

## Archives of the new possession: Spanish colonial records and the American creation of a ‘national’ archives for the Philippines

Ricardo L. Punzalan

Received: 7 October 2005 / Accepted: 3 January 2007 / Published online: 1 June 2007  
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2007

**Abstract** Through the *Treaty of Paris* in 1898, Spain ceded to the United States all its colonial authority over the Philippines, including its other colonies. The Treaty also placed in American possession the Spanish records kept in the various agencies of the former colonial administration of the islands. Upon assumption of its role as the new *de facto* colonial regime, the American insular government initiated the process of collecting the Spanish colonial records to be housed in a central repository that became the nucleus of the National Archives of the Philippines. An important aspect of understanding the context of archives in post-colonial Philippines is to trace its early beginnings and to examine the archives’ association with former colonial powers. Established against the backdrop of the shift in the continuum of colonial regimes, the archive is undeniably a colonial creation and a manifestation of colonial domination. For the contemporary imagination, however, its very presence represents a common and collective past that consequently contributes to the formation of a ‘national consciousness’ and ironically reinforces the idea of nationhood of the formerly colonized territory.

**Keywords** Archives and nationhood · Colonial archives · Spanish colonial records

---

The title is borrowed from: White, T., *Our New Possessions: A Graphic Account, Descriptive and Historical, of the Tropic Islands of the Sea which Have Fallen Under Our Sway, Their Cities, Peoples and Commerce, Natural Resources and the Opportunities They Offer to Americans* (Philadelphia: Manufacturer’s Book, 1898). This paper was presented at “Adapting and Adopting Archival Cultures”, *Second International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA 2)*, 31 August–2 September 2005, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. I wish to thank my colleagues from the University of the Philippines who provided their valuable insights, reviews and suggestions towards improving this paper, mainly Dr. Ana P. Labrador, Dr. J. Neil Garcia, Dr. Matthew Santamaria, Prof. Paolo Manalo, Ms. Sandra Roldan and Mrs. Roshan Jose.

---

R. L. Punzalan (✉)  
School of Information, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2112, USA  
e-mail: ricpunz@umich.edu

## Introduction

The Philippines has a long tradition of colonial history. Having endured 333 years of Spanish rule, another 40 years under the American regime and 4 years of Japanese occupation, the country is probably one of the most colonized nations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Ironically, these colonizing powers came to the country with the noble intention of “liberating” the nation. According to an eminent nationalist Filipino historian:

First came the Spaniards who “liberated” them from the “enslavement of the devil,” next came the American who “liberated” them from Spanish oppression, then the Japanese who “liberated” them from American imperialism, the Americans again who “liberated” them from Japanese fascists. After every “liberation” they found their country occupied by foreign “benefactors.” (Constantino 1978, p. 14)

Philippine history is thus characterized by various shifts in colonial administrations and the Filipino people’s response to foreign occupation. The years between the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s is an era punctuated by a change in the continuum of colonial regimes from Spanish to American; hence, a period of transition from one colonizer to another. Recently, there has been an intensified interest among academic institutions and historical societies to re-analyze and pay particular attention to this phase in history, as inspired by the recent activities associated with the commemoration of the country’s centennial of independence from Spain.

Similarly, in the field of archival history, there is the need to investigate and put in context the recordkeeping practices as well as the accompanying policies that were implemented during the shift of colonial power. The latter part of the Spanish regime and the advent of American occupation is a crucial time that calls for critical inquiry towards a deeper understanding of Philippine colonial archival history and its contribution to the wider discourse on post-colonial notions of nationhood. With the transfer of colonial authority, the framework for archives and recordkeeping in the country also underwent major changes that upon closer analysis reveal the undercurrents of a colonial agenda.

This article traces the actions implemented by one colonial regime towards the records of its predecessor and looks at how these measures contributed to the creation of a national archives for the Philippines. An examination of the relationship of both indigenous and colonial archives with nationalist mass movements, and the American formation of the Spanish archives, consequently reveal the multilayered nature of the archives as an institution of colonial creation and manifestation of colonial control as well as catalyst for anti-colonial resistance. In this light, the place of the archives in the intersecting post-colonial notions of national consciousness and nationhood is also explored.

