

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Colonial Schadenfreude: Mocking Europeans in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

Jorge Bayona*

El Colegio de México, Mexico

*Corresponding author. Email: jbayona@colmex.mx

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Abstract

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) attracted more than passing interest in the pages of *El Renacimiento* in the Philippines and *Bintang Hindia* in the Dutch East Indies. Both publications featured pieces with editorializing tones that indulged in a significant degree of delight at the spectacle of Russian defeats and humiliations at the hands of the Japanese. This article engages in a close reading of this coverage to insert these instances of colonial schadenfreude into the broader trajectories of shaping communities of readers and nationalist awakenings in both colonies. Filipino nationalists in *El Renacimiento* dropped clear clues likening Russian aggression against Japan, an archipelagic Asian nation like the Philippines, to that which Filipinos experienced under the Americans, thus engaging in a symbolic displacement of that international event into their own historical present. Mocking Russians was part of a nationalist reading of the war that allowed for delight in the spectacle of White humiliation and the prospects of Japanese aid in anti-colonial struggle. The way the Russo-Japanese War was commented on by *Bintang Hindia* less than ten years before the ‘national awakening’ period was remarkably similar to the reporting in *El Renacimiento*. This isomorphism between two different historical contexts allows us to examine the role that mockery of Europeans played in forming a community of readers, nationalism, and the gradual undermining of the ideas of White supremacy on which colonialism was predicated.

Keywords: Philippines; Indonesia; Russo-Japanese War; nationalism; colonialism

Introduction

“A major Russian newspaper, ‘Moskowskaia [Moskovskii] Viedomost’ presents the basic conditions that, in their view, Russia should insist upon when the time to make peace with Japan arrives. What is remarkable about this project, besides its strong resemblance to the case of the hunters who decide how to split the hunt before using their shotguns, is that censorship did not stop its publication [...] and considering the circumstances under which Russia had to draw its sword, the project loses much of its extravagance.”

El Renacimiento/Muling Pagsilang, August 1904

“When Kuropatkin departed for East Asia, people firmly believed that he alone was the most capable Russian general and that he alone would prove Russia’s greatness and Japan’s insignificance. As soon as Kuropatkin arrived in Manchuria—Russian newspapers claimed—Japan would surely surrender. Kuropatkin also planned to impose peace in Tokyo itself. “Insolence, nonsense!” Much like hunters who sell the skin of the tiger before they catch the beast.”

Bintang Hindia, #14-#15, June-July 1904

The two passages above appeared in periodicals of the Philippines and Dutch East Indies a few months after the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War, when Russian forces had already suffered major setbacks on land and sea at the hands of the Japanese military. Fascinatingly, they both independently portrayed the Russians as foolish hunters who made premature decisions regarding their spoils before securing them. The *El Renacimiento* article proceeded to painstakingly describe the peace terms that Russia planned to demand, including annexing the southern Japanese island of Kyushu and draconian reparations. Given the string of Russian defeats, these demands appeared unrealistic, if not ludicrous. The *Bintang Hindia* article pointed out that the “most capable” Russian general, Aleksey Kuropatkin, was defeated in two consecutive battles. The article concluded that although the Russian people thought they received a sweet treat with Kuropatkin, they instead received a mouthful of bitterness. Why did the spectacle of the Russian Empire’s humiliation by Japan elicit such evident delight among writers in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies? How was the discourse of delight about Russian military humiliations articulated? What does this tell us about the trajectory of the anti-colonial imagination and the construction of communities of readers in these countries?

This article seeks to intervene in the debates surrounding the impact of the Russo-Japanese War in Southeast Asia. In the wake of the centennial of the Russo-Japanese War, Gesa Westermann and Paul Rodell argued that contrary to expectation, the outcome of the war did not significantly impact Southeast Asians as a whole. Instead, the impact of the Russo-Japanese War was limited to colonies with active nationalist movements, such as the Philippines or Vietnam (Rodell 2005; 2007; Westermann 2007). A broad contrast is presented between places like the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies, inasmuch as the Filipino population had already developed modern nationalist sentiments (clearly articulated during two major anti-colonial wars against Spain and the United States) and could imagine Japan as a potential ally for continued anti-colonial struggle. The Dutch East Indies appeared to feature a more quiescent native population whose native elites, having not yet developed modern, pan-archipelagic nationalism, must have observed the war with only detached curiosity. Their conclusions, however, were drawn primarily from looking at the broad contours of the historical trajectories of these colonies before and after the war and inferring whether these trajectories were consistent with the Russo-Japanese War significantly impacting them. In this article, I take a different approach, engaging in a close reading of primary source material produced during the war. I argue that this is indeed a case of Benedict Anderson’s print capitalism in action, whereby the printed page addressed an imagined community (or community in the process of being imagined) and could shape its expectations of the international milieu (Anderson 2003: 37-46). Furthermore, as pointed out by Hagen, emotions factor into the community’s formation by inviting readers to feel a sense of fellowship around events such as tragedies or crimes (1997). The cases studied in this article clearly show writers guiding readers towards *schadenfreude* fueled by Russian defeat. The community is shaped by mockery emanating from shared feelings of scorn towards humiliated, incompetent Russians.

As a psychological phenomenon, *schadenfreude* is defined by van Dijk and Ouwerkerk as “that joyful feeling you may experience when someone else suffers a mishap, a setback, a downfall, a calamity, an adversity, or any other type of misfortune” (van Dijk and Ouwerkerk 2016a: 1). *Schadenfreude* can be motivated by two primary factors: the degree to which the victim is perceived to deserve such misfortune and the self-evaluation and self-threat experienced by the one experiencing *schadenfreude*. The logic behind the first factor is that when the one experiencing *schadenfreude* believes the victim deserves the misfortune that besets them—whether through negligence or active abuse—*schadenfreude* comes from witnessing justice in action. As to the second, van Dijk and Ouwerkerk argue that those exposed to chronic or acute threats to their self-evaluation or self-esteem are more likely to experience *schadenfreude* when they witness the misfortunes of others, especially when those others are perceived to be of higher status (van Dijk and Ouwerkerk 2016b: 134-37). As we will see, these conditions conformed to the colonised elites of the Philippines and Dutch East Indies. However, their *schadenfreude* towards the humiliating defeats experienced by the Russians was inflected by the colonial condition, which led them to engage in a symbolic displacement of the parties involved in the war, thus resignifying it as an allegory of their own colonization, and hence, manifesting colonial *schadenfreude*.

Such resignification of events from other parts of the world in general, and Asia in particular, is a phenomenon previously studied by Rebecca Karl for the case of China. She discusses how the artist

Wang Xiaonong wrote an opera that used the partition of Poland as a clear reference to the future fate of China if the country failed to reform and modernise to compete with European imperialism. Furthermore, she shows how elite Chinese intellectuals, like Liang Qichao, Ou Jujia, Lin Xie, and Tang Tiaoding, identified the Filipino war against American annexation as an authentically Asian anti-colonial resistance worthy of imitation (Karl 2002: 27-49, 83-115).¹ Of course, while Chinese nationalists were free to use their print culture to identify with partitioned Poles or imperialised Filipinos openly, the same conditions did not prevail in the Philippines or the Dutch East Indies. Limited freedom of the press and colonial surveillance precluded open calls to emulate the Japanese victories over the Russians by overthrowing their own Euro-American colonisers.² Such sentiments could develop more roundaboutly through colonial *schadenfreude*, which proved more difficult to control due to its displaced nature. It was clear to colonial authorities that this collective sentiment was not neutral; colonisers in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies realised that the Russians were indeed being written about and read as surrogates, which heightened enjoyment of their defeats at the hands of the ‘yellow race.’ Colonial *schadenfreude*, thus, became a liberating emotion: the enjoyment of (White) misfortune fostered an anti-colonial envisioning of a future of White humiliation at the hands of Asians like themselves.

