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Peasant Resistance and Religious Protests in Early Philippine Society: Turning Friars Against the Grain

KATHY NADEAU

One of the most important contributions to the study of religious resistance and rural rebellions in the Philippines has come from the works of nationalist scholars. They have shown that peasant revolts that have been widely studied cannot be constructively understood without considering their precolonial origins. This essay examines the role of religion in rural revolts in terms of its broader historical connections. It reviews some of the pre-Hispanic continuities in the selection of authentic leaders in the Philippines during the early Spanish period. It concludes that Christianity was localized not simply because it was imposed but because it was propagated by a small group of radicalized, educated friars meeting some of the indigenous criteria for effective leadership. These friars were some of the early ancestors of today's liberation theologians.

One of the most significant advances in the study of peasant rebellion and religious protest in the Philippines has come out of the works of nationalist scholars (Constantino 1975; Iletto 1979; Rafael 1988). In particular, Iletto and Rafael have shown that peasant revolts that have been the object of much research cannot be analyzed in isolation from their precolonial origins. By so doing, they challenged evolutionary frameworks used to categorize different kinds of peasant protest as either belonging to primary (precolonial), archaic (postconquest), or nationalist movements. Iletto and Rafael have shown that local elites and social organizations have persisted well into colonial and neo-colonial times. Rural forms of religious protest variously construed as millenarian, messianic, revivalistic, chiliastic, syncretistic, fanatic, cultic, and so on, that marked the archaic stage have continued to the present. As Iletto and Rafael suggest, these provincial outbursts need to be freshly reconsidered in the light of their broader historical connections, and from the vantage point of the lower classes.

In general, peasant rebellions in the Philippines, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, have been studied in terms of their disjunction from a historic past. Moral economists have argued that the penetration of capitalism into rural villages leads to widespread discord. Due to the closure of the frontier, peasants can no longer resort to earlier forms of avoidance protest by moving as a group to another area (Adas 1981). Consequently, new types of resistance develop because traditional patron-client ties and earlier patterns of reciprocity no longer structure the village economy (Scott 1973, 1985). Instrumental rationalists, on the other hand, contend that peasant uprisings do not result from violating a code of ethics that assures peasants of their basic subsistence "rights." Rather, peasants seek out political leaders, and if they deem it profitable, they will rally behind one in rebellion (Popkin 1979). While Marxists have similarly viewed agrarian conflicts as transitional phases in the history of particular social formations, they have disagreed over the issue of whether peasants are reformists or revolutionary (Kerkvliet 1977; Ong 1987; Stoler 1985; Wolf 1982; Worsley 1984). Except for Iletto and Rafael, however, no student of the Philippines that I am aware of has looked at the role of religion in rural rebellions in terms of its continuities with a precolonial past.

Iletto aptly criticized a reductionist model of Philippine society that depicts it in terms of patron-client relations for being guilty of the flaw of functionalism. That is, such a model with its

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built-in mechanism of self-preservation does not allow for other ways of looking at, or confronting, the established order (Ileto 1979:11–12). Instead, Ileto proposed a model based on hegemony, wherein marginal affronts to the prevailing social order are taken into account. Looking specifically at the role of Christianity in Filipino rebellions, he posits that the Spanish missionaries taught a mystified and “other worldly” version of Christianity to indoctrinate and subdue the Filipino masses for their Spanish overlords. However, the early Filipinos (from here forward read: *Indios*) interpreted Christianity in terms of traditional Southeast Asian cultural practices and beliefs, rather than from the Spanish perspective. It is for this reason that Filipinos were early able to articulate in the language of Christianity a means for expressing their own values, ideals, and hopes for liberation from their colonial oppressors (Ileto 1979:15). Their folk Catholicism, according to this view, emerged directly out of pre-Hispanic patterns of behavior.

For example, in contrast to the intentions of the friars, local people discerned mundane meanings that were related to their daily lives from the indigenous performance of the Passion Play during Holy Week. As Ileto (1979:20) explained, from the Spanish perspective, Christ’s Passion served “to discourage the *Indios* from enriching and educating themselves to the point where they would become a threat to colonial rule.” Contrarily, from the indigenous perspective, “the identification of the wealthy, the educated pharisees, and local leaders with Christ’s tormentors could not fail to have radical implications in actual life.” In this article, I expand upon his argument to suggest that some out of the ordinary friars used messages derived from the gospels, as in the case of the Passion Play, to criticize social injustices and with the aim of liberating the poor from their colonial oppressors (de la Costa 1961; Fabros 1988; Schumacher 1979, 1981). These rare and exceptional friars were influenced by local social life as they helped to shape indigenous interpretations of Christianity. Some of the culprits these clerics singled out for committing atrocities against *Indios* were fellow members of their own clergy and class. In other words, the local people in their quest for liberation did not come to interpret the gospel messages without influence from Catholic Church teachings.

