The Literary Alterities of Philippine Nationalism in José Rizal's *El filibusterismo*

ADAM LIFSHEY

THE SEMINAL NOVELS OF THE PHILIPPINES, JOSÉ RIZAL'S *NOLI ME tangere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891), are written in Spanish, a language that began evaporating in the archipelago when the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War in 1898 and imposed English as a lingua franca. As a result, the only Asian literary tradition in Spanish is inaccessible to virtually all Filipinos today and is often passed over in both Spanish and Asian studies programs. Where does a foundational author like Rizal fit in a discussion of globalized literatures when the Philippines are commonly framed as a historical and cultural hybrid neither quite Asian nor quite Western? Rizal's *El filibusterismo*, a novel sharply critical of Spanish colonialism yet reluctant to promote Philippine independence, provides a complicated space in which such tensions are engaged. The sinister, American, and procolonial protagonist, Simoun, freshly arrived in Manila after years spent supporting Spanish imperialism in Cuba, turns out to be an equally nefarious, Filipino, and anticolonial revolutionary named after the South American independence hero Simón Bolívar. Rizal thereby imagines the Philippines as an inchoate national project that exists not in Asia but amid complex allusive dynamics that originate in the Americas. Fantasies of an unexpectedly non-Filipino Orient emanate through the apparently American body of Simoun/Simón, for instance, as he and an American proxy enrapture the Philippine colonial elite with tales of Middle Eastern pyramids and sphinxes and of jewels once belonging to Cleopatra. In effect, Rizal and Simoun, like the Philippine nation they in large part wrote into being, appear in global and postcolonial frameworks as both Asian and American in that epistemes Eastern and Western, subaltern and hegemonic, interact in a ceaseless flow that resists easy categorization.

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In his recent *Under Three Flags*, Benedict Anderson has focused on the significance of Europe to Rizal, who wrote *El filibusterismo*, or the *Fili* (as it is tenderly called in the Philippines today), in London, Biarritz, Paris, and Brussels and published it in Ghent.[1] Anderson situates Rizal and his novel in the political trends of his era, particularly the rise of anarchism. Noting that the Philippine colonial society depicted in the novel does not generally correspond to the historical reality of 1890s Manila but bears a striking resemblance to the 1880s Madrid that Rizal knew intimately, Anderson concludes that the author effects in the *Fili* "a massive, ingenious transfer of real events, experiences, and sentiments from Spain to the Philippines" (110, 121). Anderson acknowledges, however, that "Simoun is another matter altogether. He . . . enters the novel not from Spain, but from an imagined Cuba" (121). Anderson convincingly recontextualizes as European the historical space in which Rizal's Philippine setting emerges, but, metaphorically, what are the American spaces of that same nation narration? And what does it mean for the Philippines to be constantly displaced in their foundational novels? The paradoxes of Rizal may be that he and his works are not at one with themselves: the moment any position on them is taken they dissolve into contradictions. They are alienated from their own isolation. Otherness in Rizal, perhaps in the Philippines in general, is always other than it is.

It is key to the literary alterities of Philippine nationalism in the *Fili* that the mysterious protagonist Simoun is associated with Cuba when he enters and exits the novel. His struggle is linked thereby with an independence movement long underway in a different island colony ruled by Spain. His identity, however, is not only Cuban, since at the start and end of the *Fili* he is called a "yankee," a term uniquely identified with the United States (37, 345). Though these geopolitical markers are varied and unstable, their aggregate presence, as John Blanco notes, "cues the reader to examine the colonial question in the Philippines through the lens of the Americas" ("Bastards" 100). Moreover, in the middle of the book, Simoun appears to be doubled by an itinerant ventriloquist, Mr. Leeds, also dubbed a "yankee" and also a fluent speaker of Spanish, thanks to his lengthy stay in South America (201). America in the hemispheric sense is, symbolically, as much a deterritorializing presence in the *Fili* as is the historical European context signaled by Anderson. Notably, Rizal displaces Southeast Asia in yet a third way, for even though the novel transpires in the Philippines, the conjoined Simoun-Leeds character produces a discourse that consistently invokes an ancient and stereotyped Middle East. Indeed, the slippages that Simoun signifies, his character as a dialogic phenomenon, create a global heteroglossia in his singular corpus. Simoun's American body with its orientalizing projections, a metonym for a nascent national body and a coalesced diverse world, suggests that the fin de siècle Philippines arose amid a mutable suite of planetary voices and that, consequently, the *Fili* may be viewed as a foundational novel of modern globalization.

These themes have been overlooked inside the Philippines because Rizal is the central forefather of an otherwise fractured national imaginary (the country comprises over seven thousand islands and myriad indigenous cultures and languages) and outside the archipelago because Filipino studies is a marginalized discipline. The nation remains virtually unacknowledged by Spanish departments despite over three centuries of Spanish colonialism; by English departments despite being, according to some measurements, the third or fourth largest anglophone country in the world; and by Asian departments despite geography, because of all the Western presences in the islands. The constant flux of cultures and languages and peoples that constitutes the Philippines makes the national literature and its primary novelist leading

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examples of the unsettled and asymmetrical forces of modernity.