## Archives of the “Inarticulate”

Although there is enough evidence to prove that there existed an ancient form of writing that predated the Spanish occupation (Salcedo 1998), there is no proof that the native inhabitants of the archipelago had ever consciously implemented a system of keeping records for purposes of evidence or preservation. Available accounts mention the use of indigenous script by the Spanish at the early stages of occupation, but it was mainly for religious teachings and official instructions. As centuries passed, however, the overzealous Catholic missionaries made sure that the use of the indigenous script among the Christianized population was never propagated, calling the practice pagan, uncivilized, and the

work of the devil. Consequently, many nationalist historians speculate that the country's pre-hispanic writings were almost entirely obliterated (Hernández 1999).

Up to the present, the indigenous societies of the Philippines primarily transmit their histories and customs orally through ritual and performance. Past events, indigenous knowledge and significant personalities are therefore remembered and propagated by means of oral traditions. In this context, the “archives” exist not as recorded two-dimensional objects that may be stored or preserved in a repository, but as “acts” that occur only within the realm of experience and in the memory of the members of these communities, a concept similar to the practices of the country's neighboring Pacific island nations. As asserted by Evelyn Wareham:

Archives, narrowly defined, were imposed on the indigenous cultures of Oceania by colonizing powers, as an introduced technology, which altered or displaced established practices. Written recordkeeping was a phenomenon that arrived with travelers, traders, missionaries and bureaucrats, and like the economic, religious, social and administrative systems they introduced, it has been adapted to suit local cultures and become integral to many aspects of island life. (Wareham 2002, p. 187)

Indigenous history making and propagation of memory among the Christianized masses never actually ceased but rather were transformed, modified and imbedded within the mainstream and colonially sanctioned, influenced and favored traditions. In his seminal work entitled *Pasyon and Revolution*, Renato Iletto (1981) argues:

After the destruction or decline of native epic traditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Filipinos nevertheless continued to maintain a coherent image of the world and their place in it through their familiarity with the *pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but upon closer examination in a historical context, reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind (Iletto 1981, p. 16).

Despite centuries of colonial rule, vestiges of indigenous beliefs persisted even among the Christianized peoples of the archipelago. Iletto underscores the influences of folk traditions in propelling mass revolutionary movements among peasant populations. Through the yearly Catholic tradition of the Holy Week and its indigenization through the re-enactment of the passion of Christ and the reading of *Pasyon*,<sup>1</sup> the country has “creatively evolved its own brand of folk Christianity from which was drawn much of the language of anti-colonialism...” which, in turn, “fundamentally shaped the style of peasant brotherhoods and uprisings...” (Iletto 1981, p. 15). In a related discussion, Iletto issues the following statement:

One problem in the historiography of the Philippine revolutions of 1896 and 1898 is showing the relationship between the educated, articulate elite (*ilustrados*) who have left behind most of the documents, and the inarticulate “masses” who fought and died in the various wars. (Iletto 1998, p. 1)

Parallel to the desire for liberation and ideals of nationhood of the *ilustrado* (meaning “enlightened” and refers to the educated Filipinos), the greater Filipino masses, who rallied behind the struggle for independence with the liberal elite, actually saw the revolution in a different light. Religious symbolism and utopian and millenarian visions of

<sup>1</sup> Originally written in Tagalog, its full title is *Casaysayan ng Pasiyong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin* (or Account of the Sacred Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ). This version, first appeared in 1814, is only an edited copy of an older original by an unknown author (see Iletto 1981, p. 16).

social justice and freedom, made possible through the distinctive mixture of folk ideals and the Catholic religion, were key ingredients of the mass struggle.

While traditional beliefs assimilated into the introduced colonial culture and later became vehicles for popular independence movements, the imposition of the written record was also one of the catalysts for a national revolution that started in 1896 and ultimately led Spain to cede the country to the United States in 1898. During the Spanish regime, records were strategically used as a means to control the largely illiterate and uneducated colonial subjects. One such record that embodied colonial subordination and social restriction was the *cédula personal*. Mainly the proof of tax payment and citizenship,<sup>2</sup> it was a piece of documentation required for all residents of the islands and was perhaps the most essential of all mandatory records of the Spanish era. The *cédula* had explicit bearing on property ownership, domestic or inland movement, employment, education, dispensation of justice, and establishment of identity.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that one of the first displays of resistance against Spain carried out by peasant revolutionaries involved tearing up their *cédulas personales*. Significantly associated with colonial oppression, destroying this record was interpreted as an act of severing the ties between the colonizer and the colonized.