I agree with Ileto and Rafael that the process of localization of Christianity in the Philippines happened in relation to precolonial Southeast Asian history. However, they have not accounted for the complexity and interlocking roots of the *Indios* struggle for liberation from colonial dominance. This article explores this issue and looks at some of the precolonial continuities in the selection of authority figures in the Philippines during the early Spanish period. I argue that Christianity was propagated by rare and exceptional friars who successfully met some of the precolonial criteria for a qualified leader, and have arranged the article accordingly. First, the general situation and class structure of the pre-Hispanic Philippines and its subsequent transformation by the Spanish colonizers is discussed. Then the development of Christianity and the conflict of motives debate is reviewed. Finally, some precolonial structural similarities in the relationship between friars and their constituents are put forward and some conclusions are drawn.

THE PRECOLONIAL PHILIPPINE SITUATION

Prior to the coming of Spain, the Philippines was involved in a maritime trade economy. Its communities were dispersed along estuaries of rivers and coastal shores, and each settlement was scattered to protect inhabitants from the possibility of off-shore marauders. Its history was made up of a complex of local histories wherein leaders were legitimated by their followers. Chiefdoms existed in that the office of chief was ordinarily inherited and there was a redistributive economic system. But the office of chief was also achieved and the center of redistribution shifted as new leaders emerged. That is, the pre-Hispanic history of the archipelago was intricately interlinked with the culture complex of Southeast Asia, and it engaged in tribute and trade relations with such centers as India, China, and Arabia. But each community made its own history because its inner and outer relationships were variously construed (Anderson 1972; Rafael 1988:133–17).

Kinship played an important role in the development of authority and social hierarchy on the islands (Rafael 1988:13; Wolters 1982). Unlike in Northeast Asia (China, Korea, Japan), a large and impersonal state bureaucracy never developed in the region. Instead, there were numerous competing centers of power whose rulers strove not to colonize their neighbors but to include them in their network of kith and kin. The boundaries marking communities were constantly redrawn as new alliances were formed, histories merged, and new leaders appeared.

Kinship networks, based on ambilineal descent, were traced bilaterally through male and female lines. This diminished the importance of status based on lineage connections to a single male or female ancestor. Instead, important genealogical claims were based on achieving a founding line of descent and establishing kinlike relations horizontally in the present. As Rafael (1988:14) expressed, “genealogy thus acted as a provisional, revisable marker rather than an unassailable organizing principle of authority.” There was a greater interest in extending kin and kinlike networks horizontally in space rather than vertically back in time. This emphasis on the present had an impact on how leaders emerged in pre-Hispanic Philippine society where social relations, rather than private properties, were one’s greatest resource.

Leaders emerged because they had an ability to entice followers who cooperated in ritual, agricultural, commercial, and military matters. Such leaders replaced or incorporated the previous ancestral line of the community into their own by achieving the title of village ancestor. They were able to cultivate followers by engaging in exchanges with them that were mutually beneficial. They were believed to have special spiritual energy that enabled them to keep social relations within and between communities, between the earth and the cosmos, in balance. Social confusion resulting from a rupture in the network of reciprocity and exchange, or chaos occurring in times of natural calamity, was indicative of a leader’s decline, at which point people moved to follow a new authority.

Personal power was perceived by the local people differently than in the Anglo-European and Anglo-American worldview. That is, power was not an abstraction as it is in Western European social thought; it was an existential reality (Ileto 1979:30–31; Anderson 1972; Wolters 1982). There were indigenous signs that indicated a powerful leader. A powerful leader was perceived to be pure “not in a moralistic sense but rather in terms of his or her ability to concentrate and diffuse power.” That is, there was a “direct relation between a person’s inner self and their capacity to control the environment” (Ileto 1979:31). Also, there were apparent signs of a leader: they had a “radiance” about them, they were sexually fertile, and they surrounded themselves with sacred objects and people who held unusual power so as to absorb it vicariously. Leaders wore and distributed “magic” amulets, uttered formulaic prayers, and believed that their weapons, and personages, were invulnerable in times of battle (Reid 1983:7). Conversely, “military defeats and the diminution of a ruler’s wealth and following were regarded as mere manifestations of the deteriorating state of the leader’s inner self” (Ileto 1979:31).