The macrohistorical forces that created the metaphoric theater for Philippine nationalism and the *Fili* emerge from a drama of centuries in which the Americas as well as Europe played key roles. The archipelago was unknown to Europe until Magellan encountered it in 1521. The Portuguese explorer, sailing under a Spanish flag, came from the American strait that now bears his name; he died in a skirmish in the Philippines just a month after his arrival. In 1565 the Spanish established their first permanent settlement there and in 1571 took possession of Manila. They stayed on as the imperial power for over three hundred years, naming the islands after Prince Philip, the future King Philip II.[2] Throughout most of that period there was no broad-based indigenous government to oppose them because in the Philippines, unlike other regions of Asia, there was an "absence . . . of supravillage organizations, not to speak of empires, [and] the archipelago had no common language" (Rafael, *Contracting* 20). As the most distant of Madrid's possessions, the Philippines were governed through the Spanish viceroyalty in colonial Mexico until that country gained independence in 1821, which is why Rizal's contemporary compatriot Graciano López Jaena announced in an homage to Columbus, "En nombre del pueblo filipino, brindo por América, enviando su más cordial saludo, su fraternal abrazo a todo el pueblo americano cuya historia hasta entrado ya el siglo presente, historia era del Archipiélago filipino" ("In name of the Philippine people, I toast America, sending their warmest greeting, their fraternal embrace to all the American people whose history through the beginning of our own century was the history of the Philippine archipelago" ("Homenaje" 25). The legacy of Columbus in the New World, as López Jaena explains, extends to the Philippines as well. "America" here refers not to the United States but to all the lands of the Western Hemisphere. In 1898, however, after Spain lost military battles to the United States and consequently its remaining American and Asian colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines,[3] a more specific American presence began making itself felt with the introduction of English as the new imperial language. The result, as Blanco notes, was that "barely a generation after Rizal's death [in 1896], Filipinos had already forgotten they were once a part of Latin America" ("Bastards"102).

The singularities of Rizal's historical context are expansively global. The Philippines of the nineteenth century were already the only major lands in Asia featuring a Spanish presence, a university, and a majority Catholic population. They were also the only Asian country to be governed first from Latin America and then, after 1898, from North America; independence did not arrive until after World War II. The Philippines' national imaginaries were never located entirely in the islands themselves or simply in Europe but also in the Americas. In the late-nineteenth-century era of Rizal, Filipinos were not even Filipinos, since Philippine colonial society was understood to have three principal sectors: *peninsulares* (people born in Spain—i.e., in the Iberian Peninsula), *filipinos* (people of Spanish descent born in the Philippines—i.e., those who in Latin America would be considered "Creoles"), and *indios* (people of indigenous ancestry—i.e., those who occupied the role of the "Indians" of the Americas). No one interpellated as a *filipino* in the *Fili* is a Filipino as understood in the present sense of that word: all the *filipino* characters who populate that novel and *Noli me tangere*, or the *Noli*, are Creoles and not the lineal descendants of the peoples encountered by Magellan (237). As a result, one could argue that literally as well as symbolically, the *filipinos* of the *Fili* are not even Asian. At hand instead are Spanish colonial strata mapped after New World experiences in the Americas. What then can it mean for the *Fili* and the *Noli* to be, as Victor

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Sumsky puts it, "for all practical purposes, the sacred books of Filipino nationalism" (237)?

Rizal was born in 1861, when such questions remained fairly far away from local intellectuals. Colonial rule, overseen by governors-general sent from Spain but dominated by Spanish priests of various religious orders, seemed firmly in place. Rizal grew up as a native speaker of Tagalog, which was then a regional language spoken in the area around Manila. (Today, the two national languages of the Philippines are Filipino, which is based on Tagalog, and English). He mastered Spanish quickly, one of the few *indios* to gain such proficiency; in the *Fili*, the Spanish priests deliberately suppress the teaching of their tongue to maintain a near monopoly on European knowledge. At twenty, Rizal went to Europe for the most important decade of his life. His polyglot talents and general brilliance were readily apparent, and he joined forces with a group of hispanophone Philippine intellectuals that included López Jaena. In Spain, from 1889 to 1895, the group produced *La solidaridad*, a newspaper that sought to reform the way the metropolis governed the faraway archipelago. In 1887, Rizal published the *Noli* and, in 1891, the *Fili*, the second and third novels ever written by anyone from the Philippines.[4] The *Fili* in particular, with the space it gives to all sides of the pro- and anticolonial debate, landed him in trouble with Spanish authorities, whose nerves and resources were already frayed by their increasingly unsuccessful efforts at squashing successive rebellions in Cuba.[5] Rizal returned to the Philippines in 1892 and was put under house arrest for four years, toward the end of which an armed revolution, led by an organization called the Katipunan, broke out. Inspired by the *Fili*, the Katipunan named Rizal their president in absentia and used his name as their "secret password" (Rafael, *Promise* 64). Rizal, however, abjured any connection with the independence movement and even signed up to join, as a physician, a military expedition being outfitted to repress the Cuban revolutionary forces. None of this was enough to save him. Although in July 1896 he was allowed to leave house arrest and make his way toward Cuba via Spain, the moment he landed in Barcelona in October he was imprisoned. The next day he was sent back to the Philippines to await trial there.[6] And in Manila, on 30 December 1896, a firing squad executed Rizal for subversion.