As several scholars have argued, comparative history’s most significant contribution to scholarship lies in the insights that multiple cases can offer about the object of study that would remain unnoticed in a single case study (Go 2008; Mallon 1995; Matsuzaki 2019). Studied in isolation, the manifestation of colonial *schadenfreude* in the Philippines could appear as a natural and rather unremarkable result of already-circulating ideas of nationalism among newspaper editors addressing an already-imagined national community. In the Dutch East Indies, colonial *schadenfreude* could seem like an amusing and perhaps only slightly anomalous sentiment being voiced by a single magazine editor. Seen together, however, the valences that colonial *schadenfreude* had in the Philippines allow us to study its emergence in the Dutch East Indies through a different lens. Rather than simply an unexpected anomaly, we can see how mocking Russians contributed to forming a community of readers invited to collectively mock a European empire and its humiliation at Japanese hands. In other words, it became another strand in forming an Indonesian-imagined community. As John Sidel sagely points out in his recent work, denationalizing, transnationalizing, and internationalizing the study of phenomena provides a clearer and more nuanced picture of them (Sidel 2021).

El Renacimiento-Muling Pagsilang: Nationalism and Race in the Articulation of Colonial *Schadenfreude*

The Philippine case provides a more straightforward example of colonial *schadenfreude* and its relation to anti-colonial sentiments. As mentioned, the Philippines had fought two wars against Spanish and American colonization and founded the first republic in Asia. A strong nationalist movement continued to demand independence from the United States in the short term that would extend to an already-imagined nation with a clearly defined geobody.³ In the view of the elitist nationalist intellectuals and politicians in these early years of American occupation, this national community was to be addressed in Spanish, a lingua franca shared by the various multilingual elites throughout the archipelago.⁴ Between fresh memories of a vicious war of conquest and a sophisticated readership, it is unsurprising that colonial *schadenfreude* became a safer way to mock and criticise Americans and a parallel process emerged

¹For an eminently readable synthesis of the wider context of Asian subjugation to European colonialism in this time period, see Mishra 2012: 1-45.

²For press censorship in the Dutch East Indies, see Wiratraman (2014: 45-60). While the *drukpers-reglement* mandating press censorship of periodicals would continue to be in force until after the war (1906), by publishing in the Netherlands, *Bintang Hindia* could skirt a number of issues—but not free itself from scrutiny altogether. As to the Philippines, Gloria Cano argues that by using the Sedition and Criminal Libel Acts of 1901, the United States imposed tighter press censorship than the Spanish had (Cano 2011).

³Neither elements—population and territory—necessarily match each other perfectly; however, while Filipino nationalists envisioned the entirety of the Spanish Philippines as their future territory, they were much more ambivalent about the way in which the Muslim inhabitants of the southern island of Mindanao were to be included in the national community. See Bayona 2017.

⁴For the intricacies of languages in the Philippines under Spanish and American colonial rule, see Rafael 2005; 2016.

between admiring the Japanese and strengthening anti-colonial imagination. As we will see, colonial administrators and conservative sectors of Philippine society noticed these readings of contemporary events and criticised them sharply. Clear articulation of this in the Philippines provides insight into its manifestation in the Dutch East Indies.

The newspaper selected for this study is the famed Spanish-language daily *El Renacimiento-Muling Pagsilang*. Despite the Philippines finding itself under American imperial rule, the Spanish-language press—of which *El Renacimiento* was an essential part—blossomed during these early years. While several of the titles published under Spanish rule floundered, a lively roster of new Spanish-language publications emerged, running the gamut of the ideological spectrum, from nationalistic demands for immediate independence to support for American annexation or ultra-conservative nostalgia for Spanish rule.⁵ According to Gloria Cano, this vibrant Spanish-language press milieu was a continuation of very spirited political debates featured in the press under Spanish rule (Cano 2011: 398-407). Furthermore, as pointed out by Checa, the Spanish-language press under the Americans was an “expression of the Filipino people [...], not the tiny Spanish community” (Checa 2015: 25). As mentioned previously, publications reached literate elites throughout the archipelago because they were written in Spanish. In contrast, its Tagalog-language edition, *Muling Pagsilang*, created a more “intimate” reading space for those in the regions around the capital.

El Renacimiento was founded in 1901 as the press organ of the Filipino nationalists by future senator and president of the University of the Philippines Rafael Palma, his brother José Palma, and his father-in-law Martín Ocampo, a nationalist who had been exiled by the Spanish colonial administration under suspicion of being a member of the Katipunan and who had fought against the Americans in the early stages of the Philippine-American War. Its editor and highest-profile figure during the Russo-Japanese War was Fernando María Guerrero, a Filipino lawyer who embraced journalism from a young age and boasted impeccable nationalist credentials. He had written for the revolutionary newspaper *La Independencia*, which had upheld the cause of independence through the early part of the Philippine-American War, a cause he clearly carried over to his tenure at *El Renacimiento*. Teodoro Kalaw, a nationalist and future congressperson, contributed pieces and would eventually become the editor of the Spanish edition after the Russo-Japanese War. Lope K. Santos, a significant figure in the promotion of the use of Tagalog in Philippine society, ran *Muling Pagsilang*. It is important to note that this publication was not a direct translation of the Spanish edition; it often featured original content unavailable in *El Renacimiento*. The paper’s editorial staff also included Dominador Gómez, Isabelo de los Reyes, and Felipe Calderón, a veritable who’s who of Filipino nationalists (Cano 2011: 408-13; Checa Godoy 2015: 28-29; National Historical Institute 1989: v.2, 57-60, 205-206; Ronquillo 2002).

Gloria Cano has highlighted the staunch defence of the cause of Filipino independence in the face of American colonialism put forward by *El Renacimiento*’s staff, its series of unrelenting denunciations of the abuses of the US-supported Constabulary, and its support for retaining the Spanish language in the Philippines. Its influence, circulation (it claimed to have the highest in the country), and openly adversarial relationship with the colonial government (it provocatively added the tagline “*independent Filipino newspaper*” at a time when discussion of Filipino independence was strongly discouraged) led to suppression from American authorities. This suppression was effectuated by a series of libel lawsuits brought forth by proxies of the colonial administration, such as General Henry Tureman Allen and Lieutenant Lorenzo Ramos. The paper was eventually shut down following a libel lawsuit triggered by the famous editorial “Birds of prey” (1908),⁶ in which the authors suggested that Dean Worcester, an American colonial official, was using his office for personal financial gain. Checa notes that the colonial government was so fixated on shutting down this nationalist periodical that the colonial Supreme Court produced a 174-page volume documenting and justifying its suppression. Undeterred by this setback, its nationalist editors, Martín Ocampo and Fernando Guerrero, regrouped and founded subsequent nationalist publications, including *La Vanguardia*, *El Renacimiento Filipino*, and *Taliba* (Cano 2011: 418-27;

⁵For ways in which conservative, colonial nostalgia could be used as anticolonial resistance, see Van Acker 2022. For how the association of the Spanish-language with ultra-conservative, fascist worldviews eventually led to its functional extinction in the Philippines, see Rodao 2012.

⁶Perhaps a better translation for the original title (*Aves de Rapiña*) would be “Carrion Birds.”

Checa 2015: 28-29, 31-33; Kalaw 1984; Rosario-Braid and Tuazon 1999: 296). With its strong nationalist credentials and evident impact on public opinion, *El Renacimiento* is an ideal choice to focus on to understand the discourse on colonial *schadenfreude*.