As Rafael (1988:14–15) suggests, however, “in the absence of a centralized bureaucracy, authority and hierarchy devolved upon the projection and recognition of the potential for engaging in dyadic, reciprocal exchanges among those within and outside the kinship network, and as politics was not centralized, the representation of this potential varied from society to society.” In other words, although there were some common criteria that distinguished a leader throughout Southeast Asia, the projection and recognition of leadership was invariably a local matter. Social transformations occurred as foreign influences were translated locally, and they were specific to the conventions of a particular group.

THE PRE-HISPANIC CLASS STRUCTURE

The class structure of pre-Hispanic Philippine society was diversified and complex even in the absence of the development of a state bureaucracy. Among the Moslem Tagalogs there were fundamentally three political classes (rulers, commoners, and slaves) (Scott 1982). Rulers,

otherwise known as *datu*s, were the overseers of *barangay* settlements (*ummah*, Islamic communities). They held and distributed community property and passed down final judgments in legal proceedings. Usually, *datu*s were great warriors because their primary duty was to defend their *barangays* from outsiders. The office was inherited and passed down through the male line, but the power of office depended on the loyalty of both commoners and slaves who could give their allegiance to the *datu* of their choice.

The early Tagalogs' conceptions of a *datu*'s power were informed by the teachings of mystical Islam, which was underlaid by Hindu and Shaman beliefs. They carried their religion with them from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Borneo. Perhaps this is why the Tagalogs were considered only vaguely Moslem by the Spaniards who first encountered them? (Rafael 1988:106). Nonetheless, their understandings of *datu*s power was based on a servant-lord model, which Shamanism, Hinduism, and Islam held in common.

The Islamic origins of the servant-lord bond are based on the relationship between God and wo/man, which can be traced to the relation between Mohammed, the perfect man, and a divine God with whom he united; and to the relation of Mohammed and his disciples. As Arberry (1970:12) put it, "Islam recognizes no incarnate God, no savior, the matter lies between Allah and the One Lord, and every (wo)man the One Lord's creature and servant." A lord undertakes a path to the source of enlightenment (to God) by following the example of Mohammed. The journey to God embarked upon by a lord is fraught with danger and that is why most wo/men become servants of a lord, for their guidance. A lord can turn on their path to the Godhead, however, and mark their descent by unleashing malevolent forces and this is why a servant's relation to their lord is always ambiguous. This ambiguity in a *datu*'s power is also rooted in the Hindu conception of the coming of a "just king." In Hindu cosmology, a cyclical order gives rise to kings and queens who sojourn to God but may fail and so they are tied to their servants indeterminately (Moertono 1968:36, 54). The dynamics of power in the relation between Shamans and their constituents is similarly delicate throughout Southeast Asia. To use Sally Falk Moore's (1975) expression, there is an element of uncertainty in the relationship between a lord and their followers.

Tagalog commoners, or *timawa*, were literally free persons. They were usually prohibited from marrying into the *datu* class. The only possible exceptions to this rule would be during periods of instability and political realignment within a community that moved to anoint a new *datu* from outside the village and/or *datu* class, in which case their family was newly fitted into the genealogy of the collective as ancestor. Many commoners were illegitimate offspring of the aristocracy, while others were formerly slaves who had earned their new status. Commoners entered into contractual relations with lords, who awarded them portions of *barangay* land to farm and bequeath without being subject to tribute. In return, they joined their lords as partners on fishing and raiding excursions, at harvest time, and in other enterprises. The commoners could expect a generous share in their lord's bounty for exceptional performance. Their free status depended on their ability to indebt others and to avoid being indebted themselves.

Finally, there was the *alipin* class, which included two categories of slaves known as the *namamahay* and *gigilid*. Members of this class were commoners who incurred a debt, offspring who inherited the debt of their parents, and prisoners or captives of war. The *namamahay* were analogous to tribute payers. They acquired a right to a piece of land and were obligated to return a portion of the harvest to their masters. In addition, they worked as needed for their lord in other capacities such as building houses or serving as oarsmen on expeditions. They were often rewarded for their services and they could use their savings to purchase their freedom.