### Archives as colonial creation

On 10 December 1898, an accord that ended the war between the United States and Spain was reached. The agreement, called the Treaty of Paris, signaled, among other events, the end of Spanish colonial rule and the start of the U.S. occupation (or *annexation*, as it was called then) of the Philippines, Guam, Cuba and Puerto Rico for the sum of 20 million dollars.

Of considerable importance to Philippine archival history is Article VIII of the Treaty, which states the relinquishment by Spain to America of all existing documents, official archives and records of the Islands:

The aforesaid relinquishment or cession, as the case may be, includes all documents exclusively referring to the sovereignty relinquished or ceded that may exist in the archives of the Peninsula. Where any document in such archives only in part relates to said sovereignty, a copy of such part will be furnished whenever it shall be

<sup>2</sup> According to Plehn (1962), the collection of the *cédula* started to be enforced in 1884. This repealed a much older taxation system based on the *Recopilacion de Leyes de Los Reynos de las Indias*, originally promulgated in 1523 or 50 years before the colonization of the Islands. The old law required the collection of “tribute” among the subjects and vassals of the Spanish Crown.

<sup>3</sup> See Plehn (1962, pp. 149–150). “The *cédula* had to be exhibited on the following occasions: (1) Upon taking up any commission or entering upon any public employment under the royal or insular authority; (2) upon entering any provincial or municipal office; (3) upon making any contract, public or private; (4) upon presenting any claim, soliciting business or appearing for any purpose before the petty governors or ministers of justice in the *pueblos*; (5) upon bringing any action before any court of any authority or before any officer; (6) upon matriculation in any institution of learning; (7) upon entering any employment in industry or commerce, any profession, art or trade; (8) upon payment of direct taxes; (9) upon presenting any claim or exercising any civil right not previously mentioned, and upon acquiring any rights or contracting any obligations; (10) upon establishing identity; (11) upon realizing any kind of credit, making bills of exchange, depositing money in savings banks, confirming pledges with *montes de piedad*, or pawn shops, and upon bidding at public auction; (12) upon becoming a director, administrator, member, voter, shareholder or employee of any class of association or industrial undertaking; (13) upon traveling beyond the boundaries of the *pueblo* residence; and (14) upon entering into domestic service. The officers of the government were authorized to call for and examine the *cédulas* upon any and all occasions, and any person found without a *cédula* (*indocumentado*) was subject to very severe penalties.”

requested. Like rules shall be reciprocally observed in favor of Spain in respect of documents in the archives of the islands above referred to.

In the aforesaid relinquishment or cession, as the case may be, are also included such rights as the Crown of Spain and its authorities possess in respect of the official archives and records, executive as well as judicial, in the islands above referred to, which relate to said islands or the rights and property of their inhabitants. Such archives and records shall be carefully preserved, and private persons shall without distinction have the right to require, in accordance with law, authenticated copies of the contracts, wills and other instruments forming part of notarial protocols or files, or which may be contained in the executive or judicial archives, be the latter in Spain or in the islands aforesaid.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in effect, the Treaty not only established America's newly acquired territories but also placed in American possession the fate of the Spanish archives<sup>5</sup> that remained in the Philippine Islands. Despite introducing the practice of recordkeeping<sup>6</sup> in the country, the Spanish regime did not have a general repository that could approximate an archive of national scope. Colonial records were scattered in various institutions, mainly in the parishes, religious orders and archdiocesan centers of the Roman Catholic Church, and numerous agencies of the colonial government such as the *Intendencia*, *Impuesto*, *Cantaduria*, and the *Direccion de Administracion Civil* (Bureau of Records Management 1976b).

In comparison with other records acquired by the U.S. from East Florida, New Mexico and California, the American Historical Association declared that the Spanish archives in the Philippines were "...by far the largest collection that has come into our possession through foreign sources." (American Historical Association 1912, p. 423).