If, as mentioned above, *schadenfreude* is conditioned by chronic and acute threats to self-evaluation, educated Filipinos had plenty to draw from at the turn of the century. Among the chronic threats to collective Filipino self-evaluation in living memory was the “tyranny of the friars,” which included the Spanish regular priests’ long-term refusal to acknowledge Filipino secular priests as their equals and the failure of the Filipino propaganda movement’s extended campaign in Spain to have Christian Filipinos recognised as equals of peninsular Spaniards with equal rights under Spanish law (Schumacher 1998; 2002; Sidel 2021: 19-71). Furthermore, acute threats to their self-evaluation continued to be impressed upon them. One example is the awareness that they had been crushed in the conventional phase of the Philippine-American War and that even guerrilla resistance weakened daily (Linn 2000; Tan 2002; Villegas 1999). Another is the extreme racial violence that the Americans inflicted upon Filipinos, where combatants were killed with little consideration of their humanity, their bodies gruesomely displayed for photographs. Prisoners were brutally tortured for information, and civilians were massacred (Balce 2016: 45-90; Brody 2010: 59-88; Kramer 2006: 87-158; McCormick 2009; San Buenaventura 1998; Rafael 2000: 76-102). These conditions rendered their subordinate position in the racial hierarchy imposed by foreign colonialists very salient.

The way the editorial staff at *El Renacimiento* covered the war made it easy for its nationalist readers to analogise between Russians and Americans, even before *El Renacimiento* explicitly did so several years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War. This coverage primed readers to delight in the calamities that befell the former as a presage of those the latter may experience.⁷ To begin with, Russians were portrayed as instigators of the war and vicious in their conduct—both traits that would make them clear parallels to American imperialists in the Philippines. The newspaper explained that Russia’s continued presence in northeastern China resulted from their intervention during the Yihetuan movement (Boxer rebellion) in 1901. Even though the allied powers had set a timeline for evacuation, Russia had used “a thousand pretexts and subterfuges” to delay their departure. The historical parallels were there for the readers of *El Renacimiento* to see. Much like the Russians had remained in China long after vanquishing the specific enemy they had come to deal with—the Boxers—the Americans had overstayed their welcome in the Philippines after defeating the Spanish, leading to the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902. Even after the official end of the war, discussion continued about the future status of the archipelago, an ambiguous situation similar to the situation in northeastern China, whose fate was still unknown (*El Renacimiento* 1904a).⁸ The fate of the Philippines and northeastern China lay in the hands of imperial aggressors.

Parallels were built by broaching the topic of excessive violence, with *El Renacimiento* emphasizing the vicious cruelty displayed by the Russians in their dealings with Asians, even neutral ones. Both Guerrero and Santos—in the Spanish and Tagalog editions, respectively—highlighted the “killings and outrages” perpetrated by Russian forces against civilians in Korea, which prompted them to rebel against their occupation and side with the Japanese (*El Renacimiento* 1904c; *Muling Pagsilang* 1904a). The trope of occupying Whites inflicting violence on Asians could not have been lost on Filipino readers, who were well aware of American torture practices, such as the “water cure,”⁹ and how they had led to continuing resistance even after the “official” end of the Philippine-American War in 1902. The symbolism of White violence against Asians took on additional meaning as *El Renacimiento*’s campaign of denunciations against the abuses perpetrated by the American-led Constabulary against the Filipino civilian population largely overlapped with the Russo-Japanese War (Cano 2011: 412-13).

⁷Ileto has demonstrated the long tradition among Filipinos of reading texts against their surface meanings (Ileto 1979).

⁸These anxieties were also reflected by the Chinese elites and their view of the uncertain status of the Philippines (Karl 2002: 83-115). See also *El Renacimiento* 1904b.

⁹A practice of force-filling a prisoner’s stomach with water until their abdomen becomes bloated, after which a torturer would sit on it, forcing the water out. See Kramer 2008.

Not everyone in the Philippines agreed with the narrative that Guerrero and other editors of *El Renacimiento* advanced. Several pushbacks (which *El Renacimiento* contested) showcase the various cleavages in Philippine society and how they led different communities to side with different belligerents. Ricardo José has pointed out how the Spanish community of Manila lamented the defeat of the Russian fleet at Tsushima upon seeing the battered survivors in their port, taking the Russian defeat as their own (Jose 2011: 66). Through the pages of the daily, we can also see how those who identified with the colonizing powers of the Philippines—be it Spain or the United States—denounced Filipino nationalist identification with Japan as a threat to peace, while also proclaiming their support for the Russian cause. In a satirical column, a writer going by the pen name of Tarik (whose identity cannot be confirmed)¹⁰ commented on the way the Russo-Japanese War had become a major topic of discussion in Manila and added commentary about the significance that was attributed to pro-Japanese sympathies: “It is true that, every now and then, we hear the hollers of those whose clothing is ambiguous and whose characters are peaceful and harmless, who claim that (...) *any sympathy shown towards Japan is a bellicose ‘huzzah!’ that encourages the people to take up arms and declare themselves independent from the flag that protects us*” (*El Renacimiento* 1904d. My emphasis). Those Tarik referred to were the publishers of the conservative Catholic daily *Libertas*, who engaged in a vitriolic debate with *El Renacimiento* on the Russo-Japanese War.¹¹ Thus, even though the vast majority of Filipino nationalists were practising Catholics, the most reactionary brand of Catholicism espoused by *Libertas* had an adversarial relationship with nationalism and anticolonialism. It appears that *Libertas* built on these associations, denouncing that those who sympathised with Japan also favoured independence, meaning that they were calling for rebellion against the American colonial administration.

The editors at *El Renacimiento* further highlighted how reactionary Catholicism did not limit itself to supporting the American colonial status quo but also swung towards Spanish restorationism. In a later satirical column, a writer with the pseudonym Dr Avispa¹² commented on the prophecies for 1904 by a “Fraile Junípero Kossakobarbaroff.”¹³ The column suggests that the motive behind the conservative *Libertas*’ pro-Russian sympathies was that the zany Friar Junípero had prophesied a Russian victory that would lead to the restoration of the Spanish Empire in the Philippines. In a later satirical column written in a mix of Spanish and Tagalog, Dr Avispa described the very Catholic editor of *Libertas* praying at church for the victory of the “rusianos,”¹⁴ hoping that this would result in the expansion and material prosperity of the Catholic Church (*El Renacimiento* 1904e; 1904f; 1904g). In the scathing satire appearing in *El Renacimiento*, the Church and Spain were inseparable, as they had been before 1898.

Support for the Russian side of the conflict was not inflected solely by conservative Catholicism but also by race. Just as the Spaniards of Manila lamented the defeat of the Russians, those Filipinos who identified racially with their colonisers tried to underscore their “Whiteness” by cheering for Moscow and were then satirised as “Russophiles.” For example, a columnist using the pen name “Kuskus Balungus” presented an imaginary dialogue between a local Russophile, “Don Jovito,” and his friends, wherein they discussed the veracity of the news:

Let us listen to Don Jovito, a descendant, according to him, through a line we know not whether broken or curved, from the left leg of Wamba and Chineasvinto [?], Kings who were perfectly Spanish [*godo*] and perfectly dead.

¹⁰Unfortunately, the identities behind the pseudonyms of the columns analyzed here cannot be ascertained, with none of them appearing in Mauro García’s thorough *Philippine Pseudonyms*. Most of the Filipino collaborators mentioned, that is, the Palmas, Guerrero, Kalaw, Santos, Gómez, de los Reyes, and Calderón were known to have used pseudonyms, so they cannot be discounted as the identities behind Tarik, Dr. Avispa, or Kuskus Balungus (García 1965).