The *gigilid* were members of the slave class who lived under the same roof as their lord or in the home of a commoner to whom they were indebted. As household helpers, they were commonly treated like members of their lord's family. However, if they were captive slaves they could be treated like chattel. Typically, *gigilid* acquired *namamahay* status once married as they were given a separate house and a piece of land to work. Like the *namamahay*, they could work off their debts and obtain status as free persons.

In practice, the precolonial class system of the Tagalogs, like those of other peoples of the Philippines, had built-in opportunities for social mobility (Scott 1982). Members of the indigenous elite gained their enhanced statuses by entering into a circle of relationships of varying degrees of reciprocity and indebtedness, wherein rulers were the last to be indebted (Rafael 1988:13–17). Local leaders were intimately connected to their followers, and they were the ones who made sure that surplus was recirculated back into the community, even as it was exchanged in the wider spheres of the Asian maritime trade economy. Leaders generally lost the allegiance of their followers if they were unable to oversee the commonweal, or if they betrayed public trust by exacting an inordinate portion of the wealth for themselves. The human community itself represented the greatest resource for local elites because it set into motion both the products and protective measures they needed to maintain their ascendancy; the elite were not protected by a large outside apparatus of state.

THE FIRST SHOCK OF SPANISH CONQUEST

Prior to the social, cultural, political, and economic transformation of Cebu in the central Philippines into the first colonial settlement in the nation by the Spanish on May 8, 1565, Cebu was interlinked into a pan-Asian trade network. Arabs, Indians, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans traded with Cebu in pre-Hispanic times. Her position as a traditional center of trade is substantiated by the large amount of precious porcelainware uncovered on the island (Hutterer 1977; Baumgartner 1975; Scott 1984). Eschevarria (1974) traces the route of trade between Cebu and China as far back as the T'ang and Sung dynasties in the 10th and 11th centuries. Fox (1967:58) notes, conservatively, that although Cebu may have been one of the many coastal communities engaged in trade with the Chinese in the T'ang and Sung dynasties, as it was engaged with other traders such as the Sumatrans and the Javanese in the Sri-Vijaya empire, only during the 15th century did Cebu become a focal point for the Chinese traders. Mojares (1991:288) finds that by the time the Spanish arrived in 1565, Cebu was so prosperous that the Spaniards decided to develop it into an administrative, military, and religious hub for the Philippines. However, they quickly abandoned their plans and transferred their base of operations to Panay in 1569, and, later, to Manila. They retracted their plans due to the rapid economic decline on the island that resulted from the lack of any real economic opportunities for Cebuanos under Spanish rule. For instance, the Spaniards were not as interested as were pre-Hispanic Chinese traders in purchasing Cebu's total output of raw cotton but purchased only high-priced specialty products such as lampotes, and only enough to fill a single galleon that made an annual voyage between Cebu and Mexico (Baumgartner 1975:40). This change led Cebu's southern farmers to shift to cultivating Indian corn, which continues to be the main staple crop of these Cebuanos into the 1990s, because it could be cultivated in soil already infertile due to its having been planted in cotton. Cebu's economy deteriorated from the development of the Manila-centered galleon trade with China and Mexico, which effectively blocked Cebu's commerce for almost 200 years. Its economy continued to be changed and transformed by the Spanish in relation to the incipient world capitalist system (Fenner 1985).

The Spanish conquistadors, administrators, and missionaries represented an unprecedented affront to the indigenous society. The colonizers came with preconceptions of paganism, conquest, and mission based on unrealistic Augustinian and Greco-Roman definitions of barbarians, which were reminiscent of the inaccurate notions of the Chinese, who also sought, although with less arrogance and militaristic violence, to exhort tribute from these islanders. Vincent Rafael (1988:xi) argues that it was for this reason that the Filipinos sought to domesticate the shock of Spanish colonization. While the Filipinos had many previous encounters with outside powers, and were conversant with peaceful traders and aggressive marauders offering protection in return for tribute, they could hardly gauge the abrupt and arbitrary appearance of the conquistadors. Although the Muslims had penetrated the islands to such a degree that the Tagalogs in the far north had been

won for that faith, and even though Islam, like colonial Christianity, was an intolerant religion, it did not predispose the Filipinos for the arrival of the Spaniards. Although the precepts of Islam are fundamentally similar to those of Christianity, not the least of which is its belief in one all powerful and merciful God, there are major differences between them. The Muslims were not able to exercise the same type of center to periphery control that Spain could at least attempt. The Muslim world system of the day was much looser and multicentered. The Europeans only imagined that the Ottomans exercised any influence in Asia. The spread of Islam depended on the formation of many local states, not a single "world empire" that Spain was becoming—there were no "Meccan friars."