A few anomalies stand out in this story. No more than a clutch of people in the Philippines ever spoke Spanish. Estimates of the 1890s colonial population range between twelve and fifteen thousand Spaniards in an archipelago with some seven million indigenous inhabitants. Few *indios* had the opportunity to learn the language; a recent estimate is that under 1% of the population could read it when Rizal was writing (Rafael, *Promise* 36).[7] Rizal produced in the *Fili* a novel so provocative on the question of anticolonialism that it would lead to his execution, yet it was inaccessible to the vast majority of those whom it inspired. Moreover, he chose a Western genre, the novel, to convey his thoughts, and he did so when no autochthonous novel tradition existed. This adoption of foreign forms amounts to a gesture quite different from, say, writing on colonial issues in his native Tagalog in literary genres indigenous to the Philippines, perhaps even attempting to do so in the pre-Magellanic local script *baybayin*.[8] Unusually for any tradition, the two novels by Rizal are considered both the start and summit of a national literature, even though the dearth of Spanish speakers then and now means that very few in the islands have ever read his novels in their language of composition.

Rizal has long since been converted into the leading national hero despite how few have read his novels in the original Spanish, despite his articulate rejection of the independence movement, and despite the fact that Simoun, his radical protagonist, dies at the end of the *Fili* in apparently just punishment for the errors of his revolutionary ways.

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Rizal himself, when sentenced to death by Spanish authorities, had already enlisted of his own free will, as noted above, to serve as a doctor in the Spanish military during its ongoing suppression of anticolonial forces in Cuba.[9] And yet this same antirevolutionary, European-educated, Spanish-writing individual was marked as an *indio* in his life and identified with the American *indios* who had fought against their conquest. As Blanco observes, "[T]he name of Rizal's group of friends in Europe, 'los indios bravos' ['the fierce Indians'], hearkened to the Native American Lakota and Cheyenne peoples, led by Sitting Bull, who defeated General George Custer at Little Big Horn" ("Patterns" 21). In his literary and biological corpus, Rizal continually falls outside traditional binaries: his voice is pro- and anticolonial, hegemonic and subaltern. The *Fili*, in short, is the product of an *indio* inspired in Europe and by the Americas to focus a uniquely hybrid gaze on his distant compatriots and the colonial elite that ruled them. The novel entertains displacements and deterritorializations of unending complexity as the Philippines are transplanted and transformed only to return, perhaps rhizomatically, to themselves. This movement of there and back again never settles into either here or there, this or that; and the ever-deferred signifieds of the *Fili* that frustrate many readers amply represent the inability of the protonation in question ever to be anchored in itself.

The complexity of colonized elites' attempts to write new states in imposed tongues is hardly a parochial concern. Nonetheless, the canonization of Rizal in the archipelago as national author and national martyr has reinforced a local view of his importance. Successive federal governments have made this clear with such statutes as Republic Act No. 1425, enacted in 1956 and commonly referred to as the "Rizal Law." It opens as follows:

> WHEREAS, today, more than any other period of our history, there is a need for a re-dedication to the ideals of freedom and nationalism for which our heroes lived and died; WHEREAS, it is meet that in honoring them, particularly the national hero and patriot, Jose Rizal, we remember with special fondness and devotion their lives and works that have shaped the national character; WHEREAS, the life, works, and writings of Jose Rizal, particularly his novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, are a constant and inspiring source of patriotisim with which the minds of the youth, especially during their formative and decisive years in school, should be suffused . . . [b]e it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled: Section 1. Courses on the life, works, and writings of Jose Rizal, particularly his novel [sic] *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, shall be included in the curricula of all schools, colleges and universities, public or private. . . .[10]

The Rizal Law remains in effect. All high school students are supposed to be assigned versions of the *Noli* in their junior year and the *Fili* in their senior year. Other state sanctionings of the novelist abound. Every December is officially Rizal Month; every 30 December, the day of his death, is a national holiday known as Rizal Day. And the primary urban park in Manila, site of the execution, is offically called Rizal Park and features an obelisk above the novelist's remains.

Although the *Noli* and the *Fili* are mentioned in the same breath whenever Rizal is formally sanctified, the first novel has always received more popular and scholarly attention. Its episodic plot is not directly related to most of the events in the *Fili*, its putative sequel. Amid a broad diversity of characters and locales, the *Noli* privileges the story of Crisóstomo Ibarra, a young man who in the opening pages returns to the Philippines from studies abroad. There he finds out that his father has died in jail as a result of dark forces that include local priests and politicians. These same forces now turn their enmity toward Ibarra as he tries to build a school for his compatriots and as he renews his affections for his child-

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hood sweetheart, the angelic María Clara. While the powerful conspirators keep up their overt and covert attacks, Ibarra forms an alliance with a mysterious man named Elías. By the end of the novel, the dark forces have won: as Ibarra and Elías flee, one of them (it is not clear which) dies, and María Clara is condemned to a tragic life in a nunnery. This summary is far more linear than the novel, an itinerant text that features a panoply of minor characters and subplots that have been endlessly extracted and transposed into texts that stand alone like poems, songs, paintings, and television shows.