¹¹*Libertas* was founded by a group of Spanish Dominican priests and was characterized by staunch conservatism (Checa Godoy 2015: 26, 33).

¹²Lope K. Santos’ penchant for using “Dr.” pseudonyms such as “Doctor Bejuco” and “Doctor Lukas” (García 1965: 152) might suggest he was behind “Dr. Avispa,” especially considering his mixed use of Spanish and Tagalog, but further proof is needed. At any rate, *Muling Pagsilang* lacked the more extensive satirical columns that *El Renacimiento* featured, making it possible for Santos to choose to publish this in Spanish.

¹³Equivalent to “Friar Cossackbarbarianov”.

¹⁴A—perhaps English-influenced—corruption of the Spanish demonym “ruso”.

This Don Jovito, whose factions reveal him to be as Spanish as I am a Muscovite, rants and raves and throws tantrums whenever he hears or reads that the Japanese have sunken Russian battleships or cruisers with their cannons. [...]

“Bah! Look at those telegrams and never fear... Those are all lies, filthy lies. That is why we,” he added, glancing meaningfully at Doña Lilay [his wife], “have agreed among several descendants of Whites to pay for other telegrams that’ll tell us the truth about what is happening.” [...]

“Yes, sirs,” Don Jovito continued. “Because it’s absolutely foolish to wish that the Mikado should win this match... Can those of yellow faces and slanted eyes such as the Japanese triumph? Careful what you wish for, gentlemen. The day that the Japanese triumph, a great international conflict shall break out in the Orient [...] and when the chaos reaches its climax, the Germans will come to the Philippines, bombard Manila and... Germany will return the Philippines to its old Metropole, my most beloved Spain.” (*El Renacimiento* 1904h)

The apparent contradiction between Don Jovito’s desires—that Russia should prevail and that Spain should return to the Philippines due to a Japanese victory—may be explained by the limited intelligence that Kuskus Balungus ascribed to the Russophiles. Throughout the dialogue, Don Jovito and his wife, Doña Lilay, fail to realise that some of the characters their interlocutors mention—“Kukarachafoff” and “Ubanimoratragalapatawich”¹⁵—were created solely to mock them, were unable to add seven and two (they thought it was fourteen), and believed “pánfila”¹⁶ was a kind of metal. However, what offended the Russophiles was not that their idiocy was exposed by their interlocutors but rather that they were referred to as sellers of the Philippine dishes of bibingka, bubuto, and kutsinta, casting doubt on their purported Spanish racial background, which was central to their pro-Russian sympathies.¹⁷

Perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes of how the war was received in the Philippines was that American colonisers and the colonised educated elite sympathised with the same side—Japan. However, how that sympathy was articulated made the colonial authorities distrustful of the colonised. While there was a streak of anti-Slavism behind anglophone support for Japan, the anti-colonial undertones of Filipino reporting on the war prompted American military planners to fear that their position in the archipelago would be untenable in the case of war with Japan (Linn 1997: 84-90; Shimazu 2009: 2-3). Years after the war, in 1909, the analogy between Russia and the United States was clearly articulated. *El Renacimiento* explicitly referred to the United States as “the Russia of the Orient” and predicted that it would face a similar fate as the Czars (Jose 2011: 65). Jose has shown that American colonial officials were concerned that Filipino sympathies for Japan could lead to increased support for violent resistance against colonial rule. Iletto has found that popular resistance movements were reenergised by the prospect of Japanese aid after victory over Russia (Jose 2011; Iletto 1979: 206, 239-40). We may measure the impact of the rhetoric appearing in a periodical as widely read as *El Renacimiento* by the real anxiety it produced among the colonial government.

Viciously mocking Russians in the Philippines

How was this colonial schadenfreude articulated, and why were Japan’s victories felt so keenly? As we will see, colonial schadenfreude around the Russo-Japanese War tapped into two sentiments among Filipinos: an urge to mock the Russians as surrogates for their colonisers and an urge to imagine themselves in a future in which they could emulate the Japanese. Thus, colonial schadenfreude presented the opportunity to imagine a reversion of the racial roles imposed by colonialism.

Japan’s geographic proximity and rising power played a key role in this process. By the time the Russo-Japanese War broke out, the Philippines and Japan had a long history of connections. Trade

¹⁵The first is roughly equivalent to “Cockroachavov” and the second ends in “-swallowsthefootvic.”

¹⁶A Spanish name sometimes used as a synonym for someone dim-witted.

¹⁷For more such satirical columns, see *El Renacimiento*. 1904i; 1905a. There is a longer history of critical Filipino authors lampooning other Filipinos who pretended to be European, as in the case of the withering depiction of Doña Victorina in José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* (Rizal 1976).

between the Philippine archipelago and Japan preceded Spanish arrival and continued under Spanish rule (Scott 1994: 75-76, 207-9). Japan also loomed as a menace, however, with several aborted expeditions targeting the Philippines for conquest during the first century of Spanish colonization (Turnbull 2016). Of greatest significance for the conjuncture of 1904 was the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, which Japan had won convincingly, resulting in their annexation of the island of Taiwan—only a short hop from the Philippines. Several scholars have shown how the stature of Japan as a rising Asian power led to several anti-colonial Filipino agents seeking (or hoping for) Japanese support through the various stages of the revolution—first against Spain, then against the United States.¹⁸

As pointed out by scholars such as Jose, CuUnjieng Aboitiz, and Rodell, Filipinos generally had a firmly positive impression of Japan, seeing it as an exemplary modern society whose soldiers were deeply committed to the nation's cause (CuUnjieng Aboitiz 2020: 1-31; Jose 2011; Rodell 2005: 637-41; 2007: 24-30). The coverage presented by the nationalists in *El Renacimiento* fits well within this framework, highlighting that Japanese soldiers were comparable to the best Europe had to offer (*El Renacimiento 1904j*) and exalting the bravery of their sailors. When referencing the attempt to blockade the Russian fleet in Port Arthur, for example, it printed the following:

Much has been said of the almost legendary bravery of the Japanese. From tales of people who have lived long with these men who, due to their height and modesty, seem incapable of heroics, we have gathered some stories that, far from diminishing their prestige, enhance it, for all their traits hold something sublime, something unreachable perhaps for most men. [...]

[Admiral Togo] had decided to block the exit to the port with specially designated ships which, loaded with rocks and other materials, were to be sunk to completely “bottle in” the Russian warships anchored there. They needed men to crew the ships earmarked for this task, and, O sublime patriotism!... those who volunteered for the dangerous task numbered... two thousand!! (*El Renacimiento 1904k*)¹⁹

By highlighting the bravery and self-sacrifice of the Japanese sailors, Guerrero also elevated them as models for the level of nationalism and modernity that he and his staff hoped Filipinos would achieve. *El Renacimiento*'s pages abound with descriptions of sailors who refused to surrender to Russian warships or men from both branches of service who committed suicide rather than being captured by the Russians and “soiling” the honour of Japan.²⁰

The bravery and honour of the Japanese stood in direct contrast with the cowardice and ineffectiveness of Russian combatants, who appeared to be willing to surrender as soon as circumstances turned against them. In this respect, the foreign news picked up and reproduced by the editors of *El Renacimiento* reflected the same anti-Slavic bias typical in anglophone reporting (Shimazu 2009: 2-3), yet appropriated it to other ends. In his Tagalog edition, Lope K. Santos re-edited his source material to present a more humiliating Russian surrender:

The soldiers of the Japanese empire lost three hundred men and continued to fight until the Russians lost two companies of artillery and were then forced to fly the white flag and turn over to the Japanese all their horses and weapons that remained in their possession. [...] The total number of Russians captured by the Japanese in the aforementioned battle was thirty officers and three hundred soldiers (*Muling Pagsilang 1904b*).