Before the colonial conquest, Filipinos were noncapitalist peasant commodity producers involved in a tribute mode of production in the maritime trade economy of Southeast Asia. Lowlanders were involved in mutually beneficial trade relations with upland hunters, gatherers, and horticulturists to obtain rare goods for home use or trade in the wider economy. The indigenous communities had their own structure of authority that differed from that of the colonizers. Mostly traders, sea merchants, fish harvesters, cultivators, and craftspeople, they lived in integrated communities, with production based on use value as opposed to exchange value, the latter of which marks the capitalist mode of production. Surplus was produced, but only in the sense of an excess of goods normally used for consumption set aside for appropriation and circulation; surplus circulated on the basis of its use value (e.g., tribute) rather than exchange value (e.g., sale for profit); primary producers owned the products of their labor. The economy of the early Filipinos thus negated capitalism, which is grounded in exchange for profit. Pre-Hispanic Filipinos made their own histories because each community in the archipelago was organized in a different way.

Spain's entry changed the indigenous social structure. The Spanish used the same strategy to colonize the Philippines that they used to colonize the New World (Phelan 1959). They preserved local leaders to convert their following. However, typical authority positions in the New World (e.g., in the Aztec civilization and the Maya kingdom) were part of a state apparatus and were typically inherited. By contrast, Filipino leadership positions were open and contestable because they were part of autonomous communities. Leadership was inherited and enforced in precolonial Philippines, but leaders were relatively easily abandoned. The local follower-leader economy waned under the new colonial economy.

The Spaniards negotiated their terms of settlement predominantly through the agency of male leaders, while female leaders, who held positions of high esteem and authority in the bilateral contexts of precolonial Philippines, were displaced. The follower system in Southeast Asia differed substantially from that of Spain. Differences in gender roles were simply differences in work patterns that complemented each other to form an undifferentiated whole. Errington (1990) stresses that the early Filipino ideology of gender difference was complementary. The opposite sexes complemented each other rather than competed against each other. Reid (1983:7) explains, "in Southeast Asia a follower system (still) is the awareness that a relation of authority of high over low exists, is accepted by the latter, and likewise the realization that high and low need each other in their striving for high standing. This relation is based on cooperation. On the other hand, the relation between equal groups (e.g., in the United States) is best described as opposition." Spanish colonial policy attempted to solidify local leadership and, in effect, transform local leaders into permanent lower level authority figures buttressed by the Crown, so long as the indigenous elite cooperated. As Rafael (1988:13–17) put it, "the extension of Spanish colonial rule into local communities generated a new division between natives who paid tribute and natives who collected it." The indigenous elite now sanctioned by outside military force could opportunistically shift between the colonial overlords and their subjects. They could take surplus from a community and keep part of it for themselves in the form of goods or indentured service. Although local leaders were accorded land and freed from tribute and corvee labor by the Spaniards, their prior wealth and power had derived less from the land than from tribute and services collected from their followers. Such also was the case in Mexico (Phelan 1970). The Spanish government undermined this indigenous

economic relation by exacting a head tax on all common Filipinos. They accomplished this through warfare and Catholic indoctrination and conversion. Subjects fled from both tax-collectors and former rulers, or, when prevented from doing so, rebelled. Uprising were endemic (de la Costa 1961; McCoy 1982; Mananzan 1987).

Spanish colonizers systematically brought the indigenous peoples into *encomiendas*. The Filipinos' pre-Hispanic conceptual framework was fragmented by this forced relocation process. The indigenous ideology reflected the inhabitants' particular lifestyles as small traders, horticulturists, and hunters and gatherers. As the conquerors reduced them into fixed settlements, they had to adopt European ways of seeing and dividing the world. Filipinos had to grapple with the problem of losing their cultural identity and communal orientation due to the foreign nature of the Spanish and their ways. They were required to perform *corvee* labor and pay tribute. Fabros (1988:5) states that "dependency and indebtedness characterized this multifaceted relationship" between the Spaniards and the Filipinos. "At best it gave way to a paternalistic relationship, at worst it created an exploitative set up." This relationship would intensify when the American colonizers brought their capitalist mode of production at the turn of the century and transformed the local instrumental overlord-to-peasant relationship into an instrumental impersonal relationship based on capital.

