain varied native resistances to American imperialism.

BRITISH AMBIVALENCE TOWARD MALAY “ADAT”

The same ambivalence can be found in pioneer ethnography in Malaya. While the pioneers tended to emphasize the general degeneracy of the Malay race, they identified with the rajas as model medievals. The rajas were seen as strong, courageous, loyal and noble, which not only were attributes likened to the righteous Westerner but were specifically the characteristics of the idealized Anglo-Saxon of post-aristocratic Britain, a nostalgic and romantic image conservatives endeared to (Cannadine 2001: 66–67). Thus, for British conservatives, native degeneracy was largely concentrated in the ignorant and indolent peasantry who were easily misguided into rebellions by the martial rajas (Swettenham 1948: 141–43; Clifford 1927).

The sociological differentiation between native elite and subaltern classes exists in both American and British pioneer readings, but the British racialized the differentiation in a direction exactly the reverse from that of the Americans. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain this difference, except to suggest that the composition of the Philippine Commission by middle-class professionals and the dominant American ideology of democracy provided for a more liberal approach to translating native resistance. Many British officials, on the other hand, were either conservative middle-class aspirants to landed status (Swettenham) or members of minor aristocratic lines (Clifford). The more pertinent point here is that the divergent racialization of similar sociological situations of mass resistance led by native elites shows the malleability of objective ethnographic representations and their character as transcribing categories of hypothetical equivalences.

The malleability of ethnographic transcription in the British case can be seen in its most obviously transcriptive component: linguistic translation. Clifford and Swettenham collaborated to produce a Malay-English dictionary. A consideration of the word *adat* here is pertinent because it was a juridical fetish used by the Malayan colonial authorities to formalize traditional practices as

customary authority in modern legal statutes.² Clifford and Swettenham defined *adat* as, “Custom, usage, manner, habit, state, mode, fashion, rite, functions, ceremonies, rules of etiquette, of behaviour, or of law” (1894: 1). This list suggests that in its local usages *adat* covers a range of practices implicating norms and rituals. In fact, a certain rhetoricity is often involved in the deployment of the word, a claim to the goodness and propriety of a particular line of action suffused with historical as opposed to religious truth. However, the conservatives tended to objectify rhetorical usage of *adat* in the claim to authority as indicative of the very authority itself.

Take for example a Malay sentence Clifford and Swettenham translated to contextualize *adat*: *Adapun adat segala hulubalang Melayu apabila nama tuannya dibawa pada sebuah negeri maka hendaklah sangat-sangat menghormati dan takut, akan memberi aib sekali-kali ia tiada mahu* [It is the custom of Malay warriors, when they support the reputation of their master in a foreign land, to treat his name with great respect and fear, and they will not on any account bring shame upon it] (1894: 2–3). My own translation reads: “it is *adat* for all Malay warriors when their master’s name is carried to a state to desire for the name great respect and fear, to give shame in any way he does not want.” Since Clifford and Swettenham did not give the context of the utterance of this statement, it is impossible to read the rhetoricity of its original usage. But it is possible that this was either a proverbial saying on the general value of honor or a claim made by a Malay raja to the noble distinctiveness of his class. Clifford and Swettenham emphasized instead the objective existence of such a custom. The erasure of rhetoricity is evident in, firstly, the omission of the adjectival claim “all” (*segala*) to establish “Malay warriors” as an objectively-given class rather than as a subject audience the claim is addressed to, and secondly, the transformation of a normative injunction, “to give shame in any way he does not want,” into a factual practice, “they will not on any account bring shame upon it.”

It is noteworthy that *adat* is one of the longest entries in the dictionary, with most of the twenty-one examples relating to the rajas and customary authority. The overall picture one gets from reading the entry is that the Malays were a martial race with entrenched customary practices and traditional beliefs and that the chief authority in the land resided in the rajas rather than Islam, the state or other social institutions. This made sense in the conservative approach to intervention in the Malay states, where raja collaboration to British rule was sought to forestall rebellions. The objectification and validation of raja

² A similar process took place in the Dutch East Indies. The evolutionist and historicist codification of *adat* to legitimate colonial policy and consolidate the authority of the Dutch colonial state and indirect rule regime has been observed by Ellen (1976) and Kahn (1993). The relationship between native resistance and ethnographic codification in the Dutch East Indies case is suggested by Li, who notes that when “ethnic boundaries are clearly marked, they can usually be traced to specific histories of confrontation and engagement” that involved ethnographic codification of local *adat* “by scholars and officials” (2000: 158–59).

customary authority as the source of power of the colonial state instituted the collaboration and consolidated absolute power over the peasantry. At the same time, if rebellions were to break out, these could be explained by pointing to inherent Malay racial degeneracy.

A brief comparison with R. J. Wilkinson's Malay-English dictionary will highlight the malleability of ethnographic transcription. As Acting Inspector of Education in the Straits Settlements, Wilkinson, a learned liberal of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition, spearheaded education reforms that sought to revive Malay literary culture.³ His dictionary's entry on *adat* completely omitted references to Malay rajas and downplayed the existence of customary authority. Though defined as "Custom; customary law; unwritten law; etiquette, the laws of courtesy or society," Wilkinson highlighted the non-legalistic components of *adat*: "*tiada tahu adat*: not to be conversant with the manners of good society; to be boorish," "*adat sedia kala*: immemorial usage; old customs." The final example he gave was a Malay saying:

Anak china bertimbang madat

Dari mengkasar langson ka-Deli;

Hidup di-dunya biar beradat;

Bahasa tidak di-juwal beli.