This edit presents some interesting differences with the Spanish-language rendering of the same news story (*El Renacimiento 1904m*) that suggest that Santos chose to emphasise certain elements in this version that, due to the language it was printed in, was, in a way, “for Filipino eyes only” because it

¹⁸For a recent work in this topic, see CuUnjieng Aboitiz 2020. For the general development of these stages of warfare from the Filipino perspective, see Corpuz 2002; Tan 2002.

¹⁹See also, as another example of the tone of the coverage of Japanese heroism *El Renacimiento 1904l*.

²⁰See, for instance, *El Renacimiento 1905b*.

would be harder for Spanish-reading American officials to access (and it also seemed unnecessary to undertake the effort, as it appeared to be the same article as the Spanish one). The Spanish-language version had a much more neutral-sounding title of “Official report.” However, the Tagalog version was titled “The white flag of the Russians – Their surrender to the Japanese,” emphasizing their submission to their Asian enemy. Moreover, while “Official report” included a few passages that acknowledged the bravery of the Russian combatants and the stiff opposition they put up, most of this was elided in Santos’ Tagalog version. Although the Tagalog version was briefer and also skipped information about the names of the people who sent and received the cable—which did appear in the Spanish version—what Santos chose to retain and delete is telling, especially when the concise Spanish title became a much longer one in Tagalog. Furthermore, it could not escape Filipino readers’ notice that despite suffering very similar casualties, it was the Russians who ended up surrendering and turning over their weapons to the Japanese, especially when reports of Japanese soldiers surrendering were nonexistent. A contrast between Japanese bravery and Russian cowardice must have taken shape in their minds, which in turn may have produced joy inasmuch as it reversed the White supremacist trope of brave, masculine Whites and cowardly, effeminate Asians.²¹

As a result, colonial *schadenfreude* could manifest as satirical mockery. After a string of Russian defeats on land, Kuskus Balungus put forth a satirical imaginary dialogue between the commanders of both armies, Aleksey Kuropatkin and Kuroki Tamemoto. The latter greeted the former, who bemoaned the trouncing he had received at the hands of the Japanese. After trying to raise his spirits, Kuroki reminded him of his arrogance at the beginning of the war:

Kuroki: [...] Oh! Remember that day when in a bout of holy rage you uttered this phrase: “To Tokyo!,” scandalizing good sense the world over?

Kuropatkin: Now, now, General, pay that no heed: it was just an outburst of Slavic quixotism, mere Kuropatkinian metaphor to console the people of the Russias... Just between the two of us, I confess that I’d be damned if I wanted to go to Tokyo... You see that we have already crossed back across the Yalu and are heading back to the Urals bit by bit...

Kuroki: [...] It’s never good to lose one’s head in the critical periods of one’s life, nor raise the flag of surrender so quickly... You’ve seen how the Japanese on the “Kishiu Maru”²² comported themselves... Some died from Russian bullets and others resorted to “hari-kari”²³. But... the white flag? Nequaquaff! I mean, nequaquam! And forgive me that I sometimes blurt out “off” suffixes... It’s the result of contact and “tactum molis”... do you know what that is?

Kuropatkin: Molis? Is that related to pounding [*moler*]? By Saint Nicholas, General, don’t bring up poundings, as I and my Cossacks have been pounded by the whoopings and thrashings we’ve received... you mustn’t bring up the noose in the home of the hanged man... (*El Renacimiento 1904n*)

Kuskus Balungus skillfully subverted the tropes of Asian-European hierarchies while mocking the defeated Russians. His reference to the call to occupy Tokyo and impose their peace terms ridiculed how unrealistic the Russians had been. One can further detect the Filipino enjoyment at the image of a high-ranking Russian general having to mumble excuses and apologies to his Asian counterpart; Russian arrogance had been checked by the Japanese. Likewise, by mentioning the *Kishiu Maru*, we see another iteration of the idea that while Russians were prone to surrender, the Japanese preferred death to defeat (*El Renacimiento 1904o*). This contrasted severely with the way Russians, in general, and Kuropatkin, in particular, were represented. Over the course of the rest of the imagined conversation,

²¹In this respect, these Filipinos experienced a similar amusement as that experienced by the Japanese themselves (Shimazu 2009: 162).

²²A Japanese merchant ship.

²³Sic: hara-kiri. Japanese ritual suicide.

Kuropatkin confesses to Kuroki that if he is sent to a camp in Siberia, he would probably castrate himself out of spite, to which the latter advised him not to raise the white flag so quickly, a probable phallic joke.²⁴ The inversion of the traditional racial roles was complete, and colonial *schadenfreude* was free to manifest itself. Based on this present, the Filipino reader could enjoy the imagination of a future in which other Euro-American powers would have to submit to Asians.

Bintang Hindia: Shaping a Community of Readers through Colonial Schadenfreude

Having mapped out the contours of colonial *schadenfreude* in a country with an active nationalist movement, we now turn to the Dutch East Indies. Previous scholarship has considered the Russo-Japanese War to have had no significant impact on this region (Rodell 2005; 2007; Westermann 2007). This would be the case precisely because the earliest stirrings of a pan-archipelagic nationalist movement would only take shape after the Russo-Japanese War, starting with either the founding of Budi Utomo or Sarekat Islam. Neither seemed to have been impacted by the conflict in Northeast Asia. Furthermore, the reach of the imagined community in terms of people or territory had not been defined—the matter of whether this would be a Javanese movement or an Indies movement would only be resolved several years later (Shiraishi 1990; Utomo 2014). However, this picture changes considering the rhetoric of colonial *schadenfreude* burgeoning around the Indies. As we will see, the lens of the Philippine case allows us to discover this phenomenon in the Dutch East Indies and understand its implications. In a context where the Dutch colonial state was promoting the Malay language as a modernizing medium for education, the spread of publications in the language began shaping a community of readers.²⁵ As previously pointed out, part of this shaping consisted in guiding readers' feelings about certain events, in this case, *schadenfreude* towards a group of people who resemble their own colonisers in appearance and behaviour. Mocking such a group in a society with such marked racial hierarchies constituted a sharp change in rhetoric that caused concern for Dutch colonial authorities, as was the case in the Philippines.

The periodical disseminating this rhetoric was the biweekly magazine *Bintang Hindia*, whose high profile in the history of Malay-language publishing in the Indies has merited significant interest from scholars such as Harry Poeze and Ahmat Adam (Adam 1995: 98-107; Poeze 1989). Adam situates the emergence of *Bintang Hindia* at the crossroads of two major trends in the trajectory of the Dutch East Indies. The first was the growing impulse by the natives of the Indies to acquire education to access modernity, harking back to the 1860s, leading to the emergence of a series of periodicals that sought to promote *kemajuan* (progress). The second was the *ethische politiek* coming from the metropole, which aimed to “repay” the people of the Indies for the surpluses that the Netherlands had syphoned away over previous decades. This repayment would come from “uplifting” the population, providing them with education and material resources. In this context, the eventual founders of *Bintang Hindia*, Clockener Brousson and Abdul Rivai, would independently start their own educational publications, *Soerat Chabar Soldadoe* and *Pewarta Wolanda*, respectively. They would then fuse these two into *Bandera Wolanda*, the direct predecessor of *Bintang Hindia* (Adam 1995: 79-98).

Bintang Hindia was printed in the Netherlands on high-quality paper and featured numerous illustrations accompanying its stories, which often focused on educating and ‘enlightening’ its readership.²⁶ It was a visually striking publication with enormous reach, boasting 27,000 copies circulating by the end of 1904 and a readership comprising the entire Pribumi elite of the Dutch East Indies (Poeze 1989: 94).²⁷ The aforementioned Abdul Rivai, who controlled most of the magazine’s content, was the product of the Dutch colonial state’s efforts to create an educated native elite that could provide it with the trained

²⁴For the continued currency of phallic jokes in the contemporary Philippines, see Rafael 2022: 42-56.