Despite the grim ending, the *Noli* is lighter and more accessible than the *Fili*. The romantic story line involving María Clara has received innumerable re-creations in the Philippines in all genres. The *Fili* is much more bitter and overtly politicized, and its dark criticisms are less easily sidestepped. It is a harder read, and its details are almost certainly less familiar to the public and academics alike, whether reproduced in written texts or audiovisual media. Nonetheless, the *Fili* stands with the *Noli* as one of the only two indisputably canonized novels of Filipino literature in any language, Western or indigenous. The popular public historian Ambeth Ocampo effectively underlined the national significance of the novels in a February 2008 editorial in a major Manila newspaper bemoaning the lack of compliance with the Rizal Law: "Would it help if the 'Noli' and 'Fili' were available as graphic novels or short YouTube video clips? With the continuing decline in English and the nearly extinct reading proficiency in Spanish, how can we make Rizal's novels better known, better read?" ("Rizal Law"). Evident in these reflections is the will even now, over a century since Rizal's death and over a half-century since the Philippines gained independence, to employ the author in the service of constructing the nation. Literary analysis of his novels seems to be unimportant. And yet, although any number of authors from colonized lands in Africa and Asia have been invoked in this fashion, Rizal merits attention as one of the first truly globalized authors of the modern era.

The *Fili* opens with what is literally and metaphorically, as its narrator metatextually observes, a "nave del Estado" ("ship of State") that is "genuinamente filipino" ("genuinely Filipino" [31]). It sails forward with a population representative of the islands and distributed vertically according to the local sociopolitical hierarchy: *indios*, Chinese, and mestizos[11] are stuffed belowdecks among the cargo while friars and secular Spanish elites sit in comfortable chairs on deck, "vestidos á la europea" ("dressed in the European fashion") and protected from the sun by a canopy (32). As the focus sharpens on the privileged travelers, a strange jeweler brusquely interrupts their discussion about how the colonial government should proceed with a waterway project. Identified by the narrator as Simoun, the jeweler speaks with "un acento raro, mezcla de inglés y americano del Sur" ("a strange accent, a mix of English and of South American" [36]). When he proposes that the solution to the argument at hand is the construction of an immense canal, the leading journalist of the colony responds, "¡Es un plan yankee! Observó Ben Zayb que quería agradar á Simoun. —El joyero había estado mucho tiempo en la América del Norte" ("'It is a Yankee plan!' observed Ben Zayb, who wanted to please Simoun. The jeweler had spent a long time in North America" [37]). From his first appearance, Simoun is unmarked in terms of Philippine or foreign national identity. Although the conversation is conducted in Spanish, the local imperial language, the jeweler speaks not in Castilian (the hegemonic dialect of Madrid) but with an accent identified confusingly as both English and South American. Furthermore, the plan that he suggests, though characterized as "yankee" (a word spelled in English rather than Spanish ["yanqui"] throughout the *Fili*) by the *peninsular* Ben Zayb, associates Simoun not with the North America he

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mentions (a term that here exclusively signifies the United States) but with Panama, where French construction of the world's famous canal was a global news story of the 1880s.[12] Simoun thus enters the novel not as a *filipino* (in any sense of that word) but as an *americano* as that word is used in Latin America—that is, as someone from the Americas rather than the United States. He will be revealed eventually to be a fourth-generation *filipino* (i.e., a Creole) as well as a revolutionary, making his hybrid American identity a pivotal metaphoric displacement of the islands themselves.

Rizal further complicates that American identity in successive passages in the novel's opening chapter. The civil elite Don Custodio is scandalized by the canal proposal because the plan would require many conscripted *indio* laborers' deaths, and so he "volvió la cara para ver si cerca había algun indio que les pudiese oir" ("turned his face to see if there was any Indian near who could hear them" [38]). The repeated use of *indio* is rooted in Columbus's misapprehension that the islands he came upon in 1492 were in Asia, and it requires a tremendous act of imagination *not* to map a furtive conversation among friars and secular Spanish colonial elites about *indios* and forced labor onto the engrained pattern of such phenomena throughout the history of Latin America. Don Custodio notes the relation by pointing out that Simoun, "como es americano, se cree sinduda que estamos tratando con los Pieles Rojas" ("since he is American, believes without doubt that we are dealing here with the redskins" [40]). Further strengthening Simoun's identification with the New World, Don Custodio sneeringly refers to him as "¡Un mulato americano!" ("An American mulatto"), adding that he is an "Americano, se lo digo á usted. . . . S. E. me lo ha contado; es un joyero que él conoció en la Habana" ("American, I'm telling you. . . . The colonial governor-general has told me so; he is a jeweler that he met in Havana" [39–40]). Here as well, Simoun appears to be American in a diverse, hemispheric sense. The Philippines whose cause he secretly champions do not seem embodied in him but in intermingling lands on the other side of the world.

The American allusions at play are not internally consistent. Simoun as a dialogic self bears out Mikhail Bakhtin's theory that the protagonist of a novel exists in a "zone of contact with an inconclusive present (and consequently with the future) that creates the necessity of this incongruity of a man with himself. . . . An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories" (37). At first, Simoun appears to be an American oppressor of *indios*, of the "redskins." Don Custodio perceives him as a wildly procolonial figure entirely willing to sacrifice local laborers. That makes it strange for him to jeer at Simoun as an American mulatto, a person of mixed white-black parentage and as such a member of a group suffering sustained repression in the United States in the historical era of the *Fili*. "Redskins" and mulattoes would have shared subaltern status in the Americas, albeit in different ways. Leon Ma. Guerrero, Rizal's principal English translator (his version of the *Fili* is the one most Philippine readers have known), inadvertently recognizes this when he unfortunately translates *indio* in this opening chapter and elsewhere as "nigger" (9).[13] How can Simoun be an oppressor of *indios*, or "redskins," and at the same time a scorned mulatto?