As long as we live let us be courteous, manners are not for purchase or sale (1901: 437).

Interestingly, Wilkinson did not translate the first part of the saying, "Chinese people weigh prepared opium from Macassar to Deli," where *adat* is explicitly opposed to two things: opium and the view of the diasporic Chinese in the region as rapacious merchants. In the full saying, to practice *adat* was therefore to be a gentleman of good self-control and above the corruption of money. This omission was in line with the general tendency in British colonial representations to downplay Chinese presence and see the Chinese as oriental aliens despite the history of complex interactions between Chinese migrants and local societies in the region (Reid 1996). Chinese tin mining was an important factor in the Malayan economy and the Straits Settlements population was predominantly Chinese. By downplaying the history of Chinese-Malay interaction, Wilkinson could present Malay civilization as an autochthonous

³ British Malaya was composed of three political entities under the direction of the British Governor of the Straits Settlements. The Straits Settlements combined three East India Company bases, Singapore, Penang, and Malacca, which were ruled as a Crown Colony from 1867. The Malay states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang were brought under British protection in the following three decades, and a central administration in the 1895 Federation. British protection was subsequently extended to the Malay states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, Trengganu, and Johore, but colonial government was exercised through officials attached to Malay courts and these became known as the unfederated Malay states.

accomplished good rather than as an identity defined against its moral “other,” the perfidious Chinese. Furthermore, Wilkinson’s overall omission of references to customary authority and the rajas and his emphasis on cultured etiquette rather than martial nobility was a challenge to the dominant conservative representation of Malay society. This contestation of hypothetical equivalences is a process I turn to in the next section.

HYPOTHETICAL EQUIVALENCES AND ETHNOGRAPHIC DISSENSUS

Philippines: The Worcester-Barrows Disagreement

The Philippine Commission report included an ethnographic prolegomenon, in which Worcester laid out the general characteristics of the three Philippine races of Negrito, Malayan, and Indonesian. Worcester was the only member of the original Commission appointed to the succeeding Commission, which was given the task of setting up civil government in districts pacified by the military and subsequently became the legislative and executive chambers of colonial government. Worcester’s ethnographic views contained in this prolegomenon were therefore very influential for colonial state formation. Building on theories that the archipelago was inhabited by the two major races of Malay and Polynesian-Indonesian (Wallace 1986), Worcester described the well-built and wavy-haired Indonesian as “extremely fierce” and intelligent compared to the medium-built and straight-haired Malayan. Worcester postulated that certain pagan groups in the southern island of Mindanao and the mountain peoples of Luzon were Indonesians, based on the reports of Spanish colonialists who repeatedly failed to conquer these peoples. Then, setting up an ethnological baseline for research, Worcester tabulated eighty-four tribes from recognized taxonomies published by Spanish Jesuits and the Austrian scholar Ferdinand Blumentritt (*RPC* 1900: 11–16; Blumentritt 1901).

In the first wave of legislation, the new Commission created the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes to carry out ethnographic research to inform the civilizing mission. David Barrows, then superintendent of Manila schools, was appointed Bureau chief.⁴ The Commission immediately sent Barrows to visit Native American reservations to investigate the applicability of Indian policy in the Philippines. Barrows reported that the reservation system was inapplicable since the non-Hispanicized tribes had “advanced to the point of understanding individual ownership of property” and were “oppressively autocratic” compared to the “thoroughly democratic” American Indians (*RPC* 1902: 878–81, U.S.NA 350/91/11). With this rejection, Barrows was well on his way to rejecting the reading of non-Hispanicized peoples as savages.

⁴ The three key personnel associated with the Bureau in the early half of the decade held doctorates: Barrows and Merton L. Miller trained with Frederick Starr at the University of Chicago, while Albert Jenks received his degree at the University of Wisconsin.

In a brief circular for volunteer field ethnographers, Barrows spelled out his working hypothesis for ethnographic research, using the wave theory of migration to list five groups from earliest to latest migrants: Negritos, Malayans in the northern mountains, later Malayans “affected by Hindu culture, Christianized by Spain and now approaching the plane of western civilization,” Mindanao Indonesians, and the “true Malays” of the southern islands (Dec. 1901, U.S.NA 350/5, file 3833, item 2). After a year of intensive fieldwork, the Bureau was renamed The Ethnological Survey for the Philippine Islands so that the ethnographers could “conduct systematic scientific researches in anthropology and ethnology among *all* the inhabitants of the Philippine Islands” (Act 841, 24 Aug. 1903, U.S.NA 350/5/3833/8). Barrows was confident enough of his work on the non-Hispanicized tribes to argue that the Filipinos constituted a single ethnographic category—the medieval—and now sought the extension of the survey to Hispanicized Filipinos. The conclusion drawn by Barrows in his report was a rejection of his own hypothesis, arguing that the Philippines was populated by a “homogeneous and continuous” migration from the south with a possible break that placed some groups in the interior, that tribal differences were not due to race but to culture, and that, except for the aboriginal Negritos, the inhabitants belonged to “the pure, brown Malayan race” (*RPC* 1903a: SE2158-9, U.S.NA 350/91/19).

Barrows disagreed with Worcester on two counts. Firstly, Barrows rejected Worcester’s Indonesian hypothesis. Stating that the unconquered groups appeared “to differ in no essential characteristic” from the other purportedly Malayan peoples, Barrows argued that while some groups practiced abominable customs of headhunting and ceremonial cannibalism, they were “by no means mere savages in culture” since they were active agricultural producers and garment weavers (*RPC* 1903a: SE2141; also Barrows 1905: 462–63). Secondly, Barrows rejected Worcester’s differentiation of the Filipinos into eighty-four tribes. Barrows pointed out that “nowhere in the Philippines do we encounter large political bodies or units” and that the “tribe itself as a body politic is unknown in this archipelago,” and argued that there was “a superlative number of designations for what are practically identical peoples” (1905: 453). He went on to reduce the number to twenty-four, assigned groups formerly designated as tribes to dialect groups of a tribe.