²⁵For an insightful take on the trajectory of Malay as a lingua franca vis-à-vis Dutch and Javanese, see Anderson 1990: 123-151.

²⁶*Bintang Hindia* was the foremost periodical in the promotion of enlightenment among the Pribumi, aiming to reach *kemajuan* (progress). This endeavor for ‘uplifting’ the population would be adopted in later decades by people adhering to Islamic and Communist worldviews, who would publish their own periodicals (Shiraishi 1990; Sidel 2021: 72-202; Subijanto 2017).

²⁷As highlighted by Subijanto, one must also acknowledge the number of people who gathered to listen to periodicals being read out loud in the Dutch East Indies, which potentially increased the ‘readership’ severalfold (Subijanto 2017: 1370-71).

manpower to sustain its rule. He graduated from the medical school for natives, STOVIA, and travelled to the Netherlands to pursue further studies in medicine but was prevented from doing so due to legal restrictions on enrollment.²⁸ He pursued a career in journalism and eventually became acquainted with Clockener Brousson, an enterprising Dutch soldier with a strong affinity for the Indies who had a somewhat troubled career in journalism. Brousson would eventually manage the distribution of the magazine in the Indies. It was precisely in the field of distribution that *Bintang Hindia* would become embroiled in controversy: in 1905, leveraging the educational aims of *Bintang Hindia*, Brousson managed to gain support from Governor van Heutsz, who pledged to support the publication financially and logistically, providing it with postage and instructing colonial bureaucrats to help distribute it. This was met with fierce backlash from other publications in the Indies and was disapproved of by Minister of Colonies Dirk Fock (Adam 1995: 98-107; Poeze 1989;). Adam has pointed out that the editors of *Bintang Hindia* articulated the desires and hopes of a literate elite whose successors would lead the anti-colonial movement a few years later, setting it up as a predecessor for Indonesian nationalism (Adam 1995). Harry Poeze has proposed that the publication of *Bintang Hindia*, not the founding of Budi Utomo or Sarekat Islam, marked the beginning of the Indonesian nationalist movement.²⁹

The Russo-Japanese War generally aroused interest among the natives of the Dutch East Indies, though not all of it came in the key of colonial *schadenfreude*—though it could be anti-Dutch. Barbara Andaya has studied how the rise of Japan and especially its victory in the Russo-Japanese War prompted the elite of the Sultanate of Riau, aggrieved by Dutch meddling in their internal politics, to seek out Japanese support to overthrow the Dutch. This initiative sought to restore traditional privileges in Riau, even contemplating a new, presumably fairer, Japanese lordship over Riau (Andaya 1977). Helen Creese has found a Balinese-language manuscript poem about the Russo-Japanese War, which she situates within a new trend of Balinese authors expanding their horizons to the wider world yet engaging with it using the tropes of more traditional literary genres. The text describes the war in erotic terms, with the narrator and participants assuming the form of male (Russians) and female (Japanese) genitalia, deviating significantly from an events-based narrative. Despite these deviations, Creese has identified *Bintang Hindia* as the source material for the poem (Creese 2007).³⁰

The Russo-Japanese War also garnered significant attention in Java, which speaks to its increasing exposure to intercontinental news. We see the combination of “modern” topics and “traditional” genres emerge here in a long Malay-language, Jawi-script poem about the war—which was derived from a book published in Batavia in the Malay language, albeit in the Roman script. Henri Chambert-Loir has pointed out that while Malay epic war poems were a popular genre, this was the first time one was written about a conflict outside the Malay world. Neither of these materials appears to have conveyed any preference for either of the belligerent parties (Braginsky and Boldyreva 1990; Chambert-Loir 2014). In his study of *Renodhoemilah*, a periodical that—much like *Bintang Hindia*—targeted an elite *Priyayi* readership, Akira Nagazumi generally identified favourable reporting about the Japanese military and a keen interest in the reasons behind Japan’s success in modernization—although the author does not address whether the Russians were mocked. Furthermore, Nagazumi traced a trajectory between Wahidin Soedirohoesodo’s role as the newspaper’s editor, his manifest admiration for Japan, and his later support for Javanese education in preparation for future challenges and the foundation of Budi Utomo. Unfortunately, only the issues from 1905 survive, making it unsuitable for the purposes of this article (Nagazumi 1969).³¹

Much like the Filipino elite, the conditions for the emergence of colonial *schadenfreude* were present among the native elite of the Dutch East Indies. The chronic threats to their self-image took the shape of the exploitative *cultuurstelsel* (cultivation system) of the 19th century, in which the old *Priyayi* nobility had been subordinated by the Dutch colonial apparatus and transformed into little more than

²⁸In 1918, many years after the demise of *Bintang Hindia*, Abdul Rivai would become a member of the colonial Volksraad, a consultative parliament in the Indies (Shiraishi 1990: 95).

²⁹For a similar view, see Fachrurrozi 2017.

³⁰Lest too much significance be ascribed to Russian masculinity and Japanese femininity, Benedict Anderson reminds us that sexual roles in the Javanese erotic poetic tradition imbibed from Bali can be ambivalent (Anderson 2004: 105-30).

³¹Poeze has also argued that *Bintang Hindia* was a key inspiration for Wahidin Soedirohoesodo’s founding of Budi Utomo (Poeze 1989).

intermediaries between Dutch colonial administrators and local rural populations, while surpluses were siphoned away to the metropole (Fasseur 1992: 13-55). Even the implementation of the *ethische politiek* (ethical policy) at the turn of the century seeking to “civilise” the native population of the Indies was framed in paternalistic terms that represented Indonesians as children rather than equals of the Dutch (Wesseling and Dane 2018). It was in this context that intellectuals and activists such as Tirta Adhi Soerjo tried to awaken a nationalist and progressive sentiment, but they also experienced a deep colonial melancholia product of the inherent contradiction of a colonial system that described itself as ethical and progressive but was based on segregation and maintaining traditional hierarchies (Anderson 2006; Kahin 2003; Sears 2013; Shiraishi 1990; Taylor 2008). As to acute threats, the threat of the extreme racial violence deployed by Dutch forces during the Diponegoro rebellion (1825-1830) (Carey 2021) undoubtedly continued to haunt the memory of the Javanese. Furthermore, despite the enunciation of the “ethical policy,” the first decade of the twentieth century was the high point of Dutch military expansion through the “outer regions” of the colony, engaging in conflicts in Jambi, Kerinci, Ceram, Banjarmasin, Sulawesi, Bali, and Flores, and finally winning the protracted Aceh War (Locher-Scholten 1994; 2003: 223-42; Reid 2017).³² News of colonial state-enacted violence and the continued undermining of autonomy and elimination of indigenous authority would reach Java, thus looming over the local elite.³³ If they were momentarily spared from some of the worst possible violence, it was not because they were considered equal but merely because of their “good behaviour.”