Rafael (1988:x) argues that the consciousness of Filipinos was reshaped through "the dissemination of Christianity which was mediated by Spanish ideas about signification and concomitant transformation of meaning from one language to another." The Spanish who transmitted the Christian faith held in common the other-worldly and future-oriented conceptions of the Bible, while their Filipino parishioners interpreted the scriptures in a contrary and present-oriented way. My own position concurs with that of Rafael in so far as I agree that the Spanish Crown attempted to reconstruct the foundations of Filipino social life. But, I depart from his premise that the issue of conversion has been so neatly defined as to permit us to declare that the motives of Filipinos were invariably at odds with those of the friars (p. 155). In contrast, I argue that the Christian religion took root because it was spread by select friars who successfully met some of the *precolonial* criteria of a qualified leader. My argument is exploratory and deals with a period in Philippine history where there were few original sources. My purpose is to examine and understand the roots of theology of struggle today by tracing them back to early religious clerics and lay leaders who took the side of the poor and oppressed.

EARLY ROOTS OF RESISTANCE THEOLOGY

Christianity took root in the Philippines not simply because it was imposed but because it was propagated by a small group of radicalized, educated priests meeting some of the indigenous criteria for effective leadership. In contrast, authoritarian friars would lose the loyalty of parishioners, who would merely feign allegiance to the iron might of Spain. Early friars who worked to check the widespread abuses of the Spanish government may have received impetus from the early Christian Church (Claver 1978; Dorr 1983; Fabros 1988). The Church at the time of Christ was a social movement that emerged in reaction to a co-opted local elite and a ruling Roman class, but it was no product of class conflict in a dogmatic Marxist sense. Jesus did not organize an armed resistance movement of the lower classes to overthrow and replace their rulers. However, he avidly criticized the dominant authorities of his day, especially church authorities (Troeltsch 1931:39) and considered the struggle to be against the misuse of wealth—in particular, a struggle against avarice and the accumulation of human and material possessions for the sake of self-aggrandizement and power. His is a message contiguous with that of many indigenous Asian religions (Woodward 1985; Pieris 1988; Brown 1992).

According to Ileta (1979), an effective leader in the precolonial Philippines exhibited an integrated sense of "loob" (inside), which made their philosophy and life transparent. They were connected to their community in such a way that the best interest of the community was reflected

in them. De la Costa (1961:20, 22, 26, 535–38) wrote of friars who earned respect by their example of selfless service to the sick and suffering of their parishes (see also Echevarria 1969; Schumacher 1981; Scott 1982). These were clergyman likely to have a faithful following of believers who, in turn, incorporated Catholic notions into their own worldviews. It is not surprising, from this perspective, that Filipinos were early able to articulate in the Passion Play meanings related to their daily lives (cf. Iletto 1979). The Passion Play became a means to express their resistance to the colonial regime, given that the Spanish banned all other indigenous theater. Also, some rituals popular in pre-Hispanic Philippines, as elsewhere in Asia (e.g., Javanese puppet plays in Indonesia and masked dancers satirizing nobles in Korea) were likely to have been theater productions based on ironic and subtle critiques of local political authorities (Iletto 1979).

To extrapolate on Levi-Strauss's (1963:180) theory: some Catholic priests acted out the structural idea of a religious leader in the indigenous culture, that is, they fulfilled the cultural expectation of a religious leader. In Sahlins's (1981:7) words, they were a "worldly token of a preconceived type." Like prior Tantric, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim holy men in the Philippines, such priests (oriented by the ethos of the gospel and poverty of Christ, not mercantilism) were believed to receive their power from some higher source and were not supposed to seek monetary, material, or personal power, even though they could receive tribute to acknowledge their status. In other words, the various world religions in Asia that predate Christianity also claim to have a message that is liberatory of the poor in as much as these religions and ideologies claim to be saviors of the common tao. Accordingly, voluntary poverty in Asia can be said to be a potent spiritual weapon and political stratagem in the hands of adept religious leaders to wield against the abuses and selfishness of dominant powers and authorities, and this makes an authority crisis an ever-present possibility. In contemporary terms, early friars lived and worked in a political church that was not neutral. Each individual friar himself was personally engaged on a terrain in which only the poor could decide who could liberate them. To be legitimate, individual representative authority figures, not forcefully imposed, were respected by the local people only "spontaneously as a manifestation of their own competence to mediate liberation" for the vanquished and poor (Pieris 1988:36–38). This, at root, is the basic contradiction in Catholic social teaching until now between egalitarian and hierarchical structures—a good case in point is the stark contrast between Benedictine and Franciscan orders (not least the founders), as illustrated by Victor Turner on Francis (1969:140–55).