Put another way, in the opening scene of the *Fili*, Simoun is marked as an outsider in the gaze of *peninsulares*, but of what kind? He is a hemispheric American presence who, in the name of local progress, proposes the subjection of the *indios*, not their liberation. He appears willing to extend the oppressions of the New World to the Philippines—López Jaena also saw the Philippines, albeit positively, as part of that New World—by sacrificing indigenous laborers in a development plan while maintaining his secret ties to the colonial governor-general. This mapping of

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Spanish and "yankee" hegemony onto Asian islands, however, turns out to be a feint, since, in the jagged plot of the *Fili*, Simoun eventually confesses that his plan all along has been to aggravate colonial conditions so much that the oppressed locals will rise in revolutionary fervor and smash the regime. He also admits to being Crisóstomo Ibarra, the creole hero of the *Noli*, the novel whose events had taken place thirteen years previously; exiled and radicalized, he has returned, resurrected, under a new name. That "Simoun" turns out to be a pseudonym for a revolutionary determined to unify diverse peoples and overthrow Spanish colonial rule suggests strongly that he is meant to evoke Simón Bolívar, who had liberated South American lands several generations earlier.[14] Although Bolívar succeeded militarily, his dream of a unified nation of former Spanish colonies remained, like Simoun's ambition, out of reach. Onomastically, Rizal's protagonist carries with him to the Philippines echoes of Bolívar's dreams and failures alongside Simoun's other American associations: Yankee canals, South American and English accents, *indio* conscripts, redskins and mulattoes, and Havana connections. None of these correspond directly to the imagining of a Philippine national identity. The Philippines as a national project appear to be alienated from themselves, transplanted in the *Fili* not only into the historical scenes of 1880s Spain (as suggested by Anderson) but also, through the novel's array of mixed allusions and evocations, into the colonial and anticolonial dynamics that have marked the Western Hemisphere since Columbus.[15]

These relations to the New World remain understudied. Myriad transpacific analyses that set Spanish-language Filipino literature alongside its Latin American counterparts are still to be formulated. Yet the determination of nineteenth-century literati throughout the Western Hemisphere to forge national identities by producing fiction and poetry is relevant to Rizal's oeuvre and vice versa, as is the case of José Martí, the Cuban revolutionary whose landmark essay "Nuestra América" ("Our America") was published the same year as the *Fili*. This analogy between Rizal and Martí is often noted but rarely developed.[16] Martí died at Spanish hands just seventeen months before his fellow essayist and poet in the Philippines. Probably the only exposure to Philippine literature that most Western scholars have is Anderson's analysis in *Imagined Communities* of the opening scene in the *Noli* as an example of how nations are conceived. As Anderson implies, the Philippines are central to any discussion not only of nationalism but also of the nexus of postcolonialism and modernity. The questions raised by a focus on Rizal are of potentially planetary application. How does Filipino literature in Spanish compare to that of other Asian traditions in Western idioms, such as Indian literature in English or Vietnamese literature in French? How does it force a reframing of African literatures, like Angolan or Mozambican fiction in Portuguese, written in countries farther from the Philippines than India and Vietnam but in languages closer to Spanish than are English and French? These inquiries remain to be undertaken. Today, one in every ten Filipinos lives and works abroad. What does it mean for one of the most globalized nations in the world, both historically and currently, to be consistently marginalized in the most prominent academic debates on globalization?

One subset of these questions involves the unrecognized extension of Spanish as a literary language. The Philippines are not the only Asian lands once held by Spain. In the western Pacific, these include Guam, Palau, the Marshall Islands, the Mariana Islands, Micronesia, and even a bit of Taiwan. Yet Hispanists have been divided traditionally into two categories, peninsularists (i.e., Iberian specialists) and Latin Americanists. This binarism has resulted in lack of awareness not only of Asian but also of African literature in Spanish—the nation of Equatorial Guinea

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has an increasingly vibrant tradition in that respect—and of literature in Spanish and Spanglish across the United States, Canada, Sweden, Australia, and elsewhere. Notwithstanding such phenomena, Spanish is never acknowledged, even by specialists in Spanish departments, as a globalized literary language the way English, French, and Portuguese are. What questions unique to the postcolonial Spanish landscape in Asia and Africa are in turn ignored, because of the language barrier, by scholars of parallel anglophone, francophone and lusophone traditions? Must any universalizing claim of postcolonial studies consider the peculiarities of the Spanish case? These include, for instance, the overnight transition of an Asian archipelago from Spanish to United States control and the belated decolonization of Equatorial Guinea in 1968 under not a democratic regime like Great Britain or France nor a collapsed dictatorship like Portugal but an ongoing European autocracy, that of Francisco Franco. Where does Philippine fiction in Spanish, the *Fili* in particular, fit in discussions on the planetary panorama of marginalized literatures produced in major tongues? Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that "the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16). This seems to be the case in the itinerant American body of Simoun. Does it hold for his projections of Asia as well?

