
THE AFTERLIFE OF EMPIRE:
SOVEREIGNTY AND REVOLUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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I.

Like many other nation-states, the Philippines is marked by an imperial inheritance. Over three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, for example, have left behind a certain idea of sovereignty rooted in Christian thinking. It is an idea of sovereignty that gives the ruler the freedom to take exception to the law. Whether embodied by the king, by the state or, in its nationalist revolutionary moment, by the people, sovereignty is the power to define and decide upon what is exceptional, so exceptional as to warrant the breaking of laws in view of either preserving or destroying the existing order and establishing a new one altogether. In Carl Schmitt's oft-quoted definition, "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"¹ It is the sovereign who, in founding the law, gives to himself the license to operate both inside and outside of it. The self-legislating and self-granting agency of the sovereign is precisely what allows him to decide who will live and who will die, and what forms such living and dying are to take; who is the friend and who is the enemy and the terms of such friendship and enmity; and who is the citizen and who is the foreigner and the laws of citizenship that allow for the assimilation or expulsion of the foreigner.

The power to *decide* on the exception—to break with the norm, rupturing the precedents and processes of deliberation and debate—gives to sovereignty an absolutist nature. Jean Bodin writing some three and a half centuries earlier (1576) foreshadows Schmidt in saying that "Sovereignty is not limited either in power or in function or in length of time... For he is absolutely sovereign who recognizes nothing, after God, that is greater than himself."² Sovereignty as absolute power is thus absolutely free of any obligations and conditions. This makes it a kind of impossible power, truly exceptional because beholden to no one and nothing else but God. However, rather than serve as a limit, God here figures an infinite force, exceeding any attempt at codification into positive human law. Like a pure gift, it can neither be calculated nor reciprocated. That true sovereignty is beholden only to God's laws means that the latter enables the former. The sovereign comes to be the sole agent of Divine power. He thereby embodies the impossible possibility of a thoroughly non-human, immortal power manifesting itself in the world.³

It is arguably the legacy of this absolutist notion of sovereignty that constitutes the afterlife of empire. It haunts every articulation of democracy in postcolonial societies, the ghost that both enlivens and poisons the nationalist struggles for freedom and social justice. In this paper, I will ask how this paradoxical notion of sovereignty comes about in the Philippines.

II.

We can begin with Spanish regime.⁴ At the cornerstone of Spanish imperialism was the institution of the Patronato Real or Royal Patronage of the Catholic Church. Emblematic of the vanguard role of the Spanish Crown in the Counter-Reformation, the Patronato Real obligated the monarch to supply the material and military needs of the Church and further its planetary project of evangelization. It grew out of the imperative to conjugate colonialism with Catholic conversion.

¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters On the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.5.

² Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters from Six Books on the Commonwealth*, edited and translated by Julian H. Franklin, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 3.

³ Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, 8-11.

⁴ My account of the Spanish colonial period is largely taken from my earlier works, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*, Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993; and *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*, Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2005.

Beginning with a series of Papal Bulls between 1486 to 1493, the Crown received the Indies as a Papal “donation,” a gift for which it would assume the responsibility of converting its native peoples. The Patronato also granted the Crown the right to all tithes collected in the Indies and, more important, the privilege to appoint bishops and assign parishes that fell vacant in all the colonies beginning 1508. Evangelization in turn legitimized conquest as a supremely moral undertaking designed to liberate the very subjects it subjugated, filling them with the Word of God that resonated with the Will of the Spanish King. Acting as the “vicar of Christ,” the King enjoyed what some Dominican theologians described as a “supernatural sovereignty” over the Indies. Unlike the “natural sovereignty” that local princes exercised to insure the earthly needs of their people, supernatural sovereignty meant that the King was obligated to act in ways that would insure the salvation of the souls of all colonial subjects. He was thus expected to use everything within his powers to intervene and protect Christian converts against the threat of non-Christians, including the creation of the global conditions necessary to spread the Word of God.¹

In a similar vein, the Laws of the Indies (*Recopilación de las leyes de los reinos de Indias*, 1681) were meant not only to address and synthesize the administrative complexity of empire. It was also cast as the positive encoding of natural law, which in turn was thought to derive from Divine Law. The first law of *Recopilación*, for example, situates colonization as the work of evangelization. It lays out the law as if it were continuous with the confession of the Faith:

“God, our Lord, through His infinite Mercy and Goodness has designed to give us, unworthy as we are, such a great portion of His Dominion in this world, and having joined in our Royal person the great kingdoms of our glorious progenitors...has obligated us further to... employ all the forces and power that He has given us to work so that He may be known and adored all over the world as the true God, as in fact He is, and the Creator of all that is visible and invisible; and desiring the glory of the Holy Roman Catholic Church among the Heathen and Nations that inhabit the Indies, Islands and Other Lands of the Oceans as well as other parts subject to our dominion, and so that everyone universally shall enjoy the admirable beneficence of the Resurrection through the Blood of Christ our Lord, we pray and entreat the native of our Indies who may not have yet received the Faith, since our end is to provide and to deliver to them Teachers and Preachers, for the purpose of their conversion and salvation, that they should receive and listen benignly to and believe totally in the doctrine of the Faith. And we command that all natives and Spaniards and other Christians of the various Provinces and Nations... firmly believe and simply confess the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons and one True God, the Articles of the Faith, and all that is taught and preached by the Holy Mother Roman Catholic Church... ”²

We can see then how Spanish imperialism was sustained by a kind of political theology. State power was understood in ideal terms as the expression and extension of Divine power; while human law was regarded as the instruments for the actualization of natural and Divine Law. In this context, sovereignty possessed what we might think of as a magical quality owing to its transcendent source. Because it rested on that which was immortal and non-human, its force was such that it could break with and thereby free itself from every human norm and custom so as to

¹ For a discussion of the Patronato Real, see Horacio de la Costa, SJ, “Church and State in the Philippines During the Administration of Bishop Salazar, 1581-1594,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, v.30, no.3, (Aug., 1950), 314-335; John Leddy Phelan, “Some Ideological Aspects of the Conquest of the Philippines,” *The Americas*, v.13, no.3, (June 1957), 221-239; J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Briatania and Spain in America, 1492-1830*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 68-69; 198.

² From the facsimile of the 4th ed. , *Recopilación de las leyes de los reinos de Indias* (1681), Madrid: Consejo de Hispanidad, 1943. Long in the making, the *Recopilación* contained numerous provisions which were modified, if not ignored in their specifics in various parts of the Indies. Indeed, each vice-royalty soon came out with their own versions of the laws, though the general ideological thrust of these Laws remained essentially the same. See Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 128.

pave the way for the emergence of new social order under God's name. Colonial intervention in the name of Christian conversion was thus construed as an act of liberation. It was a means for establishing the King's supernatural sovereignty to free native peoples where before only the tyranny of paganism and demonic practices existed. Not surprisingly, this stunningly modern conception of imperialism¹ was predicated on an order constituted in and through a hierarchy that reached down from heaven to earth: God, King, colonial officials and missionaries ruling over local elites and the mass of male and female natives. It was an order that was further articulated by a linguistic hierarchy with Latin as God's language and Castilian as the idiom of the King and his officials on top while the myriad of local vernaculars was reserved as the speech of empire's native subjects below.²

Spanish political theology, however, was far from seamless. The actual exercise of sovereignty was mired in the material complications of historical contingencies: corrupt officials, for example, or rebellious natives. Church and State relations were as mutually dependent as they were antagonistic, as each sought to gain absolute prerogative over the other. Symptomatic of these tensions was the essential yet odd position of the missionary priest.³ The key importance of evangelization placed the Spanish missionary as an indispensable relay in the transmission of God's Word and the King's Will. Often the only representative of empire in the farthest reaches of the realm, the missionary enjoyed considerable influence and great latitude in interpreting, or more often, disregarding the laws of the King in the name of preserving and furthering God's laws. The missionary's power was further enhanced by his knowledge of native speech. It allowed him to stand as the indispensable mediator between colonizers and colonized, translating between the demands of one and the responses of the other. Capable of traversing different political, social and linguistic realms, the missionary occupied a position at a remove from all these. In this way, the clergy constituted a critical force within colonial society. Intimately, at times oppressively involved in the day to day affairs of the people, he came to possess the power to decide on the exception—for example, abusive colonial officials, accused sorcerers, heterodox ritual practices, or subversive nationalists. This capacity for deciding not only on what was an exception but how to deal with it turned the clergy into a kind of sovereign power himself, often undercutting the authority of the King's colonial representatives in Manila. The missionary was thus a kind of double agent, simultaneously enacting and limiting, enabling while challenging the absolutist vocation of the King's supernatural sovereignty.