Even in the earliest days of the American occupation, the establishment of a single, centralized archival repository to be located in Manila was already being seriously considered. In one of the first reports of the Philippine Commission, a body established by U.S. President William McKinley to investigate the affairs in the Philippine Islands, it was recommended that:

"In order to their better preservation and use, it was thought proper to bring together, within the limits of the intendencia building, all the records and other papers formerly belonging to the several offices of the Spanish Government kept in many buildings throughout the city." (Philippine Commission 1901, p. 130)

The magnitude of the disorganized and unfamiliar Spanish collection and its role in running the affairs of the new territory posed overwhelming administrative concerns for the Americans. The Spanish records were considered as indispensable sources in establishing ownership of land and property and in restoring of peace and order (Philippine Commission 1901, pp. 130–132). Thus, by 1900, efforts to gather and transfer all Spanish

<sup>4</sup> *A Treaty of Peace Between the United States and Spain*, signed at the City of Paris, France on December 10, 1898.

<sup>5</sup> Even in the final years of Spanish colonial rule, these documents were known as the Spanish records, not as the Philippine archives. Also present in the collection are the records pertaining to the administration of the Mariana Islands and the Caroline Islands.

<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the Spanish practice of keeping records in the colony was a direct reaction to the hostilities inflicted on the Philippines by another dominant colonial power. During the British Invasion of Manila from 1762 to 1764, it was reported that the looting of records was so prevalent that upon the end of the two-year incursion, the Spanish government began to order the survey and compilation of important records and to establish a policy of keeping duplicate copies of them. In fact, a significant number of Spanish records that have survived to the present were the product of such efforts. See Bureau of Records (1976a).

records into one location began. However, the task proved to be quite onerous, especially given the lack of understanding of the intricacies of the Spanish colonial bureaucracy. Worthington C. Ford, at that time chief of the division of manuscripts of the Library of Congress, noted in a report:

On the first occupation of the city of Manila by the Americans there was appointed a ‘‘keeper of the Spanish archives,’’ but he could do little in the confusion that prevailed. The administrative offices were separate and often distant from each other; and the papers they contained, not well arranged as it was, suffered from removals incident to the installation of the new government. The attempt to bring them under one roof would only add to the confusion, for a want of proper knowledge of the colonial administrative system to make a proper discrimination and arrangement supplemented the dangers incident to removal. (Ford 1910, p. 133)

On 21 October 1901, almost 3 years after the Treaty, the American colonial government enacted into law, Act No. 273,<sup>7</sup> creating under the Department of Instruction the Bureau of Archives. This Bureau became the official custodian of the Spanish archives.<sup>8</sup>

Another reason for the centralization and relocation of the Spanish records to the capital city was the ongoing war waged by insurgents against the American insular government. From the Filipino-Spanish revolution of 1896 until the annexation of the territory by the U.S. in 1898 and the Philippine Insurrection<sup>9</sup> of 1899 to 1902, records kept in small municipalities and the provinces were reported to have been destroyed by both Filipino insurgents and the Spanish and even American forces; for instance, American military troops added to the destruction of the records by using them to wrap packages and for fire kindling. There were also reports that upon the signing of the Treaty of Paris, Spanish authorities stationed in the provinces deliberately destroyed documents by burning them (Philippine Commission 1901, pp. 506–510).

Despite efforts to organize the Spanish records, the collection was in a deplorable state<sup>10</sup> due to lack of sustained financial and administrative support on the part of the insular government (Philippine Commission 1902, pp. 44–45). Hoping to draw greater attention for the organization and preservation of Spanish records, the American Historical Association issued the following report:

It is good to know that the next few years will see provisions made for the efficient conservation of these precious manuscripts, and that many years hence will see them as carefully housed as those in the unequalled division of manuscripts of the Library of Congress. The Filipinos appreciate thoroughly the importance of preserving these

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Philippine Commission, *An Act Creating a Bureau of Archives* (Act No. 273), 21 October 1904.

<sup>8</sup> The Bureau of Archives later became the repository of the country’s other colonial and archival records. At present, the National Archives also has under its custody American and Japanese occupation records, and inactive records of national and local government institutions, including those that have been abolished, transferred or merged.