Simoun makes a habit of orientalizing, notably in the Mr. Leeds episode, which stretches over parts of four chapters at the heart of the novel. This sequence begins amid a reunion of nearly all the same characters (and their corresponding social sectors) who relaxed together above deck on the ship of state in the novel's opening passage: friars representing the ecclesiastical elite; Don Custodio, of the secular upper class; Ben Zayb, of print capitalism fame; and Simoun. The subject arises of the ongoing fair of Kiapò at which "Mr. Leeds, un americano" is exhibiting the head of an alleged sphinx (192). Simoun urges the others to see this curiosity, but as they go toward the carnival, he mysteriously disappears. This causes one friar to harrumph about the "americano" and Zayb adds that that americano is an "amigo" ("friend") of Mr. Leeds (199–200). A fascinating conflation of identities is thus presented here, for whereas Leeds seems at first to be from the United States—the use of "Mr." rather than "Sr." (short for "Señor") marks him as an americano from North rather than South America—he next appears to be a double for Simoun, likewise dubbed an americano. That they are friends and that one disappears just before the other appears suggests metonymically that they are the same character, that Leeds in effect incarnates the American presence of the suddenly vanished Simoun. Indeed, Leeds's national identity turns out to be just as hemispheric as Simoun's: he is introduced as "un verdadero yankee" ("a true Yankee") who "[h]ablaba bien el castellano por haber estado mucho años en América del Sur" ("spoke Castilian well for having spent many years in South America" [201]). Like Simoun, this "yankee" is a hybrid phenomenon with associations up and down the Western Hemisphere. In literary terms, therefore, Leeds/Simoun will produce a remarkably orientalized staging for colonial consumption from a rhizomatic American space of enunciation.

This staging involves a private performance of the purported sphinx head for the assembled church and civil elites of the colony. Leeds recounts to them that one day, while visiting an Egyptian pyramid, he came upon a mysterious sarcophagus that contained only a box with some ashes in it and a piece of papyrus (203). On his pronouncing a word on the papyrus, the ashes metamorphosed into a mummified talking head (the "sphinx") that told a fantastic tale: how it was wronged in the ancient Middle East by a conspiracy of political and religious usurpers and how one of the priests involved lusted hypocritically after the

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virgin the sphinx desired. In front of the friars and Don Custodio and Ben Zayb, Leeds conjures forth the talking head and it repeats this tale, which bears an unmistakable resemblance to Simoun's own complaints against Spanish colonial rule and his own biography. In other words, Leeds, a double for the absent Simoun, projects (presumably through ventriloquism) Simoun's litany of anticolonial criticisms through an allegory relayed by another alter ego, the sphinx. Father Salví, a friar who desires the virgin Simoun loves, recognizes himself in the story and blanches in terror as the sphinx shouts, "¡Asesino, calumniador, sacrílego! . . . te acuso, asesino, asesino, asesino!" ("Assassin, liar, committer of sacrilege! . . . I accuse you, assassin, assassin, assassin!" [208]). This "americano" (a three-headed entity comprising Simoun, Leeds, and the sphinx) presents a stark challenge to hegemonic forces. Yet by the time the shaken colonial elites gather themselves and prohibit further displays of the sphinx, "ya Mr Leeds había desaparecido llevándose á Hong Kong su secreto" ("already Mr. Leeds had disappeared carrying his secret with him to Hong Kong" [209]). Just a few pages later, Simoun reappears at the Kiapò fair "despidiéndose de un estrangero y hablando ambos en inglés" ("saying goodbye to a foreigner, both of them talking in English"), and a passerby overhears the words "Hong Kong" (215). Although Leeds is not named here or ever again in the novel, the foreigner is surely he,[17] and the import of the whole episode seems clear: anticolonial criticism, unable to be voiced directly under the Spanish regime, has been issued successfully through the sphinx by a conjoined Leeds-Simoun figure of broad but unsettled American identity.

The sphinx's geocultural projections emerge literally on a Philippine stage but symbolically from a theater on the other side of the world. The orientalizing moments of the *Fili* are articulated not from Asia or Europe but from the Americas, and the "americano" gaze is fixed on a stereotyped Orient associated not with Southeast Asia but with the Middle East.[18] This gaze is produced for a colonial elite that aspires to dress itself in all ways, as the first chapter suggests, "á la europea" ("in the European fashion" [32]). Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* is concerned with the complex imbrications of power in European discourses on the Middle East, but Rizal's case offers the additional intricacies of an orientalism mediated by a Southeast Asian nationalist who voices a contradictory subalternity from a variably Pan-American vantage. Leeds's tale of the pyramid, sarcophagus, and sphinx is neither voiced from nor directed at the Philippines per se, since the Philippines are essentially absent here despite the Manila location of the Kiapò fair. Thus, elsewhere in the novel, when Simoun is selling jewels to provincial colonial elites to raise money secretly for the revolution, he palms them off as "collares de Cleopatra, legítimos y verdaderos, hallados en las pirámides, anillos de senadores y caballeros romanos encontrados en las ruinas de Cartago" ("Cleopatra's necklaces, legitimate and authentic, found in the pyramids, and rings once owned by Roman senators and gentlemen, discovered in the ruins of Carthage" [112–13]). And when he reveals another collection of jewels, they appear to the ruling class to be from "las *Mil y una noches*, los sueños de las fantasías orientales" ("*A Thousand and One Nights*, the dreams of oriental fantasies" [114]). Such associations of Simoun with an imaginary and typecast but powerful Orient come to a head when he, prepared to detonate a bomb at a party attended by the entire colonial elite, appears "como el genio de las *Mil y una noches* que sale del seno del mar: adquiría proporciones gigantescas, tocaba el cielo con la cabeza, hacía estallar la casa y sacudia toda la ciudad con un movimiento de sus espaldas" ("like the genie of *A Thousand and One Nights* who emerges from the womb of the sea: he acquired gigantic proportions, touched the sky

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with his head, blew up the house, and shook all the city with a movement of his back" [353]). In short, Simoun, the secret *filipino* (but not *indio*) revolutionary, is intent on destroying the colonial ruling class, but to do so he assumes the persona of an *americano* (in a hemispheric sense) who associates himself with an Orient of sphinxes and genies to exert nefarious power over his Europhile enemies.