By the later nineteenth century, the contradictions of Spanish sovereignty would become stunningly apparent to an emergent racially-mixed colonial bourgeoisie.⁴ Indeed, the emergence of nationalist thought was in part a response to the highly problematic role of the Spanish friar in at once ratifying and usurping a sovereign power whose origins was understood to lie in an extra-terrestrial and supra-human source. Resentful yet envious of the friar's proximity to this power, the first generation of Filipino nationalists, called *ilustrados*, or the enlightened ones, began a steady campaign to remove or at least neutralize missionary influence spurred by Enlightenment ideals of progress. Desirous of tapping into the sovereign, which is no less than the magical power of the state by way of assimilation into Spanish society and gaining representation in the Spanish Cortes, *ilustrado* nationalists as self-styled sons of the nation accused the friars of blocking the path of their political ambitions. They blamed the *soberania monacal*, or monastic sovereignty, as Marcelo H. del

¹ See for example the nineteenth century notions of "manifest destiny," and "benevolent assimilation" in the case of the United States—or Operation Iraqi Freedom in our own time.

² For a detailed discussion of the linguistic basis of Spanish colonial rule, see Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*. For an overview of the structure of the Spanish colonial bureaucracy, see John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

³ See for example, de la Costa, "Church and State in the Philippines"; John Schumacher, SJ, *Father Jose Burgos: A Documentary History*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999; Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*.

⁴ For an extended discussion on the origins of Filipino nationalism, see Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*. See also John Schumacher, SJ, *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895*, Revised ed., Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997.

Pilar put it, for all the country's ills.¹ The friars responded by threatening ilustrados with imprisonment and ex-communication. Calling each other *filibusteros*, or subversives, and thus traitors to the patria, Spanish friars and Filipino ilustrados sought to portray the one as the negation of the other. In doing so, each claimed the right to call itself the real patriot and thus a sovereign citizen while casting the other precisely as the exception to be expelled from the body politic.

Given the racial logic of imperial rule, it is not surprising that the Spanish state despite its disdain for the friars would side with them against the growing militancy of Filipino nationalists. As separatist sentiments took hold, there arose a secret revolutionary society called the Katipunan, literally "the gathering." With the Spanish discovery of its secret cells, colonial authorities were seized with terror at the prospect of a mass uprising. With the eruption of the Revolution in August of 1896, imperial sovereignty entered into a prolonged period of crisis from which it would never fully recover.

III.

What was the revolution and how would it come to re-appropriate Spanish sovereignty? Among the revolutionists, some of the most astute answers came from Apoloniario Mabini (1864-1903), the most important theoretician of the Revolution and the most gifted advisor of Emilio Aguinaldo, leader of the First Filipino Republic. Born in the Tagalog province of Batangas of indio parents of modest means, Mabini was educated in philosophy and law in Manila. Contracting an illness that left him paralyzed from the waist down in 1896, he had to be transported by hammock during the revolution as the Revolutionary Government sought to elude American forces. Popularly known as the "sublime paralytic," Mabini, unlike other prominent nationalist leaders, never traveled outside the Philippines except when he was exiled to Guam by the Americans for refusing to take the oath to the U.S. occupation government. It is thus all the more remarkable that Mabini's pronounced disability allowed rather than impeded a robust and sophisticated formulation of the revolutionary theory.²

Filipinos fought, Mabini claimed, to attain independence but not as an end in itself. Rather, it was to be the means to arrive at a "moral government" with which to secure the conditions for the general "well-being" and "happiness" of the country. Such conditions required, furthermore, a popularly elected and truly representative government that would, as he told the American military commander, General Joseph Wheeler, "assure all Filipinos of the freedom of thought, conscience, association; privacy of their persons, houses and correspondences; popular representation in the drafting of laws and imposition of taxes." While the Revolution, according to Mabini, may have started out as an act of vengeance in 1896, it had by 1898 become transformed into something else: a manifestation of the irresistible movement of Reason around the world.³

In his writings, Mabini repeatedly situates the Philippine Revolution as a continuation of the American and the French Revolutions, inspired by the same ideals and moved by the same aspirations for liberty, equality and fraternity. Such he argued, lent to the Revolution a cosmopolitan character in contrast to Spanish and American insistence that it was merely a Tagalog uprising. For Mabini, national history when seen through the optic of the Revolution was in fact an aspect of Universal history that placed Filipinos at the vanguard of a global anti-colonial movement.⁴ It is this shared history of revolutionary beginnings that Mabini reminds Americans of in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris and in the midst of the Filipino-American war. Indeed, in fighting the Americans, Filipinos, "show to the United States that they possess sufficient culture to know their rights.... They hope that the war reminds the Americans what their [i.e., the Americans'] forefathers had to sustain in their past against the English for the emancipation of their Colonies and what is today the free states of North America. At the time [of their own revolution], the

¹ Marcelo H. del Pilar, *La soberanía monacal en Filipinas*, Barcelona: Imprenta Iberica de Francisco Fossas, 1888; and del Pilar, *La frailocracia Filipina*, Barcelona: Imprenta Iberica de Francisco Fossas, 1889.