Some early friars were welcomed in Filipino communities (examples in de la Costa 1961; Schumacher 1981; Scott 1982; Keesler 1989:46). During the colonial period, Filipino communities in Cebu were ordinarily neglected by the government (with obvious parallels today). De la Costa (1961) documented cases where locals in Cebu welcomed friars into their communities to ward off abuses by Spanish soldiers and landed officials and attacks from marauding offshore Southeast Asian slave raiders (Scott 1982:176; Reid 1983). The advent of a friar meant the development of a town ringed by a small fortress, although such often made formerly scattered communities more vulnerable to offshore raiders. A few friars sought to win converts by way of example rather than force. This was apparently the case for the student of medicinal plants, Father Padrino Chirino in Cebu, as noted by de la Costa (1961). This is not to say that they succeeded. Some entered into the local scheme of things as allies in resistance. These friars, who were not just religious leaders but social leaders as well, were the predecessors of today's theologians of struggle.

Rafael emphasizes that because Spain's presence in the Philippines could be legitimated only as a function of the Crown's Christianizing mission, Filipinos were forced to orient themselves to a divine authority, an authority whose directives were emanating from Spain. Instead of situating themselves in relation to Southeast Asia and the natural world around them, Filipinos "were constrained to negotiate with and around the totalitarian economy of divine mercy" (p. 109). That is, a prior system of relating to others in terms of mutual indebtedness and exchange was replaced by one of divine patronage tied to the bureaucracy of colonial Spain. Local autonomy was lost (p. 145).

As Rafael sees it, Filipinos and friars indigenized Christianity for purely economic and political reasons. The people of the Philippines looked at Christianity as a quid pro quo in terms of reciprocity and varying degrees of indebtedness (*utang na loob*), while the early friars used their role as priests “to consolidate their position in the hierarchy of divine commerce” (p. 98). Rafael’s interpretation of economic interest is similar to a capitalist, that is, individualist one. For him, to be economic is to be interested in individual profit more than in the welfare of the community as a whole. It is to promote one’s status through a system of indebting others unto oneself. In a word, it is “opportunist” (pp. 14, 35, 143, 164). Such a definition does not fit precolonial Philippine economy.

I slightly diverge from Rafael’s contention that one of the key means used to control local workers was confession. According to his view, the priest used his role as father confessor to force his parishioners into debt and further dependence upon him (p. 99). By such means, the local workers were further goaded into obeying their Spanish overlords. While religious clergy undoubtedly served to domesticate a potentially unruly and landless labor force for Filipino and Spanish colonial officials (Troeltsch 1931:138, 220), a rather different interpretation of confession is given by de la Costa, namely, that this sacrament was used more to oversee Spanish and Filipino *encomenderos* than the peasant laborers who worked for them (1961:33–35). In fact, argues de la Costa, the early Spanish abuse of Filipino rights was so offensive to the Catholic clergy that Bishop Salazar called for a meeting of a Synod in Manila in 1581. Describing the times, the Spanish bishop thundered that “it was absurd that a man of low degree, merely because he immigrates to the colonies, should acquire the prerogatives of a knight and lord of vassals, doing violence and a thousand injustices to the miserable native who is unable to stand his ground against the arrogance of the Spaniard and the tyranny of his own chiefdoms” (de la Costa 1961:33). Under the new Synod directives, absentee *encomenderos*, in particular, were found guilty. Similarly, Spanish troops and other laymen who committed crimes against Filipinos were ordered to compensate their victims. The proceedings from this meeting were drawn up into a handbook for priests to use in the confessional to oversee the *encomenderos* and conquistadors. The directives, however, were not well received and many offenders simply stopped going to confession (de la Costa 1961:35).