Soon after, Worcester published “The Non-Christian Tribes of Northern Luzon” in the government’s *Philippine Journal of Science*, which criticized Barrows for not explicitly defining “tribe.” This was true, but what Barrows meant could be easily inferred. Comparing the Malayan groups to Native Americans, from whom the word “tribe” gained currency in American anthropology, Barrows had rejected a sociopolitical definition. He saw the Filipinos as essentially identical in physical and racial characteristics. His discussions of

Table I
Colonial Ethnographic Classifications of Native Groups in Northern Luzon

Barrows 1905		Worcester 1906	Beyer 1917	
Tribe	Dialect	Tribe	State of Economic and Social Progress	Group
Negrito		Negrito	Civilized and semi-civilized lowlanders	Gaddang Isinai
Igorot		Bontoc Igorot		Tinggian
	Dadayag Gaddang Kalinga	Kalinga	Semi-civilized, sedentary agricultural groups	Bontok Kalinga Ifugao Igorot
	Bunnayan Silipan Mayoyao	Ifugao		
	Isanay Kankanay Nabildi	Benguet-Lepanto Igorot	Semi-civilized, semi-sedentary agricultural groups	Apayao Gaddang Kalinga Ilongot
	Banaos Tinguains Apayaos	Tinggians	Tribal, semi-sedentary agricultural groups	Tinggian Ilongot
			Tribal, semi-sedentary primitive types	Ilongot Negritos
Ilongot		Ilongot	Tribal, wandering primitive types	Negritos

differences based on religion, kinship, agriculture, and language show that sociocultural traits were his defining key. On the other hand, Worcester defined tribe as “a division of race” similar in both physical and sociocultural characteristics, “but not constituting a political unit subject to the control of any single individual nor necessarily speaking the same dialect.” He thereby kept the defining political and linguistic traits elastic (1906: 799, 803). Worcester’s resulting classification expanded Barrows’ three tribes (Negrito, Igorot, Ilongot) to seven (Table 1), and combined Barrows’ Igorot dialect groups (from Dadayag to Apayaos) to form five separate tribes (Bontoc Igorot, Kalinga, Ifugao, Benguet-Lepanto Igorot, Tinggians).

The malleability of ethnographic discourse forms the basis for disagreements between colonial ethnographers. In the Philippine case, Barrows advocated the reading of the Filipino as medieval, placing the myriad native groups squarely in the positive trajectory of progress traced by Western civilization. Worcester, on the other hand, was arguing for a reading of the non-Hispanicized groups as

savages, so as to differentiate them from the Hispanicized Filipinos. In the first instance, such disagreements can be interpreted as academic *exchanges*. This observation opens up a fruitful theoretical opening based on Marx's (1976: 125–77) analysis of value and commodity fetishism. As Marx observes, the exchange value of commodities is expressed through the value of a commodity generalized as currency. Liu (1999) has shown that it is possible to take the Saussurean linguistic sign as homologous to the commodity. Because translation involves the postulation of equivalents between otherwise incommensurable meanings, Liu argues that the historical coincidence of meaning in a linguistic community that is taken for granted in Saussurean semiology gives way to the problem of meaning-value formation in unequal relations of linguistic exchange. If we broaden Liu's application of Marx's theory of value to encompass translation and exchange between and within cultural groups, we can see that the categories lying at the heart of disagreements between colonial ethnographers carry a certain value that gives meaning to notions of culture and difference in a civilizational community.

The ethnographic categories were translations of otherwise incommensurable native cultures into a comprehensible idiom held together by the biological racial trope and a linear temporal imagination, Western civilization being the universalized equivalent in the exchange of anthropological knowledge between ethnographers. In other words, in the comparative anthropology of imperialism, disparate native groups were made equivalent along the dimensions of race and time signified in the categories, Western modernity being the semantic key. Concomitantly, a provincial culture came to be generalized as the universal civilization (cf. Chakrabarty 2000). As a cultural sign, each ethnographic term possessed a racial-time meaning-value that was exchangeable between academics for epistemic gain. But in Marx's analysis, the market exchange of commodities presupposes the prior exchange of a commodity of fundamental use value in the sphere of production: labor. In the very unequal conditions guarded by colonial power, ethnographic production took place as a form of cultural exchange between the reading ethnographer and the revealing native. Even without face-to-face interaction, as Fabian (1993: 86) suggests, the transcription of a recorded text or reading of a native text requires the recreation of "the oral performance of speech." If ethnographic writing is the production of the meaning-value of an ethnic sign, then transcription is the act of extraction of that value from the speaking native.

The circulation of ethnic signs in colonial ethnographic discourse was not limited to academia. Colonial policy discourse tapped into this circulation. The academic-policy overlap is clearly manifested in the very persons of ethnographer-officials, allowing them to not only conduct an academic disagreement but also to compare notes with officials of other imperial powers on native policy. Thus, Barrows' Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes installed

“a small exhibit of racial types of the Philippines” and produced a publicity leaflet for the occasion of the International Congress of Orientalists meeting at the 1902–1903 Hanoi *Français et Internationale* Exposition because it was believed that “best results” concerning the native problem “can be obtained only by a wide comparison of material from Malaysia, Polynesia, and the continent of Asia” (“Ethnological Investigations in the Philippines,” undated, U.S.NA 350/5/3833/5). The link between cultural transcription and native resistance becomes particularly visible in this conflated academic-policy exchange. In Marx’s analysis, commodities are naturalized hieroglyphs that belie the social process of its production by resistant labor activity subjugated, commodified, and purchased by the bourgeoisie. Likewise, the production of ethnographic terms involved the social process of dominating groups with resistant practices that had been ethnographically transcribed and codified by the colonizers.