<sup>9</sup> According to nationalist historians, *Insurgency* was the term used by the U.S. colonial government to downplay the intense warfare between Filipino revolutionary forces and the American military campaigns in the Islands. See Shaw and Francia (2002).

<sup>10</sup> When the Spanish records were first being consolidated in 1902, they were organized into 11 groups: Government-General, Civil Administration, *Ayuntamientos*, Public Works, Civil Government of Manila, Department of Finance, Secretariat, Direct and Indirect Imposts, General State Intervention, Bureau of Orders for Payment, and Central Treasury. Based on these headings, bundles of documents were tagged and numbered, which proved to be quite difficult and confusing given the complexity of over 300 years of Spanish colonial government in the Islands. See Wickberg (1995).

priceless records, and Americans are bringing enlightened means to bear for their future care... Every measure looking toward the preservation of the manuscripts of the Philippine archives will redound to the glory of the Philippine Legislature; and every dollar expended wisely for that end will be a monument to the legislators (American Historical Association 1912, p. 425).

The Spanish collection currently forms the nucleus of the National Archives of the Philippines. In its possession are an estimated 13 million manuscripts from the 16th to 19th centuries, with 400 titles on various aspects of Philippine history under the Spanish rule. All these were taken by American military personnel during the early stages of the U.S. occupation from various offices of the previous colonial administration. This colonial documentary heritage is a blend of religious, secular and government records dating as far back as the rule of the first Spanish Governor-General to the Philippines, Miguel López de Legaspi (1564–1572) (Records Management and Archives office 2000, p. 3) Unlike the fate of the records of America's other new possessions, the Spanish records in the Philippines were never removed from the country where they remain until today.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the prohibition of colonialism in its constitution and the expressed desire of Filipino nationalists for absolute independence, the U.S. Congress ratified the Treaty of Paris on 6 February 1899, with a marginal one-vote lead in favor of its adoption (Grindstaff 2004, p. 301). Thus, by virtue of the said Treaty, the U.S. immediately became a *de facto* imperial power in possession of a group of islands at the far side of the Pacific that were totally unknown to most Americans. With the growing anti-imperialist sentiments coming from the people of the archipelago as well as from the mainland U.S., the colonial administration had to justify its annexation in the Pacific. Thus, at the onset of American expansion, the Philippines became a site for modern scientific study<sup>12</sup> and ethnographic exploration in the tropics. Particular interest was given to understanding the diverse insular cultures of over 80 ethno-linguistic groups in the archipelago and the study of resources found throughout its more than 7,100 islands. During this period, museums, libraries and archives were established mainly for this colonizing function. In fact, the Insular Museum of Ethnology, Natural History and Commerce, established in 1901, was one institution that embodied the colonial agenda of cultural exploration for commerce, and to justify the acquisition of the new territory. Consequently, official reports and representations<sup>13</sup> of the Philippines in media and expositions such as the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904<sup>14</sup> depicted

<sup>11</sup> According to Evelyn Wareham, the “archives of the Spanish administration of the Mariana Islands in Guam were captured by the United States’ armed forces in the Spanish-American War, and relocated to the Library of Congress.” See Wareham (2002).

<sup>12</sup> At closer analysis, even the so-called neutral scientific laboratories and medical facilities that were established in support of American health and sanitation campaigns and research on tropical medicine had a more crucial role in justifying the annexation of the Islands. See Anderson (1995a, b) and Iletto (1995).

<sup>13</sup> For some interesting work on the early American representation of the Philippines, see Vergara (1995) and Holt (2002).

<sup>14</sup> The Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904, also known as the St. Louis World's Fair became the perfect venue “to show to the American people—and to the world—its newly acquired colony...to make Americans realize what its colony holds in promise in the way of potential wealth, opportunity for service, and exotic wonders.” See Fermin (2004, p. 37). “Standard World's Fair formulae positioned St. Louis to function as a source of expedient information about the new possession...” for the American population who were largely unfamiliar with the new insular possession. See Grindstaff (2004, p. 302). For a discussion on the Spanish archives of Louisiana, see Lemmon (1992).

the former Spanish colony as backward, uncivilized, unfit for self-governance and in need of American tutelage in the ways of democracy.<sup>15</sup>