² The standard biography of Mabini is Cesar Adib Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1960.

³ *LRF II*, 56-57; 125; 134-35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

Americans were in the place of the Filipinos today.... [T]he fighting is not due therefore to race hatred, but [to] the same principles sealed by the blood of their forefathers.”¹

From Mabini’s perspective then, the Revolution was neither a race war nor a criminal act of uncivilized people as both Spaniards and Americans had claimed. Rather, it was the most compelling evidence of the people’s enlightenment suggesting, thereby, an emergent historical kinship between revolutionary Filipinos and civilized Americans and Europeans. Such is underlined by the fact that, as Mabini points out, the Filipino people fought to recover and protect their “natural right” to be free and in so doing, joined their fate to that of all civilized peoples in the world. Indeed, it was because they were willing to sacrifice and die for their rights that Filipinos showed themselves capable of self-rule. For Mabini, it was never the Declaration of Independence of June 12, 1898 nor the establishment of the Malolos Republic and Constitution that proved Filipino capacity for independence. In fact, he had repeatedly criticized these institutions as premature, and early on saw how they were being used by the ilustrados to put an end to the Revolution, in effect re-colonizing the nation under their rule. Rather it was the very fact of risking their lives to fight injustice that filled a people with what he and Rizal before him called “virtue,” that is, the ability to place the common good above one’s self-interests, a capacity he felt scandalously lacking among the elite leaders of the Republic. For Mabini then, sacrifice borne of virtue was the essence of the Revolution, the basis of its legitimacy and the proof of its modernity. Founded on Reason and stemming from “natural law,” it was propelled by a virtuous people simultaneously enacting the very thing it sought to restore to itself: its own sovereignty.²

In Mabini’s account of the history leading up to the Revolution, he cites a common theme in nationalist historical thinking: that a bond of friendship and mutual support characterized the initial relationship between indios and Spaniards sealed by the blood compact, or *pacto de sangre*. This originary social contract was betrayed by Spanish duplicity and oppression, and Filipinos would respond by rebelling.³ By breaking the social contract, the Spaniards had broken the natural law. So, too, had the Americans who, in signing the Treaty of Paris (1899), assumed sovereignty over the Philippines from Spain in exchange for the sum of \$20 million. For Mabini, such an act amounted to treating the Filipinos as if they were slaves to be bought and sold, and so represented a barbaric regression on America’s part. In using the instruments of positive international law, the Americans gained legal title to the Philippines, but did so by violating natural law that forbade slavery and the usurpation of another people’s sovereignty.⁴

In rising up first against the Spaniards then against the Americans, Filipinos were seeking to restore what justly pertained to them. “Then and now our battle cry remains to be natural law, the eternal foundation and regulator of justice and of all human laws. It is God’s law promulgated in men’s conscience....” Natural law in turn “recognizes no other sovereignty except that of the people....[T]heir precepts are orders from Divine Reason dictated to the human conscience.”⁵ Popular sovereignty derived from natural law is thus a function of Divine sovereignty and so shares in its unassailable and absolute nature. Relying on the very scholastic categories he learned from the friars, Mabini frames the Revolution as a providential event that reveals God’s will in the recovery of a people’s natural rights. In breaking with the politics of empire, he also reiterates its political theology. In attempting to undo imperial claims, he resorts to a language of rights that finds its ultimate sanction in the Christian notion of natural law.⁶ Sovereignty in this case rests on the people but only insofar as they are infused with Divine Reason and thus become the privileged instruments

¹ Ibid., 196.

² Ibid., 53-59; 206-209; 300-325.

³ *LRF II*, 278-279. For an extended discussion of the significance of the blood compact in late nineteenth century nationalist thinking, see Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, chapter 7.

⁴ *LRF II*, 72-74; 131; 161-167.

⁵ Ibid., 93; 54-55.

⁶ Mabini was drawing, as many of his fellow ilustrados were, on the idea of natural law rooted in Scholasticism, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas. See for example the selections on natural law taken from the *Summa Theologica*, in Anton C. Pegis, ed., *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Random House, 1945, pp.616-645. See also the useful discussion in Cesar Adib Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution*, Quezon City: Univ. of the Philippines Press, 1960, pp.79-84.

of His will. Their freedom, if it exists at all, is indissociable from their subordination to and assimilation of His awesome power. In this sense, Revolution as the recovery of a people's right to be sovereign is also paradoxically the restoration of God's unending rule over man just as it is man's assumption of the Divine right to rule.