Concomitantly, ethnographic dissensus in the academic-policy exchange stemmed from, firstly, the dialectical context of ethnographic representation and, secondly, the multiplicity of resistance complicating the civilizing project. In other words, disagreements in translation occur precisely because ethnographic production was concerned with overcoming multidimensional native resistance. When Worcester proposed the Indonesian hypothesis, U.S. forces were busy fighting the revolutionaries and had yet to assert American sovereignty in the deep interior. The Indonesian, as a racial sign, was a marker of danger. By the time Barrows rejected the Indonesian hypothesis, U.S. forces had already shifted their attention to the peripheries. Thus, Barrows noted, “The ferocity of these tribes, while hardly exaggerated by the Spaniards, breaks down more quickly than could have been expected in the presence of the American government.” He added immediately, “Head-hunting in the North and slavery and raiding in the South can be stopped just as soon as a proper effort is made”; the prognosis for the Malayan race was good (*RPC* 1903a: SE2159).

There was no disagreement between Barrows and Worcester that real social and cultural differences existed among the Filipinos. The disagreement was over whether to organize these differences into classifications employing “tribe” or “dialect groups.” Each concept emphasized different aspects of the same native reality. Barrows’ concern was with the educational field. Thus, Barrows’ claim that the Filipinos were more homogeneous than most people thought was in line with his pedagogical orientation. So was his definition of “tribe” as a marker of cultural and linguistic differences, since these differences were the manifest resistance a colonial educator would encounter when he faced the native masses. In late 1903, after two years as the chief colonial anthropologist, Barrows was appointed General Superintendent of Public Instruction and embarked on an ambitious universal education program, which emphasized English literacy as vehicle of Anglo-Saxon freedoms to displace Spanish as the vessel of cacique tradition and modern agricultural training

in the “model Filipino house” that was attached to each school to transform a colony of peasants in peonage into a model nation of independent smallholders (General Superintendent of Education 1904: 701–2; Barrows, “The Prospects for Education in the Philippines,” *The Philippine Teacher*, 15 Dec. 1904, U.S.NA 350/5/13450). Worcester expressed great regret with the appointment and warned that the government would fail to protect the non-Hispanicized tribes in the absence of ethnographic information (*RPC* 1903b: SE102, U.S.NA 350/91/16). The Commission sided with Barrows, reduced the Survey to a divisional unit, and placed it under the Bureau of Education so that teachers would double as ethnographers.

While Barrows was the Chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes he wrote a long letter to his former mentor at the University of California, the Philippine Secretary of Education Bernard Moses. He told Moses that the Filipino appeared to him “to have much of the mental readiness and acquisitiveness of the Japanese,” and expressed hope that mass education would make Filipino society less aristocratic (Barrows to Moses, 7 Dec. 1901, U.S.NA 350/5/3833/3). In his paper for the American Political Science Association, Moses argued the Spanish crusading spirit had prepared the Filipinos by elevating them from their native primitivism to feudal medievalism, and that Spain “had finished her mission” when it failed to modernize practices of bonded labor to free wage labor and chose to preserve the Filipino in his semi-civilized stage by refusing him modern education. He noted that “feudalism survived only as a relic of receding past,” particularly in that “the tasks she [Spain] had undertaken had fallen to other nations,” namely America (1904: 98). Moses’ view on American succession to Spain’s civilizing mission and the racial mess left behind by the latter clearly influenced Barrows. Thus, Barrows wrote in 1902 that the “variety of problems” presented by the *mestizo* Filipinos as racial embodiments of cacique feudalism “is equally great for the Ethnologist and the statesman, and nowhere, it may be asserted, must the constructive work of administration be so dependent for information and guidance upon the researches of the expert student” (*RPC* 1902: 1: 2: 871–72, U.S.NA 350/91/11).

For Worcester, who headed the Interior Department, the issue was a territorial-administrative one of organizing the non-Hispanicized tribes for settled agriculture so as to protect the tribes from Hispanicized Filipinos. Worcester obtained executive control of the non-Christian tribes in 1905 and subsequently established the Mountain Province in 1908, consisting of seven sub-provinces, some excised from existing provinces, which corresponded to his classifications: Apayo (Tinggian), Kalinga (Kalinga), Ifugao (Ifugao), Bontoc (Bontoc Igorot), Benguet, Amburayan, and Lepanto (Benguet-Lepanto Igorot). The two tribes that did not have their own provinces were the two listed as lowest in racial-time value in Worcester’s *Philippine Journal of Science* article: Negritos and Ilongots. Worcester used political-economic criteria to

plot the racial-time: the level of agricultural production and degree of resistance to sedentary settlement. Worcester saw the nomadic hunter-gatherer Negritos, though timid and peaceful, as recalcitrant primitives whose children even when raised by Christian families showed a natural inclination to return to the wilderness. His prognosis was eventual extinction and he advocated that they be segregated for nature to take its course.⁵ Worcester saw the Ilongots as the next lowest tribe; though they lived in settlements they were hunter-gatherers and headhunters, and were therefore ignoble savages with an “unreliable and treacherous disposition” (1906: 817).