In an effort to contextualize the centuries-long relationship between Spain and the Philippines, the Philippine Library facilitated the compilation and the translation into English of Spanish records pertaining to the country found in various repositories around the world. The resulting monumental compilation, boldly called *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1803*, (Blair and Robertson 1903–1909) became the most widely used historical source related to the islands. According to its authors,

The present work – its material carefully selected and arranged from a vast mass of printed works and unpublished manuscripts – is offered to the public with the intention and hope of *casting light on the great problems which confront the American people in the Philippines*; and of furnishing authentic and trustworthy material for a thorough and scholarly history of the islands. (Blair and Roberson 1903–1909, vol. I, p. 13) (itals. provided)

This work was one of the most influential texts used in the early part of the 20th century to claim the idea of a collective past and thus became the official reference on the history of the country. It is important to note, however, that the Spanish collection in the National Archives was never included in the published compilation. Thus, since the time it was gathered in the early 1900's until the time it became the archives of the nation, the Spanish records, while undoubtedly a collection of legitimate sources on Philippine history, is yet to be fully exploited.

The practice of keeping records and the use of record in governance and administration were mainly a Spanish colonial contribution. The origins of a “national archives,” on the other hand, can be traced in the early American colonial efforts to establish itself as the new imperial order and to take administrative control of the new insular possession. As the context of archives in the country is deeply associated with these two colonial powers, it is interesting to establish how this colonial creation is, ironically, being used to propagate the concept of a nation and has contributed to the idea of nationalism.

### Colonial archives and the idea of nation

In his keynote address for the first I-CHORA in 2003, Terry Cook, borrowing from David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*, designated the “archive” as a “foreign country” and argued that records and archives themselves have histories that have to be reckoned with and appreciated (Cook 2003). A similar analogy can be drawn for the archives of post-colonial Philippines. Written in archaic Spanish, the colonial archive is a distant and rarely visited foreign country to the people of the Philippines. What is “national” and what is the “nation” represented in the National Archives of the Philippines if its collection is hardly understood by the majority of the population and is rarely visited and used by scholars? How then did the colonial archives, which in themselves are an

---

<sup>15</sup> In order to justify America's annexation of the Philippines, U.S. President William McKinley proclaimed on 21 December 1898, 11 days after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the occupation of the Islands as “Benevolent Assimilation.” America took upon itself the task of “civilizing” and “educating” the Philippines to make the Filipinos become fit for self-governance.



accumulation of materials written in a language<sup>16</sup> totally alien to the vast majority of Filipinos, figure in propagating the notion of a homogenous nation?

A significant aspect of constructing the history of the colonial archives of the Philippines is understanding how it has evolved into what it is now—as the consciously acknowledged and officially recognized “national” archives. A completely foreign and colonial body of records, regarded as the product of a distinct tradition and divergent expressions of memory making, and considered one of the “technologies of rule”,<sup>17</sup> came to be appropriated into the national consciousness, and this was ironically made possible through the actualization of the American imperialistic ideals of “manifest destiny”, through “benevolent assimilation” and annexation of the Philippines.

Benedict Anderson, in his widely acclaimed work, *Imagined Communities*, explains that the interplay between capitalism and printing has made possible the fixity of language into unified fields of exchange and communication above the spoken vernaculars. This situation where the literate is favored gave rise to “national consciousness” and enabled Filipinos to imagine themselves as a sovereign nation. A commonly shared printed language, which evoked a feeling of connectivity “formed...the embryo of the nationally imagined community” out of diverse cultural communities and linguistic traditions that were all bound under colonial rule (Anderson 2003, pp. 37–46). With the impact of written, and consequently printed, language on the formation of formerly colonized into nation states, it can be argued that the American creation of a national archives for the Philippines somehow contributed to imagining the nation. Although foreign and hardly used, its mere presence as a national collection of centuries-old records reinforces the idea of the existence of the Philippines as a community with a common beginning. The National Archives, both as an institution of colonial creation and as a collection of records of colonial control, therefore, reinforces the imagined idea of nationhood.