It is important, however, to stress that Mabini's texts do not merely occasion the return of imperial-Christian ghosts. There is another powerful force which inhabits all of Mabini's writings, and that is of course the Revolution whose eruption points to other possibilities. The Revolution comes across not simply as the medium for the restoration of absolute sovereignty in a national body that would lead to rational institutions even as it restores social hierarchy. It can also appear as a radically new, profoundly unrecognizable and therefore thoroughly inhuman force. In one essay, Mabini writes of the fear and trembling that the Philippine Revolution had struck in the hearts of other European colonizers who saw it as "contagious, very contagious." For the Revolution "bears in its volcanic bosom the germ of yellow fever or the bubonic plague, which is fatal to their colonial interests. In the not so distant future, it could constitute the uncontrollable dike against their overwhelming ambitions." In another piece, he writes that "...the American authorities will understand that it is senseless to claim that the Revolution can be stifled by force because there is no human force capable of preventing the natural flow of things." And in addressing the conservative ilustrados Pedro Paterno and Felipe Buencamino, he warns of the "dangers" that another revolution would bring should the Republic negotiate with the Americans without first securing the recognition of Filipino rights. Without justice, there can be no peace, he avers; only an unending uprising beyond the Republic's—or any other regime's--control.¹

In this and other passages, the Revolution exceeds both human and, it would seem, Divine agency. Its "naturalness" leads not to the creation of new institutions much less to the revelation of Divine Reason, but to sheer destruction. Like a plague, it knows no boundaries and respects no rank, inflicting everyone with its relentless violence. Its effects are unforeseen and beyond anticipation, incurring losses beyond calculation. In this sense, the Revolution becomes an event that cannot be recuperated for social uses inasmuch as it impairs the very mechanisms and agencies of social recuperation. Leading neither to restoration nor return, the Revolution here is imagined to escape the sovereign determination of both the human and the divine. In the name of justice, the Revolution as such could just as easily sow injustice, or more precisely—and here is the source of real terror--confuse men's minds about the difference between the two. Such is the case for example when revolutionary fighters find themselves overcome with urges they cannot control. Mabini at one point imagines the following scenario:

"We took the enemy by surprise and made them prisoners. Our easily-won victory made us conceited. We grouped the soldier into two, assigning one to attend to the prisoners. We ordered the soldiers to tie the hands of the prisoners and shoot them after stripping them of their money, clothes and jewelry. Immediately afterwards, we commanded the other group to go over every house and confiscate the money, jewelry and clothes that they find inside cabinets and boxes. They were also ordered to take the prettiest women and then burn the town. The last words of the order had barely left our lips when a thunderous voice shouted: God, humanity, progress! We looked up at the sky and it was red as blood. We gazed at the sea and we saw it turning over, hurling foam and pounding the shore. It roared furiously and threatened to flood and drown everything. The mountains rumbled and the ground shook beneath our feet. We then hurriedly withdrew the orders as terror and dread overcame us".²

Here, Mabini paints a lurid account of Revolution unmoored from Reason and bereft of virtue. No doubt this scenario was based on reports that the Malolos Republic was constantly

¹ *Ibid.*, 48; 206; 180.

² *LRF II*, 66-67.

receiving regarding the abuses of the revolutionary army.¹ The “fever” of the Revolution infects fighters with an exaggerated pride that leads them to assume arbitrary power over their prisoners, women, and property. It leads them, that is, to take exception to all consideration of law, natural as well positive, acting with a kind of violence freed from all restraints. For them, sovereignty devolves into sheer destructive power, and it is not until Divine retribution is threatened that they are overcome with the very terror that they themselves had unleashed.

Side by side with the concept of the Revolution as the collective sacrifice and struggle with which to restore a people’s natural rights protected by a Republican state, there is thus the on-going danger of the Revolution as the dissolution of such rights, unleashing a state of permanent violence by way of civil war. In such a case, society would be reduced to a “corpse,” that is, a body without its soul. Mabini writes,

The same happens in all societies. If there is no more than the reunion of men that move with neither direction, nor order nor harmony, society becomes a veritable corpse, because what one does the other will surely undo. It will not be long when this gathering will fight among themselves and dissolve themselves like a corpse that does not take long to decompose. It is thus necessary to have a soul that will move this gathering towards one sense or another, and this soul is authority. How does authority function? It functions like the human soul, inasmuch as society is nothing more than a great individual, comparable to a giant.²