In the southern islands, the U.S. Army, with support from Worcester, maintained that the Moros were savages akin to Native Americans, an equivalence Barrows explicitly repudiated. In the beginning, the military government emulated the British in Malaya by signing an agreement of protection with the Sultan of Sulu, who with the Sultan of Magindanao claimed to rule the southern islands. But beneath the friendly veneer troubles were already brewing. The situation was similar to that in the peninsular Malay states. Endemic rivalries between the chiefs of autonomous political units segmented the polity. The Malay court, based in an urban trading center dependent on raja tribute, maintained tenuous symbolic hold on power while balancing on the tightrope of rivalries (Warren 1981). The entry of a foreign power tended to destabilize the situation by causing realignments or provoking open conflict from rivalries previously contained in the symbolic order of the Malay court. The Sultanate of Magindanao had long disintegrated in the vortex of raja rivalries and Spanish intrusion. American arrival hastened the breakdown of a deteriorating Sulu Sultanate. Faced with organized groups led by fiercely independent rajas, the military men found themselves in a new western frontier. In 1901, the army commander of the southern islands submitted a Worcester-endorsed report advocating a change in policy towards the Moros. In it, the racial-time of the Moros was forged according to the peculiar historical role played by the Army in the symbolic construction of American Indians as savages. The commander equated the “beehive of Mohammedan savages” with “the Indian tribes on our western frontiers,” thereby evoking the institutional memory of marauding braves led by indomitable chiefs (Report of Brigadier-General George Davis, 24 Oct. 1901, U.S.NA 350/5/5075/2).

Barrows did not agree. Expressing some melancholy about the passing of the Moro “pirate states,” the only native Filipino “political achievements of any consequence ever made,” he wrote that the passing nonetheless marked “a gain for civilization” (1905: 467). Though agreeing that the protection

⁵ Worcester’s diagnosis was based on Spanish failures to organize the Negritos for sedentary life in protected reservations. According to Reed (1904: 32), Barrows attributed this failure to the government’s failure to provide homes and work for the Negritos rather than to their natural proclivities. This shows us again the malleability of ethnographic reading.

agreement was redundant, Barrows argued for a civilian administration (*RPC* 1903a: SE2154). For Barrows, the Moros were not savages but orientals whose independent rise to civilization had reached its finality and was now in retrogression, deserving therefore to be supplanted by the superior civilization offered by the Anglo-Saxon American. They were to be assimilated into mainstream Filipino society and civilized as model medievals. Earlier, Barrows appointed Najeeb Saleeby, a Lebanese-American army doctor, to study the Moros. Based on acquired manuscripts, Saleeby (1905) traced the genealogies of Mindanao's ruling houses and translated the codes of laws used by the Magindanao and Sulu Sultanates. The use of Moro manuscripts gave Saleeby's work the force of historical truth and showed that the Moros were a civilized people with history. The translation of Moro laws implied that the Americans could revive the historical foundation of customary authority for civilian rule. But in 1903 the Commission, wary of a general Moro uprising, created the Moro Province and delegated its government to the U.S. Army. General Leonard Wood, who began his military career chasing Geronimo, was appointed Governor and began the ironhanded suppression of Moro resistance in accordance with the representation of savagery.

Wilkinson's Liberal Critique of Conservative Ethnography

Compared to the Philippines, the primary ethnographic unit of the Malayan colonial state, the Perak Museum, was largely relegated by pioneer ethnography to the domain of collection and exhibition.⁶ The challenge to pioneer ethnography came from an *ad hoc* scholarly committee spearheaded by Wilkinson after he had been removed from institutional positions of influence. Controversial spats with his superiors over education marked Wilkinson's 1903–1906 tenure as Federal Inspector of Education and led to his reassignment to a minor administrative post, when he began publishing the *Papers on Malay Subjects*. The official intent was to prepare British civil service cadets for the Malay examination. Wilkinson's (1907a: iii–iv) ambition was to record existing Malay traditions, customs, and history to enlighten both British officers and Malays.

In contrast to the pioneers, Wilkinson sought to preserve Malay culture for the purpose of nation building. He described Malay life as a “museum of ancient customs,” Hindu and Muslim details built on “the bedrock of Indonesian custom,” and lamented that it would be a pity to allow Malay

⁶ The Museum's ethnological work was hampered by the lack of expertise until Ivor Evans was hired in 1912 as assistant curator. Evans published in three areas: the aboriginal Sakai “negritos,” Malay crafts, and archaeology. In stark contrast to Worcester's harsh diagnosis of Filipino Negritos, Evans was largely sympathetic towards the Sakai, in part because many Sakais were semi-settled agriculturalists who planted in jungle clearings not far from rural Malay communities (Evans, 1937: 49–69). On Malay crafts and archaeology, Evans' (1927) work showed ambivalence between the conservative reading of pioneer ethnography and the liberal reading of Wilkinson.

custom to perish unrecorded because “national history is crystallised in the old ceremonies of the people” (1908a: 63–64, 72). Wilkinson’s own work in the series placed the Malay as equivalent to the medieval European with a positive vector. Through the study of Malay proverbs to read the Malay character, Wilkinson criticized the dominant conservative reading. He disparaged Swettenham for “thoughtlessly” describing the Malay as a mild-mannered pirate, and Clifford for portraying him as an “interesting scoundrel,” and argued that the Malay was more an Asiatic equivalent of Tennyson’s knights and “a law-abiding individual who is far more devoted to curry and rice than to methods of barbarism” (1907b: 8, 16–17).