## Conclusion

The practice of recordkeeping was a technology implemented in the Philippines as an integral part of the Spanish colonial administration. For the archipelago’s largely non-literate and uneducated indigenous population, written records served as objects of colonial domination and control, ensuring its continued rule of the colony. Upon the assumption of the U.S. as the new colonial regime in the country, and by virtue of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the Spanish records in the islands were collected and put together, thus fated to become the nation’s national archives. Although undeniably a colonial creation, the presence of a national archives embodies the notion of a common and collective past that contributes to the formation of “national consciousness” and consequently to the idea of nationhood of the Philippines.

The designation of something as the embodiment of the “nation” is sometimes arbitrary, contentious and can be tantamount to privileging one representation for another in order to suit nation-building agenda by a dominant few. Ann Laura Stoler, commenting on colonial-

<sup>16</sup> On the role of translation and the Castilian language in the emergence of Filipino nationalism, see Rafael (2005).

<sup>17</sup> A term borrowed from Stoler, A.L. (2002, p. 87). One example of the power of the record as a “technology of rule” can relate to the fact that for most part of the Spanish rule, the Philippines was governed through Acapulco in New Spain, or today’s Mexico, the port of harbor of the galleon trade after crossing the Pacific before proceeding to its ultimate destination, Europe. Because of the distance, colonial governance was made possible through royal orders and other official communications that were handed down from Spain. The implementation of the written rules relied on bureaucratic channels and Spanish colonial representatives. For details of the Galleon Trade, see Lyon (1990).

history writing in formerly colonized states, argues that nationalist historiographies are mainly shaped by “nation-bound projects” and that “...colonial states were first and foremost information-hungry machines in which power accrued from the massive accumulation of ever-more knowledge rather than the quality of it” (Stoler 2002). In the Philippines, it appears that the configuration of nationhood is inevitably linked to colonial regimes and the various struggles for self-determination. As Vicente Rafael fittingly declares,

Unable to find in the precolonial past a suitable source for establishing the archaic and therefore timeless stretch of the Filipino nation, nationalist historiography has instead looked to the moment of rupture from Spanish colonialism as the ground zero of its historical becoming. (Rafael 2002, p. 362)

The crucial role of the archives in anti-colonial mass revolutions and the struggles for nationhood of the Philippines widens the scope of how archives can be understood in a post-colonial milieu. One argument that can be forwarded is that both colonial and indigenous archives, each rooted in divergent traditions but converging into a specific setting, were active catalytic elements of social actions. Archives in this context must be reckoned with beyond their passive utilitarian and evidentiary functions or even as enabling tools of dominance and control by the colonizer to the colonized, but as a manifestation of “resistance and accommodation” (Thomas 1994, p. 15) and the continuing and dynamic negotiation of national identity. According to Nicholas Thomas,

In many cases, what may appear as the exercise of colonial hegemony – the imposition of Christianity, for example – is in fact better understood as the appropriation of introduced institutions, material objects or discourses to strategic effect on the part of colonized peoples... (Thomas 1994)

The assimilation of indigenous memory-making expressions into colonial traditions and the imposition of recordkeeping in colonial administration can be further examined for their more pivotal role in revolutionary and nationalist movements. The conversion of the Spanish archives into the Philippine national archives, made possible through the efforts of the early American colonial administration, illustrates the close relationship of colonialism and nationhood with archives.

## References

- American Historical Association (1912) Annual report of the American historical association for the year 1910. American Historical Association, Washington
- American Historical Association (1912) Annual report of the American historical association for the year 1910. American Historical Association, Washington
- Anderson W (1995a) Where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. In: Rafael V (ed) *Discrepant histories: translocal essays on Filipino cultures*. Anvil Publishing, Manila
- Anderson W (1995b) *Colonial pathologies: American medicine in the Philippines, 1898–1921*. UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Anderson B (2003) *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Anvil Publishing, Philippines
- Blair EH, Robertson JA (1903–1909) *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1803: explorations by early navigators, descriptions of the islands and their peoples, their history and records of the catholic missions, as related in contemporaneous books and manuscripts, showing the political, economic, commercial and religious conditions of those Islands from their earliest relations with European nations to the beginning of the nineteenth century*, 55 vols. A.H. Clark, Cleveland, Ohio
- Bureau of Records Management (1976a) National archives at 75. *Archiviana* October 1976:50
- Bureau of Records Management (1976b) National archives: past, present and future. *Archiviana* October 1976:3
- Constantino R (1978) *The Philippines: a past revisited*. Tala Publishing, Quezon City