Constantino (1975:22, 77, 78) notes that some friars accused the “*encomenderos*” of “exorbitant exactions and other abuses;” some governors complained that the friars had “exploited and reduced the natives to virtual slavery.” But if Filipinos wished to report the misdeeds of their friars and overlords to civil authorities, they had to do so through the agency of another friar. The system was corruptible. Only rare and outstanding clerics struggled against the grain for the civil rights of parishioners. Until the latter part of the 19th century when select members of the Chinese *meztizo* and Filipino *illustrado* class were for the first time admitted into the priesthood, the indigenous *Indios* could not represent themselves in Spanish courts because they could not enter the priesthood, and I emphasize again that this is in contrast to the Muslim and Buddhist development of indigenous religious elites. The indigenous had little parliamentary recourse other than to allow a Spanish friar to represent them. Only the late Spanish period saw Filipino *males* ordained into the priesthood. The first Council of Mexico (1555) forbade *Indios*, *mestizos*, and *mulattoes* to enter the priesthood because “they resembled the descendants of Moors and persons who had been sentenced by the Inquisition as lacking in good repute which those who bear the sacerdotal character ought to have,” an indictment repeated in milder form at the second Council of Mexico in 1585 (see de la Costa 1961:233–35). While no doubt some Catholic clerics willingly allowed themselves to be used by prominent Filipinos and colonial officials, some spoke out against the widespread injustices wrought by government, Church, and landed aristocracy. These religious spokesmen persistently wrote and sermonized against the authorities of the Church and Crown, as in 1768 when the Pope at the behest of the king ordered the Jesuits to return to Spain (de la Costa 1961:486; Schumacher 1981). Although some peasants grew attached to their priests through rituals such as processions and novenas to petition for rain or cures that aimed to rectify worldly wrongs through other-worldly ways, the localization of Christianity occurred in relation to precolonial Southeast Asian history in a process multisided and complex.

On the one hand, many early missionaries taught a mystified and other-worldly version of Christianity to indoctrinate and subdue the masses for their conquerors. They misled Filipinos to redress through appeal to a higher and all-knowing God rather than to social and economic conditions stemming from the inequitable relationship between the imperialists and the colonized. Both friars and collaborating local elites were accomplices in this coercive conversion that rested on tenets more of Hispanization than of Christianization (Phelan 1959:87; de la Costa 1961:534; Rafael 1988). However, the indigenous Filipinos interpreted Christianity in terms of traditional Southeast Asian cultural practices and beliefs. Many articulated the language of Christianity as a means for expressing their own values, ideals, and hopes for liberation from their colonial oppressors. In effect, Filipinos developed their own version of folk Catholicism to contest and eventually transform Spanish rule. This folk Catholicism was largely an indigenous resistance to Spanish Christian colonialism. Concomitantly, select friars played a role in this Filipino resistance movement by shaping popular ideas and opinions opposing the prevailing social order (see Gramsci 1971:192–93). Their resistance transpired simultaneously in relation to a parishioner and indigenous follower system in the history of Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

Summing up, the premises of Christian conversion are not the same as those governing the logic of imperial Spain. Nor does a reading of the works of de la Costa, Phelan, and Schumacher render a view of Philippine history from the side of the dominant colonial society to the exclusion of the history of the subordinate classes. For it is in between the lines, and clearly also within them, that I have found the history of the poor, the oppressed, and their defenders, the latter of whom cut across class. I agree with de la Costa, Schumacher, and Fabros that the traditional Church, albeit closely identified with the state, played a role in “checking” widespread government abuse of the local people (de la Costa 1961:534). Some friars interrogated and used the messages from the gospels to criticize social injustices and colonial oppression. Some of the culprits they singled out for blame were members of their own clergy, nation, or class. Hence, the roots of the Filipino struggle for liberation from colonial (and neo-colonial) dominance interlocked the cultures of the dominant and the subordinated.

Finally, the Spanish colonization (1521–1896) processes had a disintegrating effect on the indigenous political economy. The Spanish disrupted traditional values, communal practices, and social relations of production by instituting a new class structure that served colonial interests and that undermined the preexisting leader-follower economy. They brought with them a feudalistic production mode, a landlord land owning system, that activated the development of capitalism in the Philippines. Land that was held in common was increasingly reduced to private property (Constantino 1975:40). This instigated a process of eroding the traditional subsistence base and created a class of landless peasants. By the 19th century, cash-cropping (sugar plantations, tobacco estates) by expropriating Filipino labor and resources (McCoy 1993:438) began to transform the productive base in such a way as to allow the emergence of a small national elite class of landed and entrepreneurial Filipino and Chinese mestizo families from whom came powerful religious and political leaders. Under these divergent conditions in the relations of production, Filipino resistance theology as an integral part of the struggle for national liberation emerged.

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