In this complicated global interplay of metaphoric agencies, what space is carved out for the Philippines as a national project? What imagined communities are implicitly constructed? There are no clear answers. When Simoun, after one of his several sustained disappearances, reenters the novel for the last time, Ben Zayb immediately marks him again as a "yankee" even though at no point does his biography place him in the United States (345). On the contrary, the last pages of the *Fili* again reference his past in Cuba (398). Draped in slippery American semiotics while clandestinely organizing a doomed revolution in the Philippines—for which he raises funds by promoting orientalist fantasies—Simoun is both Philippine and not, both Asian and American, paradoxically the foundational voice of a nascent national identity even as the author kills him off in the final chapter. Simoun is dying at the end of the *Fili* because he was wounded while leading a guerrilla uprising and subsequently decided to commit suicide rather than be captured by the approaching colonial authorities. He kills himself in the house of an *indio* priest—another paradoxical figure—to whom Rizal gives the final moral of the novel: violent means cannot justify anticolonial ends, no matter how atrocious Spanish rule might be. Rizal thus rejects Simoun's revolution (and by extension the American independence movements his Bolivarian name evokes), just as in real life he would eschew a few years later the independence movement of the Katipunan. This, of course, would not save him either. In a case of life imitating art, Rizal like Simoun would die for his associations with anticolonialism. And this would take place despite his decision to participate in the same Cuban war as his fictional protagonist.

In the *Fili*, Asia seems to be absent. The Orient is present but only in the *americano* persona of Simoun/Leeds.[19] Europe is absent in geographic terms—the entire novel takes place in Manila and its environs—but is manifestly and allegorically present, through what Anderson aptly terms "space-time shifts," among the politics and preferences of the *peninsulares* and *filipinos* who form the colonial ruling class (*Under Three Flags* 112). Amid those hegemonic forces, the revolutionary Simoun is not a particular subaltern cause or individual with a fixed identity but a protean array of associations in which he appears as both antihero and hero, *americano* and *filipino*, orientalist and native. This foundational novel of the Philippines, as Bakhtin notes of the genre in general, "is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality" (39). The flux that Bakhtin signals seems appropriate to the globalized modernity of José Rizal, the national hero without a nation who died for patriotic books his patria could not read. After all, as Vicente Rafael has written, Rizal's own "position is split and unstable . . . eccentric to any particular identity and at a remove from any one position" (*Promise* 54).

In the time of Rizal and Simoun, the Philippine nation was not imagined as such. The seeming contradictions of the man and his protagonist are unusually honest: they mirror those of history. As Alma Jill Dizon suggests, "Rizal's novels exist as invented memory, helping to shape a sense of national identity that is itself, like any identity, shifting and tenuous yet at the same time powerful" (423). At the end of the day, the *Fili* depicts not a Philippines and an Asia evacuated of

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themselves but an irreducible heterogeneity in which all geopolitical imaginations are inseparable from each other, fused and opposed and always slipping away the moment they approach definition. Ever since Western presences appeared in the Pacific from the Americas, the identities of all the lands involved became globalized. The authorship of a Philippine nation by Rizal and Simoun would be shared by many others after them, but the paradoxes the writer and his protagonist represent, honest to the hybridity of history, were then as now rightfully unresolved.

Notes

All translations are mine. Readers of Spanish will note irregular orthographic features in the original quotations; these are all reproduced verbatim from source texts.

1. See also Rafael, *Promise* 39.

2. Andrés Bonifacio, the leader of the 1896 revolution against Spain, proposed that the name of the Philippines "fuera sustituido por otro más autóctono, que no recordase ni a un país ni a una dinastía extranjera . . . pero no resultaba fácil que este nombre fuera aceptado al ser vocablo tagalo, y no ser los tagalos sino una parte del pueblo filipino, y no precisamente la más numerosa" ("be substituted for a more indigenous name that did not recall either a foreign country or dynasty . . . but it was not easy for this name to be accepted, because it was a Tagalog term, and the Tagalogs were but a part of the Philippine people and not even the most numerous" [Ortiz Armengol 10]).

3. Technically, Spain sold the archipelago at that point to the United States for $20 million.

4. The first was *Ninay* by Pedro A. Paterno, published in Madrid in 1885. *Ninay* therefore is also the first Asian novel in Spanish. For an analysis of nineteenth-century novels in the Philippines written by *peninsulares*, see Hernandez Chung.

5. See Anderson's *Under Three Flags* for extensive historical contextualization that juxtaposes and interrelates events in the Philippines with those in Cuba before and after Rizal's death. *Filibusterismo*, effectively meaning "subversion" in Rizal's novel, came from Dutch but in the mid-nineteenth-century was primarily associated with Cuba and the attempts by individuals in the United States to overthrow Spanish power on that island by military means. See Lazo for a discussion (in English) of the Cuban context that immediately preceded Rizal. Cuba was more important economically to the Spanish Empire than were the Philippines; Mariñas estimates that the American colony's exports were approximately six times greater than those of the Asian possession (32).