The parallels between *Bintang Hindia*'s framing of the war and *El Renacimiento*'s are clear. First, Rivai portrayed the Russians as aggressors³⁴ in terms that made analogies between the Russians and their Dutch colonisers salient to readers. Rivai remarked on how the Russians also sought to colonise Asian peoples by cunningly inserting themselves in the region during the Yihetuan Movement and then using the construction of a railroad in northeastern China as an excuse to gain a more permanent foothold in the region (*Bintang Hindia* 1904a). For the Javanese readers of *Bintang Hindia* (which often included essays on the history of the Dutch East Indies), the trope of footholds and progressive colonization must have struck a chord. Furthermore, *Bintang Hindia* highlighted Russian arrogance upon the outbreak of war and their scorn towards Asians. In the context of the Russian defeat in Tsushima, the editor reflected on how the Russians had called the Japanese “yellow monkeys” and treated their nobles as “paper nobility” (*Bintang Hindia* 1905a). Russian scorn for Japanese nobility reflected Dutch condescension towards their status as a subordinated local nobility, another “paper nobility” in the context of *cultuurstelsel* and *ethische politiek*. Thus, it is understandable that Rivai then shows delight by adding, “Now the insolent ones are those who bow their heads in shame.”

As in the Philippines, parallels drawn between the Dutch and the Russians were noticed by critics. In the context of the scandal of 1905 surrounding the subsidies *Bintang Hindia* had received from Governor van Heutsz, Rivai's “socialist articles” and coverage of the Russo-Japanese War were subjected to particular scrutiny. The lumping together of the two categories of writings in the eyes of the conservative critics suggests that they indeed perceived that Rivai wrote about the war subversively. The shadow of the war endured after the end of hostilities, with *Bintang Hindia* publishing a column in 1906 on how shocked the nations of the White race were with the emergence of Japan as a military power due to the Russo-Japanese War (Poeze 1986: 32-58).

Finding ways to mock Russians and shaping the emerging community of readers

Identifying colonial *schadenfreude* could be especially tricky in *Bintang Hindia* compared to *El Renacimiento*. The Filipino periodical had an openly adversarial relationship with the American colonial government and featured dedicated satirical columns where contributors could let loose. *Bintang Hindia* was supposed to align with the Dutch colonial government's mission of “uplifting” the native peoples to the point of Brousson trying to make it a semi-official organ of the colonial government. Properly satirical

³²As pointed out by Anthony Reid, although the Aceh War was one of the longest-lasting campaigns of resistance against Dutch rule in the archipelago, it was only incorporated into the Indonesian nationalist narrative in the 1930s, and with considerable ambivalence on the part of the Acehnese themselves (Reid 2011: 135-36, 139-40; 2005: 335-54).

³³*Bintang Hindia* itself reported on the Dutch state's wars of conquest in the Outer Islands.

³⁴This alignment has been noted by Laffan as well (Laffan 2007: 224).

columns were absent in *Bintang Hindia*, with satire probably considered antithetical to an educational mission of uplifting. Praising Japanese modernity could be educational, but mocking Russians probably was not. However, as we will see, Rivai could find ways to transmit his contempt for the European belligerents—and encourage it among his vast readership.

In the broader context of the previous relations between Indonesia and Japan, the Dutch East Indies' greater distance from Japan meant that early modern connections were far weaker than in the Philippines. Furthermore, the Islamic orientation of Java and other parts of the archipelago resulted in much of its local elites looking westward across the Indian Ocean towards Constantinople for an outside ally or referent rather than northward towards Japan. Still, transitioning from an earlier history of being seen as the source of swordsmen and sex workers, Japan's strengthening after the Meiji Restoration meant that Tokyo arose as an alternate potential ally for anti-colonial sectors of the Dutch East Indies. Michael Laffan references the voyage of the Turkish warship *Ertuğrul* through Southeast Asia en route to Japan in 1889-1890 as a pivotal moment, as the embattled Acehnese leadership saw it as an opportunity to gain support from either their traditional referents, the Ottomans, or the new rising power, the Japanese, in their ongoing war of resistance against Dutch colonial forces. Later, Japan's overwhelming victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 led to the Japanese being declared equals of Whites in the Dutch East Indies in 1899. This victory, in turn, prompted the ethnic Chinese and Arabs to create organizations to demand the same status as the Japanese, and the Javanese followed suit (Andaya 1977: 133-35; Laffan 2007: 221-24; Padiatra 2020: 2-3; Supratman 2016). These organizations would prove to be the driving force behind the emergence of what would become Indonesian nationalism, with either Budi Utomo (1908) or Sarekat Islam (1912) taken as its starting points (Shiraishi 1990; Sidel 2021: 72-202). Thus, there is a link between the emergence of an imperialist, modern Japan and the eventual rise of the national movement in the Dutch East Indies, even if it was a mediated one.

Bintang Hindia's portrayal of the Japanese during the war and in its leadup, as well as other Malay language publications in the region, was overwhelmingly positive (Laffan 2007: 222-26). Indeed, Abdul Rivai portrayed them as altruistic and heroic victims of Russian aggression, embodying Asian modernity and independence. Abdul Rivai and *Bintang Hindia* exalted the Japanese along at least two major axes: their power (due to a modernization that preserved their Asian culture) and their bravery and heroism. The former proved their vast superiority in both fields by contrasting the rising Japanese empire to a teetering European empire such as the Russian. The quality and capabilities of the Japanese army were such that Rivai claimed to be lost for words to describe them:

Russia and Japan have shown their bravery, but what has been shown by Japan in this battle cannot be put in writing, for words cannot describe their triumph. If one pays attention to the deeds of the Japanese soldiers and officers in the battle of Kintsjou [Nanshan], then we are forced to say that it was like the Japanese sought death in the battlefield. Their general said: "My death in this battlefield will immortalise my name among my people; my blood that gushes here will fertilise my fatherland [...] The enemy bullet that should take my life will dig a hole in our land, where the Tree of Honor will grow and protect the Japanese homeland and people." (*Bintang Hindia* 1904b)

Rivai placed special emphasis on the virtue of bravery among the Japanese. Japanese acts of extreme bravery and self-sacrifice were understood as signs of having achieved modernity, which led to its combatants' patriotism. Similar sentiments permeate his coverage of naval operations, whereby the failed attempts at bottling in the Russian Pacific Fleet by scuttling ships were described in glowing terms, labelling the dead Japanese as heroes (*Bintang Hindia* 1904c). These actions were not represented as the self-destructive impulse of the "savage," nor the blind obedience of the subject of an autocratic régime, nor the almost irrational sacrifice to maintain honour. His admiration suggests that this was the future he believed colonised should aspire to, in which all would willingly sacrifice their lives for the national cause.

Having framed the Russians as vicious aggressors and the Japanese as heroic, *Bintang Hindia* increasingly showed the contrast between the former's incompetence and cowardice and the latter's gallantry, which would soon turn into a stream of ironic mockery of the Russians—even within the bounds of what was supposed to be an educational publication. For instance, they transcribed and translated the

comments of a German correspondent in Tokyo who praised Japanese preparations in the years before the war and its people's spirit of sacrifice, which he followed with a glaring contrast: "When Japanese soldiers leave their fatherland, they leave their homes and their families and go to the field of battle with only two intentions in their heart: 'death in the battlefield or to return while crying: victory, victory!' This is unlike Russian soldiers, who retreat when the Japanese approach, or surrender when pressed" (*Bintang Hindia* 1904d). The contrast between an Asian nation that fought with a logic of "victory or death" against a European nation whose soldiers operated instead under a logic of "retreat or surrender" reminded their readers that Russia deserved its misfortune. Still, it also reversed the traditional White supremacist discourse of the brave, masculine European and the timid, effeminate Asian. The delight in writing and reading such words was a prophetic witnessing of the future fall of all European colonialism in Asia, like in the case of the Philippines and *El Renacimiento*.