Wilkinson read Malay historical documents ethnographically, seeking to discern in the tales not pedantic facts about kings but “the details that come out incidentally about” everyday life, customs, laws and, specifically, “the attitude of the Malays to the new learning that was being introduced from Arabia and India” (1907a: 34). He was obsessed with the Islamic character of the Malays, only to seek to expose the Hindu influence lying beneath it, and again only to discover the true and pure Malay at the base. In his first two papers of the “History” series of the *Papers* (republished later with four additional chapters; Wilkinson 1923), Wilkinson crafted the standard narrative of Malayan history passing through these stages: aboriginal Negrito, tribal proto-Malay, Hinducized Malay migration from Sumatra, the rise and Islamic conversion of Malacca, the Portuguese and Dutch conquests, and finally British settlement and intervention. This could easily be read as a history legitimating British rule in Malaya, as a narrative of progressive civilization marching from aboriginal, tribal, Hindu, Islamic, continental European to Anglo-Saxon.

But Wilkinson’s last paper in the series, a study of Negri Sembilan, was his *pièce de résistance*. The state was unique among the peninsular states. It was a confederation of nine states born out of the sixteenth-century migration of matriarchal colonists from Menangkabau in southern Sumatra. Semi-autonomous matriarchal clans made up of extended family units crosscut and moderated the hierarchical Malay social structure. The clan elders therefore shielded commoners from powerful rajas. Against the Hinducized and Islamicized states, Wilkinson saw Negri Sembilan as representing the true Malay civilization, an aberration in a linear history that expressed the true Malay potential:

If any European student imagines that constitutional Government is alien to the Asiatic mind he may study the Menangkabau system with profit, *for it is a genuine Malay creation and owes nothing to alien influence*. Its faults and failures are those common to all democracies: overmuch disputation, irresolute and divided action, and the inertia that comes of a Government being over-weighted with checks and counterchecks. These faults were free from any oriental hankering after despotism

—(Wilkinson 1971: 312, my emphasis).

In his study of Malay laws, Wilkinson distinguished between the democratic *adat perpateh* of matriarchal Negri Sembilan, the autocratic *adat temenggong* of the other Malay states, and the theocratic *hokum shara'* of Islam. Wilkinson reserved high praise for *adat perpateh*, a body of proverbial legal maxims handed down by oral tradition. Analyzing the proverbs, Wilkinson contrasted *adat perpateh* as a humane and civil code to *adat temenggong* as a brutal and deterrent code. Indeed, Wilkinson saw superficial differences between *adat temenggong* and *adat perpateh*; the former merely represented “the old Menangkabau jurisprudence—the true law of the Malays—in a state of disintegration after many centuries of exposure to the influence of Hindu despotism and Moslem law.” The theme is evolutionary degeneration. *Adat temenggong* brought the “aristocratic and autocratic rule” of “the old Hindu civilization” and “degraded and destroyed the primitive Menangkabau law.” Islamic law would have become the dominant code in Malaya “had not British law stepped in to check it” (1908b: 36, 45, 49).

The conclusion to Wilkinson’s paper on Malay literature gives us a clue to the source of his distaste for Islam. He tells us that the latest phase in Malay literature was the pan-Islamic phase, where the Malay public absorbed translations of Arabic political journals from the Middle East. At the turn of the century, the Malay intelligentsia in the Straits Settlements, influenced by the pan-Islamists, began publishing their own political literature urging Islamic reforms, modern education, and the disavowal of Western culture. Wilkinson’s distinguished stint as chief educationist of the Settlements sensitized him to their writings. He was pessimistic about the incipient Malay political awakening and wrote that the failure to properly develop the Malay through British education would “drive the Malay—whom we so often condemn as unwilling to learn—to get his knowledge of the world through the seditious press of Egypt and to seek political and religious guidance from a group of sullen fanatics who are bitterly hostile to the British Empire” (1907a: 64).

Wilkinson was aware of the sociology underlying the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago. The rise of trading city-states with a peasant base was founded on the cultural technologies of first Brahminism and then Islam, which permeated into the illiterate countryside as *adat* (Johns 1976). He feared that the same urban trade routes would again disseminate new ideas, now those of a radical Islam. Although confined to the Settlements, the reform movement had the potential to spread among the religious schools that were mushrooming in the peninsular states at around the same time (Roff 1994: 56–90; Khoo 1991: 157–84). Transcribing this impending resistance, Wilkinson racialized the history of Islamicization in evolutionary frames to locate the Malay essence: “the ideas of the old Indonesians [Menangkabau Malays] were not the ideas of Mecca” (1907b: 14).

The concerns of the colonial state were more immediate. After the Federation of Malay States was established in 1895, British rule extended into the

surrounding Malay states and faced resistance similar to that experienced in earlier phases of expansion. Adas (1981) describes Southeast Asian polities as “contest states,” in which the king claimed absolute power but was restricted by rival elite powers that were in turn constrained by peasant “avoidance protest.” Because a low population-to-land ratio made the retention of manpower crucial, the threat of peasant withdrawal from patron-client relationships moderated the exactions of the ruling class. Colonial disruption of this political economy tended to provoke rural rebellions led by local chiefs despite British control over the sultan in the center. Pioneer ethnography, which portrayed the Malays as racially hostile to change and held hostage by avaricious blue-blooded chiefs, transcribed this form of Malay resistance in racial terms. Feeling mainly the pressure from traditional Malay elites, the British colonial state found conservative pioneer ethnography more pertinent than Wilkinson’s liberal view.