- Cook T (2003) The archive is a foreign country: rediscovering records in history. In: First international conference on the history of records and archives (I-CHORA). Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, 2 October 2003
- Fermin JD (2004) 1904 the world's fair: the Filipino experience. University of the Philippines Press, Quezon City
- Ford WC (1910) Public records in our dependencies. In: Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1904. Washington
- Grindstaff BK (2004) Creating identity: exhibiting the Philippines at the 1904 St. Louisiana purchase exposition. In: Preziosi D, Farago C (eds) Grasping the world: the idea of the museum. Ashgate Publishing, England
- Hernández V (1999) Trends in Philippine library history. In: 65th IFLA council and general assembly. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Bangkok, Thailand, 20–28 August 1999. <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/039-138e.htm>. Consulted 1 February 2006
- Holt EM (2002) Colonizing Filipinas: nineteenth-century representations of the Philippines in western historiography. Ateneo De Manila University Press, Quezon City
- Ileto RC (1981) Pasyon and revolution: popular movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910. Ateneo De Manila University Press, Quezon City
- Ileto RC (1998) Filipinos and their revolution: event, discourse, and historiography. Ateneo De Manila University Press, Quezon City
- Ileto RC (1995) Cholera and the origins of the American sanitary order in the Philippines. In: Rafael V (ed) Discrepant histories: translocal essays on Filipino cultures. Anvil Publishing, Manila
- Lemmon AE (1992) The archival legacy of Spanish Louisiana's colonial records. *Am Archivist* 55(Winter):142–154
- Lyon E (1990) Track of the Manila Galleon. *National Geogr* 178(3):5–37
- Philippine Commission (1901) The public records. In: Report of the Philippine commission for the year 1901. Government Printing Office, Washington
- Philippine Commission (1901) Spanish records in the provinces (Appendix AA). In: Report of the Philippine commission for the year 1901, pp 506–510
- Philippine Commission (1902) Archives. In: Report of the Philippine commission for the year 1902. Government Printing Office, Washington, pp 44–45
- Plehn CC (1962) Taxation in the Philippines. *J History* [Published by the Philippine National Historical Society] 10(2):145–192
- Rafael V (2005) The promise of the foreign: nationalism and the technics of translation in the Spanish Philippines. Duke University Press
- Rafael V (2002) Parricides, bastards and counterrevolution: reflections on the Philippine Centennial. In: Shaw AV, Francia LH (eds) Vestiges of war: the Philippine American war and the aftermath of an imperial dream 1899–1999. New York University Press, New York
- Records Management and Archives Office (2000) The national archives modernization project. RMAO, Manila
- Salcedo C (1998) Prehistoric writing. In: *Kasaysayan: history of the Filipino people*, vol 2. Asia Publishing, pp 221–229
- Shaw AV, Francia LH (eds) (2002) Vestiges of war: The Philippine American war and the aftermath of an imperial dream 1899–1999. New York University Press, New York
- Stoler AL (2002) Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Sci* 2(1–2):100
- Thomas N (1994) Colonialism's culture: anthropology, travel and government. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK
- Vergara BM Jr (1995) Displaying Filipinos: photography and colonialism in early 20th century Philippines. University of the Philippine Press, Quezon city
- Wareham E (2002) From explorers to evangelists: archivists, recordkeeping, and remembering in the Pacific Islands. *Archival Sci* 2(3):187–207
- Wickberg EB (1955) Spanish records in the Philippine national archives. *Hispanic Am Historical Rev* 35(1):78

## Biography

**Ricardo L. Punzalan** is a doctoral student at the School of Information, University of Michigan. He is also an Assistant Professor of Archival Studies at the School of Library and Information Studies, University of the Philippines and a Bureau Member of the Section on Archival Education and Training, International Council on Archives. His research

interests include the exploration of ‘record’ and ‘recordkeeping’ within the context of the museum’s function of collections information management and documentation, the concept of archives in non-literate and oral societies of the Philippines, archival policies during colonial transitions, and how visual archives relate to stigma and the collective memory of leprosy in the Philippines.