By raising the possibility of pure violence, the Revolution turns every man against every form of authority and thus threatens to rob society of its soul. In doing so, it converts society into a spectral version of itself. It is in light of this permanent possibility of social death that authority becomes essential as a way of resurrecting social life. Furthermore, it is an authority which, as Mabini repeatedly reminds us, resides in the people.³ The notion of popular sovereignty thus turns on (in all senses of that phrase) the Revolution as much as the Revolution promises to re-turn popular sovereignty. On the one hand, popular sovereignty seeks to contain the Revolution from unleashing pure violence that will kill society. On the other hand, it is precisely the Revolution that creates the people as the locus of sovereign power in the first place. The Revolution then constantly disrupts the question of sovereignty. It challenges not only the colonial state’s and the Catholic Church’s claims of possessing absolute power; it also sabotages popular assertions of such power. Similarly, the Revolution dramatizes the innate capacity of a people guided by a law natural to all humans to protect their rights and demand recognition from others. At the same time, it threatens to violate not only positive human laws but putative natural laws—what today we more commonly refer to as “human rights”—giving rise to a spectral society incapable of making or preserving laws as such, and thereby unable to distinguish between just and unjust acts.

Put another way, we can think of the Revolution working as a principle of deconstruction in the world. It periodically calls into question various claims of sovereignty whether based on the reason of force or the force of reason. It undermines imperial hegemony and its political theology, linking the nation with other global movements of progress and democracy. But it also excavates the irrational foundations of rational institutions, exposing the terror-filled excesses of the sacrificial economy of virtue. It is, however, important to stress that the deconstructive effect of the Revolution does not end with the sheer destruction of oppressive social orders; nor does it rest mainly on the propagation of terror and the spread of criminality. Other accounts of the Revolution left behind by Filipino fighters suggest that it was always something more than the practical unraveling of the received notions of sovereignty as we have seen in our reading of Mabini. They also reveal how the Revolution occasionally opened up the possibility of another kind of sovereignty, one that did not entail the exercise of power and the delusions of empowerment. Rather, it was a kind of sovereignty that stemmed from a vernacular experience of freedom, or

¹ See Milagros Guerrero, “Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society, 1898-1902,” Unpublished PhD dissertation, Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1977, chapter 3.

² *LRF II*, 68-69.

³ *Ibid.*, 69.

what in Tagalog is called *kalayaan*: that is, freedom from the necessity of labor and the violence of law.

IV.

In approaching these other accounts of the Revolution, it might help first of all to briefly consider an alternative notion of sovereignty offered by the French writer Georges Bataille (1897-1962). Bataille of course has no direct connection to the Philippines. But in the spirit of Mabini invoking analogies between the Philippine and the French revolutions when addressing his American interlocutors, I want to broach an analogy between Bataille's thinking about a non-theological notion of sovereignty and the experience of revolution recorded in other Filipino accounts, hoping that one might help illuminate the other.

For Bataille, sovereignty entails not the exercise of the absolute power to take exception, but rather the joyful consumption of surplus beyond the boundaries of what is useful and productive. "Life beyond utility," he writes, "is the domain of the sovereign."¹ In this way, sovereignty has to do neither with self-government nor with the governing of others that would require subservience to a dialectic of dependency and recognition between ruler and ruled. Instead, sovereignty for Bataille comes from the enjoyment of that which is "savored" rather than employed as an instrument for something else. "The sovereign, if he is not imaginary, truly enjoys the products of this world—beyond his needs. His sovereignty resides in this. Let us say that the sovereign (or sovereign life) begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit."²

This limitless opening up of life: how can we understand this?

We can take, for example, the account of Santiago Alvarez (1872-1930), one of the leaders of the Filipino revolution. In his memoirs written in the 1920s, Alvarez recalls life in the liberated towns of Cavite, a province south of Manila, during the initial flush of victory against the Spanish forces in September, 1896. Reading it, we get a sense of the experience of sovereignty as sheer enjoyment beyond what is useful and productive:

During those times, the Enemy did not launch any attacks...The people were truly happy (*totoong masaya*). Free in their enjoyment of different diversions, abundant food, everything was cheap, and there were no criminals, no thieves, or pickpockets. Each loved the other (*lahat ay may pagmamahal sa kapwa*) and from one end of the town to the other, sibling love (*pag-ibig-kapatid*) which is the teaching of the Katipunan, reigned supreme. The terrifying envoys of death, as signaled by the rushing sounds of canons fired by the Enemy, were regarded with indifference. Everyone simply ducked and avoided them, and trusting in God, the children, the elders, women and men, did not fear death...³

In another passage, Alvarez speaks of people, "mad (*nag-uulol*) with happiness. At the sound of canon fire, they would laugh as if these were merely the sound of fireworks at a celebration.... There was singing, dancing, eating under the shade of trees, gambling and cockfighting everywhere, all of which set aside the anticipation of having to offer blood and life...."