Just as in the Philippines, the multi-dimensional character of native resistance underpinned divergent ethnographic readings in Malaya, and produced dissenting hypothetical equivalences that transcribed different aspects of native life worlds. In Malaya, between the conservative emphasis on the peasant economies of the Malay States and the liberal focus on their urban trade routes of goods and ideas, the colonial state preferred the former for its immediate relevance. However, the ethnographic dissensus sat uncomfortably with the institutional coherence of the colonial state. Divergent readings therefore required synthesis in line with the direction of colonial state formation.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SYNTHESIS: TWO EMPIRES, TWO DIRECTIONS

Reflecting his obsession with the ethnographic, Worcester succeeded in getting the Division of Ethnology transferred back to his charge in 1907. But lack of funding and manpower plagued the Division for the rest of its existence, and its task was largely limited to the management of museum exhibits. This was a manifestation of how well established the ethnographic categories already were in the operations of the colonial state by the end of the decade. The only significant event was the return of anthropologist H. Otley Beyer from graduate studies at Harvard. Beyer first joined the Division in 1905 after he was awed by the Philippine Exhibit organized by the colonial state at the 1904 Saint Louis World’s Fair (Zamora 1974: 361–62). Barrows sent him to study the Ifugaos until 1908 when he left for the United States. In 1914, Beyer was appointed to the newly created chair of anthropology at the University of the Philippines. The occasion was the reorganization of government in 1913 following Woodrow Wilson’s electoral victory. The Democratic administration ended ethnological research.⁷ Anthropology

⁷ After a steady stream of articles on non-Hispanicized tribes that followed Worcester’s classification and definition, no anthropological articles were published in the *Philippine Journal of*

was privatized as an academic discipline. This bifurcation of theory and practice, knowledge and power, was a natural development after each had given the other the discursive momentum it required: the multiplying problems and puzzles of a science and the categories for transcribing native resistance.

But anthropologists continued to provide ethnographic advice. Beyer was involved with the 1918 Census conducted by Filipino nationalists. The Democratic regime took Barrows' view of the Filipinos as essentially one people to its logical conclusion: the Filipinos were a nation irreducible to tribes and the United States had the duty to make the Filipino nation capable of political independence. Tribes were merely designations of groups that were in the process of being assimilated into the Filipino body politic. To prepare for the Census, Beyer published a summary description of Filipino ethnic groups. Beyer's definition of an ethnic group synthesized Barrows' and Worcester's definitions: a group of people with unique economic and social life, language *or* physical type (1917: 40). The innovation is his use of Worcester's racial-time hierarchy as a superordinate classification of the groups to show progress towards a homogenous nationhood (Table 1). A few non-Hispanicized groups consequently straddled two or more categories, providing therefore the range of progress each group was making relative to others. Anthropology in the Philippines was already becoming a post-colonial component of the nationalist hegemonic project.

While the synthesis of divergent ethnographies proceeded in a post-colonial direction in the Philippines, the synthesis conducted by R. O. Winstedt in Malaya conservatively affirmed the categories of pioneer ethnography. Winstedt was Wilkinson's protégé, who, in contrast to his mentor's failed educationist career, became a successful Director of Education and retired an acclaimed Malay scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Though both Wilkinson and Winstedt employed "evolutionary positivism" to shape modern Malay studies (Maier 1988: 57), the difference between their writings is significant. If Wilkinson found the true Malay lying repressed beneath Hindu and Muslim layers, Winstedt saw a race, half-civilized and dazed by foreign influences, that was only coming out of the jungles aided by the British. Inspired by Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Winstedt read Malay folklore in his 1907 paper as a reflection of the primitive mind. Deprecating Malay fables, Winstedt argued, "the Malay has ceased to be a savage and has not yet become a dilettante, the fable has only lately become a medium of his literature, and tales surviving in nursery and village have had to wait

Science from 1915 to 1920. The American Anthropological Association protested the suspension of ethnological research but this was brushed aside (Bureau of Insular Affairs to the American Anthropological Association, 16 Jan. 1916, U.S.NA 350/5/3833/39).

for the prompting of Europeans to find a literary setting.” Winstedt concluded, “one foreign influence after another has borne down on [the Malay] so rapidly that he cannot weigh the relative value of his materials nor see the wood for the trees” (1907: 8–9, 38).

Winstedt’s later writings employed the same historical evolutionism as Wilkinson’s, moving the Malay from animism through Hinduism to Islam and then European influence. The title of his acclaimed work on Malay magic, *Shaman, Saiva and Sufi*, by itself suggests the evolutionary narrative. The significance is in a minor detail. Though the Malays had been “orthodox and convinced” Muslims for five hundred years, Winstedt wrote, they were “no zealots,” for “in their beliefs and their magic the influence of the early Indian missionaries of their latest faith is marked” (1925: 156). The Islam of the Malays was therefore adulterated from the start, blended with Hinduistic elements. Elsewhere, he wrote that Islam broadened the Malay mind and transformed customary tribal law into the law of the state (Winstedt 1923: 106). Thus, while Wilkinson saw Islamic law as magnifying the excesses of *adat temenggong*, Winstedt (1935: 254–59) saw Islam as the vehicle that developed primitive *adat perpateh* equivalents into *adat temenggong*.