6. See Anderson's *Under Three Flags* for a detailed account of this sequence of events.

7. In *Under Three Flags*, Anderson writes that Spanish was "understood by less than 5 percent of the Philippine population" (5). In his 1998 *Spectre of Comparisons* (the title is a mistranslation from a phrase in the *Noli*), he suggests that "[i]n the 1890s barely 3 per cent of the population knew 'Castilian'" (227). Whatever the true figure, the general point is the same: almost no one in the Philippines could understand the language in which Rizal chose to write.

8. According to Mojares, in 1891 Rizal attempted "writing his third novel in Tagalog" but was "unable to complete the work" (145). Only fragments of that novel remain, leaving the *Noli* and the *Fili*, despite their having been written in Spanish, "to date the most important literary works produced by a Filipino writer, animating Filipino consciousness to this day, setting standards no Filipino writer can ignore" (140–41). The surviving sections of the third novel were published by Ambeth Ocampo as *Makamisa: The Search for Rizal's Third Novel*.

9. Rizal visited the Americas only once, when he made a brief journey across the United States in 1888. His second trip would have been with the Spanish military to Cuba.

10. Taking into account the economic pressures on individuals in the Philippines and the widespread illiteracy in Spanish, the Rizal Law includes the following clauses: "It shall be obligatory on all schools, colleges and universities to keep in their libraries an adequate number of copies of the original and unexpurgated editions of the *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, as well as of Rizal's other works and biography. . . . The Board of National Education shall cause the translation of the *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, as well as other writings of Jose Rizal into English, Tagalog, and the principal Philippine dialects; cause them to be printed in cheap, popular editions; and cause them to be distributed, free of charge, to persons desiring to read them."

11. *Mestizo* is a Spanish word borrowed from the New World colonies that designates individuals of mixed ancestry. In the Philippines, *mestizo* could signal *indio*-Chinese parentage as well as *indio-filipino* (Creole).

12. The Suez Canal, greatly quickening the voyage between Spain and the Philippines, had opened in 1869. The disastrous French effort in Panama was abandoned in 1889, between the publication of the *Noli* and of the *Fili*. Construction of the canal as a "yankee" plan of the United States would not commence until 1904.

13. Anderson extensively critiques Guerrero's bowdlerization of the *Noli* in chapter 11 of *The Spectre of Comparisons*. Although Guerrero's 1960s translations of Rizal's novels dominated the market for nearly half a century, as has his corresponding *First Filipino: A Biography of José*

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Rizal, more recent translations now compete for space and readership: Ma. Soledad Lacson-Locsin's translations into English of the *Noli* and the *Fili* in 1996 and 1997; Virgilio S. Almario's translations of both novels into Filipino in 1998; and Harold Augenbraum's translation of the *Noli* into English for Penguin Classics in 2006. Lacson-Locsin, whose versions seem to be increasingly disseminated, was born in the Philippines when they were a United States colony but into a family that still spoke Spanish as a primary language. Late in her life, she was asked to undertake the translations because of her childhood proximity to the Spanish of Rizal's era. Her introduction to the *Fili* reads in part, "The *Fili* is just another story to tell, but in its intensity lie the thoughts and the soul of a people, their hopes and their future, the sweep and shape of their destiny, forming part of the parcel of a national heritage."

14. Joaquín argues compellingly that Simoun/Simón was not meant to represent a revolution to come so much as to echo those that had taken place decades earlier in the New World possessions of Spain: "During Rizal's youth, it looked as if what had happened in America would happen in the Philippines" (67). This makes particular sense given López Jaena's and Blanco's suggestions that the Philippines were Latin American for centuries in that they were ruled through Mexico. The independence of the Mexican state did occur in the age of Bolívar but that Simón was not instrumental to it. Blanco develops Joaquín's argument further in "Bastards" (101).

15. López Jaena issued wildly enthusiastic discourses on the subject of Columbus, even comparing him to Jesus ("Redención" 108–09), implying that 1492 marked the splendid start of European explorations in the Americas to which the Philippines were gratefully heir.

16. An excellent exception is Blanco's "Bastards."

17. The language overheard is not unequivocally English; the narrator hastily notes that for the passerby "todo idioma hablado en Filipinas por los europeos, que no sea español, tiene que ser inglés" ("every language spoken in the Philippines by Europeans, if it were not Spanish, had to be English" [215]). Nonetheless, the suggestion remains that the unnamed "estrangero" (the word translates as both "foreigner" and "stranger") is Leeds and that the language is English.

18. This Orient is a mishmash of vague associations; the talking head, for instance, though called a "sphinx," does not bear much resemblance to the mythological creature of that name.

19. There is a minor Chinese character in the *Fili* who is represented in somewhat stereotypical terms, but this appears to be not so much an orientalizing gesture as a weak, racialized attempt to realistically depict an ethnic group in the islands. Perhaps significantly, however, the Leeds-sphinx episode commences in a chapter entitled "Las tribulaciones de un chino" ("The Tribulations of a Chinese"). Rizal himself was of partially Chinese descent, which complicates consideration of this question.

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