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¹ George Bataille, "Sovereignty," in *The Accursed Share*, 3 volumes, translated by Richard Hurley, New York: Zone Books, 1993. The quote comes from v. 3, 198. For an exhaustive biography of Bataille, see Michael Surya, *Georges Bataille: an Intellectual Biography*, translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, London: Verso, 2002.

² *Ibid.*, 198.

³ Santiago V. Alvarez, *Katipunan at ang Paghibimagsik*, translated Paula Carolina Malay as *The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992. 281. All translations from the Tagalog are mine.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

Alongside accounts of horrific battles, heroic sacrifices, and unforgivable betrayals, Alvarez's memoirs are peppered with recollections of these moments of "mad" happiness. To be sure, these did not last long. The state of "sibling love" could neither be consolidated nor sustained in the face of Spanish attacks and the factional strife that would eventually tear the revolutionary movement apart. But it is precisely their surprising and ephemeral occurrences that Alvarez and his readers savor, lingering on the memory of moments which could be neither consolidated nor institutionalized. Rather, the pleasure of recalling the experience of liberation here comes precisely from their vanishing.¹

These moments in Alvarez's account resonate with the memoirs of one of the most prominent revolutionary leader and president of the First Philippine Republic, Emilio Aguinaldo. Writing in the 1960s, Aguinaldo relishes the "delicious" memories of the early days of the Revolution: "How delicious (sarap) to remember the purest (dalisay) and perfect oneness (pagkakaisa) during those days when revolutionaries and townspeople were joined in one purpose: to save the Mother Country (Inang Bayan) from its pitiful condition."² Aguinaldo refers to this intimate "oneness" between and among fighters and townspeople as "pag-iibigan," or love. Such love was "truly impressive. Because of this, one would never hear of robberies, or rapes, or extortions that used to happen night and day. And it was even delightful to see men and women going about all day in complete peace without anyone disturbing them, and that everyone greeted each other brother/sister (kapatid)."³

This sense of oneness and ease of movement bespoke of a freedom from fear and need. Felt as a kind of intense love between revolutionary fighters and townspeople, this freedom arises from what Aguinaldo refers to as "damayan," from the root word "damay:" to mourn a loss as well as to sympathize with that of an other's. It also means to participate and share in the other's work, to bear the other's sorrow and so to answer to his or her need.⁴ As an ethic of compassion, damayan generates the radical identification of one with the other, implicating each in the other's deeds and sentiments. Revolutionary love consists precisely of continuous acts of "damayan" as when townspeople enthusiastically greet arriving revolutionaries with great shows of generosity: "they invited all of the troops to come and eat so that all the houses served food without anyone asking them to;" "When those from there (i.e., Talisay) saw us... they were overcome with joy (galak)... All of the houses, even the smallest huts, eagerly fed and welcomed the troops;" "When we arrived in Silang, we were enthusiastically greeted and the food they served the troops was incredible..."⁵ These and similar accounts of generosity are described by Aguinaldo as examples of "buong pagdamay", of complete sympathy and reciprocity between the fighters and the people. Damayan as the basis of revolutionary sociality brings "galak", or joy, and "ginhawa", peacefulness, ease, and comfort to everyone, regardless of their social position. It is for this reason that acts of damayan conjure a sense of freedom, or kalayaan: "...We should not forget the sweetness of our damayan," Aguinaldo says at one point to hundreds of followers wishing to follow his troops into the mountains as they retreated from advancing Spanish forces, "... that sooner or later we might attain our cherished freedom (kalayaan)."⁶ Damayan is thus not only the substance of revolutionary love; it is also the path to a different kind of sovereign existence.

We can perhaps better appreciate this notion of sovereign experience in the memoirs of Alvarez and Aguinaldo by briefly inquiring into its vernacular context. Sovereignty that arises from acts of damayan is deeply associated with *kalayaan*, the Tagalog word usually translated as "freedom." It is important to note, however, that there is no easy correspondence between these two words, "freedom" and "kalayaan." As the historian Reynaldo Ileto has pointed out, "kalayaan" has meant both more *and* less than "freedom," holding a range of connotations that exceed words such as "independence," "autonomy" and the political-theological implications of "sovereignty."

¹ Bataille, "Sovereignty," 200.

² Emilio Aguinaldo, *Mga Gunita ng Himagsikan*, Cavite (?): Cristina Aguinaldo Suntay, 1964, 117.

³ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴ Pedro Serrano Laktaw, *Diccionario Tagalo-Hispano, Segunda parte*, Manila: Santos y Bernal, 1914, 203-204. 34 Aguinaldo, 81; 111. 117; 147.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

Pointing out the historical link between *katipunan*—the word as well as the name of the secret revolutionary organization—and *kalayaan*, Iletto writes:

The meaning of “wholeness” or “becoming one” implied by the term *katipunan* is also contained in *kalayaan*. Prior to the rise of the separatist movement, *kalayaan* did not mean “freedom” or “independence.” [It is]... built upon the [root] word *layaw* or *laya*, which means “satisfaction of one’s needs,” “pampering treatment by parents,” or “freedom from strict parental control.” Thus *kalayaan* as a political term is inseparable from its connotations of parent-child relationship reflecting social values like the tendency of mothers in lowland Philippines to pamper their children and develop strong emotional ties with them. Childhood is fondly remembered as a kind of “lost Eden,” a time of *kaginhawaan* (contentment) and *kasaganaan* (prosperity)... In “*kalayaan*,” revolutionists found an ideal term for independence that [signified] ...the “coming together” of people in the *Katipunan*. *Katipunan is kalayaan* in that it is a recovery of the country’s pre-Spanish condition of wholeness, bliss and contentment, a condition experienced as *layaw* by the individual who is thus able to leap from the “familial” to “national.” As a revolutionary document put it, the “*Katipunan of Man*” is none other than the extension of the experience of the unity between mother and child.¹

Iletto asks us to consider *kalayaan* in its proto-political sense as a return to the state of *layaw*--the pre-oedipal and pre-lapsarian moment of perfect reciprocity between mother and child. Idealized as a state of bonding without bondage, the condition of *layaw* comes from acts of giving that do not expect a return and so escape the economy of the gift; of taking without incurring a debt and so dispense with the formation of hierarchy. Freed from the need to calculate and wait, reciprocity ceases to be reciprocal altogether. Similarly, recognition is no longer recognizable, having done away with the protocols of mediation and forms of social hierarchy. Indeed, one might even say that the state of *layaw*, so far as it centers on the relationship between mother and child, is one where the father counts for little, if at all. The latter has yet to make his presence felt, much less assert his authority over the family by establishing the law regulating the relationship between mother and child.

Kalayaan, or “freedom” understood as *layaw* thus conjures a scene of sovereignty that reminds us of Bataille’s notion alongside the accounts of Alvarez and Aguinaldo of a liberated Cavite. It is a scene where the family as a patriarchy is yet to emerge and where law as a coercive device and instrument of power over life and death is yet to be established. Unlike the violent inequalities and inequities that inhere in the colonial and republican state, the state of *kalayaan* engenders constant caring, or *damayan*. It is thus a site of unconditional hospitality whereby whoever or whatever comes, whenever it comes, enters without need for permission, and where visitations never require invitations. For all these reasons, the experience of *kalayaan* that arises from acts of *damayan* delineates a utopic and therefore unsustainable state. Yet, as Iletto points out, it also furnished the idiomatic context for the enactments of enlightenment nationalist notions of “liberty, equality and fraternity.”

Put differently, to say with Iletto that “*kalayaan is katipunan*” is to say that the impossible is at the foundation of the possible, the utopic at the foundation of the real. The incredible state of *layaw* invoked by *katipunan* as “wholeness” and “becoming one” is that which lends credibility to the possible and periodic incarnations of *kalayaan* in the Revolution. In both Aguinaldo’s and Alvarez’s account of Cavite, we can imagine life briefly attaining the state of *layaw*. It is momentarily freed from the labor of fighting and the struggle for recognition. There is only consumption beyond necessity together with a general indifference to the terrible authority of death. In the midst of the revolution, the world appears not simply upside down, but wholly new. It is new because its appearance could not have been anticipated nor calculated, happening suddenly, always it seems for the first and for the last time. For this reason, it is perhaps not too unreasonable

¹ Reynaldo Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Univ. Press, 1979, 88-89.

to ascribe to this experience of sovereignty the sense of the miraculous. Such sheer enjoyment even and especially in close proximity to death is a kind of miracle if by this word we mean the impossible becoming suddenly real. Here is Bataille again: “Beyond need, the object of desire is, humanly, the miracle; it is sovereign life, beyond the necessity that suffering defines.”¹ Sovereign life as the singular yet recurring condition of *kalayaan*: this, too, no doubt constitutes the afterlife of empire.

The political theology of empire asserts the possibility of the impossible: divine force as absolute power incarnated in the sovereign’s body and expressed in his capacity to take exception. Revolution, as I have argued, simultaneously dismantles even as it re-appropriates this enduring and terrifying fiction. But it is also capable of bringing about the impossible possibility of sovereignty as the experience of mad joy, of frenzied generosity, of the miraculous, if evanescent, opening of an entirely new life.

¹ Bataille, “Sovereignty,” 201.