When describing the setbacks faced by the Russians, such as the fall of key fortresses around Port Arthur and the destruction of the larger part of what remained of the Russian Pacific Squadron, Rivai commented thusly on the circumstances of the bulk of General Kuropatkin's army:

Fighting has ceased temporarily in Liaoyang; reports attribute it to heavy rains. This has raised Kuropatkin's spirits, for he can now wait for the arrival of troops sent from Russia. The Russians intend to concentrate 500,000 soldiers in Manchuria. When... when Kuropatkin gets that many soldiers, then he will engage the Japanese army. Yes, when... when! That is, if the Japanese let him gather that many soldiers. (*Bintang Hindia* 1904e)

Rivai promptly, and sarcastically, expressed his doubts about Kuropatkin's chances. The reader could not overlook the way the Russians were being mocked, as well as the expectations of further defeats (and delight) that would soon come. As Hagen suggests, these passages guided readers' feelings about these events—in this case, to contempt towards the Russians. They added another dose of mockery by commenting on how the Russians felt blessed by God upon receiving news that the czarina had just given birth to a male prince and that the proud czar had appointed him commander of several regiments. In this fashion, those who practised customs portrayed as ridiculous were Europeans, not Asians. The cycle of mockery was completed a couple of months later, when hostilities on land recommenced. Rivai began by letting Kuropatkin give an epic speech followed by a sudden change of tone:

"Until today, Japan has attacked us, and since their army is larger than ours, we have been forced to retreat. But now we will retreat no longer. Japan will learn that Russia is not afraid of spilling the blood of its people. Russia will show the world that we prefer death to shame."

These words pleased those Russians who were far from the battlefield. The people of Saint Petersburg rejoiced, saying "now Japan is certainly defeated." Kuropatkin's words were spread far and wide by newspapers around the world.

Field Marshall Oyama too rejoiced when he received this news. He quickly readied his army and attacked Kuropatkin's army before Kuropatkin could even begin his own offensive. (*Bintang Hindia* 1904f)

Rivai selected his material to reference tropes familiar to readers. He presented the proud Russian general, who at the beginning of the war announced that he would impose peace in Tokyo, declaring that his soldiers preferred death to defeat when *Bintang Hindia* had already established that their motto was "retreat or surrender." The heroic speech and the hopeful expectations of the Russians were followed abruptly by a mocking rebuke. Once again, the ones being humiliated were, like the colonisers of the Dutch East Indies, White Europeans.

Furthermore, the Russo-Japanese War intersected with Rivai's growing restlessness with the magazine's apolitical bent, which led to a brewing conflict with Brousson over the direction the periodical should take. While Brousson wanted to keep *Bintang Hindia* within the bounds of a didactic publication, Rivai wished to push the envelope towards being a voice for the transformation of the social and political structures of the Indies (Poeze 1989). In this context, the Russo-Japanese War served as a "safer" topic from which Rivai could level criticisms towards the colonial administration:

Conditions in Russia will remain the same while the Russian Czar remains “Emperor of All Russia,” that is, so long as Russia and the Russian nation are ruled according to the whims of the Russian Czar. It is impossible that our country, the East Indies, will progress as it deserves so long as it is ruled and administrated solely by the masters living in Batavia and Bogor! The East Indies will not progress as long as the conditions of the government are as they are at present: like those of Russia. (*Bintang Hindia* 1904g)

The “masters” of Batavia and Bogor were clearly the Dutch colonial government. However, by framing this passage as “constructive” criticism resulting from a desire that the Dutch East Indies not collapse like Russia and instead take the path of modernity and science, Rivai was able to skirt more drastic measures on the part of the colonial administration.³⁵ Nonetheless, Rivai’s analogy between Russia and the Dutch colonial government clearly shows that his continuous mockery of Russian humiliation was also directed at a hopeful eventual defeat of European colonialism and oppression in his own country. It also seems likely that these analogies were not altogether overlooked by Dutch administrators, who subjected the magazine to special scrutiny for “intolerant or seditious articles” (Poeze 1989: 93). As the months went by, Rivai continued to push the envelope, eventually publishing an article titled “*Kaoem Moeda*” (youth, rising generation), in which he advocated for a youth association that would foment education and Western knowledge and science in the Indies.³⁶ Brousson feared that these political editorials would imperil the magazine’s future. This conflict would eventually lead to the break between the two and the end of the publication (Poeze 1986: 45-46).

Thus, while in the Philippines, the construction of analogies between Russian and American colonisers and the manifestation of *schadenfreude* regarding the calamities visited upon Moscow by Japan was addressed to an already imagined community with specific boundaries and inclusions (and exclusions), colonial *schadenfreude* in the Dutch East Indies preceded the sharpening of these contours. However, it added the mockery of a White population to shaping the community of native readers in the Indies. Part of joining this wider community was the opportunity to show contempt for previously unassailable Whites. This, of course, would be a very gradual process. Still, as shown by Lutikhuis and van der Meer, eight years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, a Javanese clerk named Raden Prawiradinata stopped showing servile deference to his Dutch superior, much to the latter’s displeasure. This development triggered a series of events that led Governor-General Idenburg to issue a new *hormat*-circular,³⁷ essentially forbidding civil servants from demanding the humiliating gestures of subordination that had been baked into colonial society. Importantly, Prawiradinata read *Bintang Hindia* (Lutikhuis and Van der Meer 2020). Rivai, by mocking Russian military performance, made a first step in shedding deference towards Whites. For those natives who considered themselves “modern,” the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War supported the idea that Whiteness should no longer command automatic reverence and deference.

Conclusions

Using a comparative approach, this article has shown how mockery of Russians served as “code” for critiquing the colonial régimes in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. Indeed, while the Russo-Japanese War could have merely been the object of detached curiosity by the local elites in the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies, the periodicals studied here took the opportunity to insert significant editorial commentary on those events. Their descriptions of the war made the parallels between Russian aggression and that which their readers routinely faced from their own colonisers salient. It is also abundantly clear that both the writers and the American and Dutch colonial authorities noted

³⁵Although the *drukpers-reglement* mandating pre-censorship continued to remain in effect until 1906, in practice, Governor van Heutsz allowed for more freedom of the press, including criticism of government officials. By 1914, a time of greater agitation, regulations became stricter (Wiratraman 2014: 47-54). Technically published in the Netherlands, *Bintang Hindia* could circumvent many colonial publication regulations.

³⁶Abdul Rivai’s calls proved to be prophetic. Associations similar to that which we advocated for would become the driving force behind Indonesian nationalism and eventual revolution (Shiraishi 1990; Sidel 2021: 72-202).

³⁷*Hormat*: respect, reverence.

the anti-colonial analogies being drawn. Mockery was ever-present once the tide of the war had turned against the Russians, with *El Renacimiento* and *Bintang Hindia* obviously delighting in the sight of White men being humiliated by Asians in the overtly masculine arena of conventional warfare. This spectacle reinforced the trend of viewing Japan as an example of Asian modernity and strength and the hopes for Japanese intervention against their colonisers. These expectations, of course, were proven false relatively quickly. Nevertheless, the isomorphism in the expression of *schadenfreude* at the sight of Russian collapse and how the Russo-Japanese War was transplanted into the political and colonial frictions of the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies is remarkable.

The comparative approach used in this study allows for colonial *schadenfreude* and its implications to be identified and understood in two different contexts: one in which nationalism was clearly and openly articulated and continued to contest colonialism and another in which such sentiments would blossom over subsequent years. Thus, colonial *schadenfreude* can be both a product of (as in the Philippines) and a predecessor to (as in the Dutch East Indies) nationalism. In the Philippines, the mockery of Russians as surrogates of Americans was part of a context that nationalists and colonisers understood clearly. In contrast, in the Dutch East Indies, mockery of Russians as surrogates of Dutchmen was one strand in the foundation of a community of readers who would later spur a national movement. Openly, and complicitly, mocking Europeans while living under a colonial regime that placed Europeans at the top of the hierarchy constituted a significant shift towards modernity.

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