Uninterrupted by the appearance of the true Malay, Winstedt’s historiography was strictly linear and evolutionary. Like the conservatives, Winstedt downplayed the significance of Islam, concluding that the Malays possessed a medieval civilization defined essentially by *adat* rather than Islam, thus affirming the customary authority of the rajas. Winstedt’s work was therefore a synthesis of Wilkinson’s liberal-historical and conservative pioneer ethnographies that reaffirmed the latter’s reading. This took place in the context of the decentralization controversies that plagued native policy in Malaya in the last two decades before the War. The Malay rajas began in the 1920s to voice concerns about their lack of power in the government, which the British then used as a basis to call for reforms to politically accommodate the rajas and to dampen the growing restlessness of the ethnographically neglected and politically alienated Chinese population. Winstedt was himself instrumental in enacting conservative educational reforms in the 1920s informed by his ethnographic synthesis, redirecting Malay schooling from a liberal emphasis on cultural development and uplifting of the peasant masses to agricultural and vernacular education to enhance the customary authority of the rajas.

CONCLUSIONS

From pioneer malleability to contesting dissensus to consensual synthesis, colonial ethnography did not merely provide the materials for the colonial state to “imagine” its dominion and subjects. I have argued the case for looking at ethnography as primarily concerned with the translating reading of

culturally disparate groups into commensurate sociological terms. Undoubtedly, colonial ethnographers were intimately involved with Anderson's (1991: 163–85) triad of census, map, and museum, but they were no mere lexicographers for the grammar of colonial state representations. Studies on ethnography as a cultural technology of imperialism have so far focused on forms that are manifestly technical such as censuses and maps (Cohn 1996; Kertzer and Arel 2002; Hirsch 2005). But the semantic translation of the unopened native book preceded the syntactic formulation of colonial state representations. This article's emphasis on semantics attempts to move the issue of ethnographic representation beyond the structure and form of state cognition into the realm of exchange and production of signs across the institutional boundaries of state and society. In other words, I treat ethnographic discourse as dialogic rather than taxonomic, transcription rather than "serialization" (Anderson 1991: 184), provincial rather than "high modernist" (Scott 1998). In addition, I have strongly indicated the close links between ethnographic discourse and colonial state formation in the person of the transcribing ethnographer-official, whether of an old colonial power already present in the area such as in British Malaya or new imperialist pretenders such as in the American Philippines. The ubiquity of the ethnographer-official throughout the colonial world in the imperialist period is suggested by studies of colonial state formation in already colonized areas such as the Dutch East Indies (Kahn 1993: 68–109) and newly colonized areas such as in the German colonies (Steinmetz 2003) and the French colonies in Africa (L'Estoile 2005).

Viewing the ethnographer-official as a transcriber engaged in a perilous provincial task rather than as a confident engineer applying universal technologies helps us to better understand state formation in the Third World not as the transplantation of modern state forms, but as the discursive adaptation of Western institutions of government to local societies fraught with sociological tensions. The transcription of native resistance was always precarious, opened to contestations by different readers, and vulnerable to the vicissitudes of imperial politics and native responses understood as resistance. At the same time, it provided for the capacity and strength of the colonial state in managing multidimensional native resistance and inscribing its modernity unto native populations to produce hybrid subjects. Thus, equipped with its investigatory knowledge, the Philippine Commission became the central arm of the colonial state once the Filipino revolutionary resistance it transcribed was militarily suppressed or co-opted as collaboration with imperial democracy. The ethnographic dissensus that emerged from attempts to transcribe native resistances to pedagogical benevolence, territorial administration, or acquiescence to imperial sovereignty was resolved in synthesis in favor of those who emphasized nation-building modern education as the proper colonial project. Colonial state formation therefore proceeded

in the direction that privileged nationalist *mestizo* collaborators who increasingly wrestled the state from the Americans using the imperial democratic processes they were educated in. The conservative British translation of *adat* served to consolidate the traditional authority of the Malay rajas and bought their acquiescence to colonial rule. On the other hand, the liberal transcription of *adat* and Malay society in general challenged conservative ethnography and deployment of raja authority for colonial rule. The challenge did not succeed but the liberal ethnography informed Malay education projects that grew a generation of future nationalist leaders, and directed incipient modernist sentiments from the pan-Islamic anti-colonial movement arriving in the Straits Settlements to the construction of an indigenous collaborationist nationalism. The eventual conservative synthesis of liberal ethnography refocused collaborationist nationalism on the maintenance of customary raja authority.

Significantly, none of the ethnographers I have cited provided details on their native informants. Their epistemological posture was one of objective sociological reading. This is not surprising given that the natives were seen collectively as closed books and it did not matter where the ethnographers began to peel open the books. Unlike the intersubjective meeting of Western travelers and native autoethnographies in precolonial contact zones (Pratt 1992; Steinmetz 2003), colonial ethnography and its objective readings were closely bound up with the objectifying violence of the colonial state, which could only deal with whole categories of peoples and with native individuals as inextricably embedded in racial groups. Correspondingly, colonial ethnographers read their native informants as individual windows into the same racial essence defining the entire group. Here, the question of the willingness of native informants to reveal and perform for the ethnographer is only an apparent one. Just as the voluntary selling of labor is a defining feature of the capitalist system secured by the normalized violence of the bourgeois state, the willing articulation of local meanings and performance of native practices for ethnographic reading were secured by the mundane violence of the colonial state against myriad native resistances.

These days, nation states have succeeded colonial states, the mundane violence has normalized, the demographer-engineer has replaced the ethnographer-official, and the racial-time narrative of Medievalism has morphed into the grand-narrative of Modernization. Most importantly, de-racialized sociology has taken the place of anthropology as the preeminent discipline to discern the progress of national society and transcribe local resistances to national projects of development into the semantics of social problems. But as Beyer's intellectual craftsmanship for the nationalist Philippine census suggests, hidden behind the numbers are categories indicating the transcriptions of a fundamentally ethnographic state.

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