

Postcolonial Resistance, Hybridity, and the Filipino Gay Writer: The Case of Villa, Montano, and Perez¹

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Colonialism is all about power, but as the Foucauldian account tells us, such power is always already ambivalent in its effects:² it coerces or subjugates at the same time that it animates the persons it hails into being.

In the Philippines, American colonialism and -- as the two Gulf Wars make horrifically clear -- continuing *global* neocolonialism must be seen as the ascendancy of a regulatory regime that is both juridical and productive in its very nature. While it obviously hierarchizes and marginalizes its many different subjects (and abjects), it also enables certain subjectivities and/or positionalities to exist where they haven't existed before. In an ironic reversal which this selfsame power couldn't have completely foreseen, various dissidences and positions of resistance are made possible alongside the inarguable fact of brute, imperialist domination.

I will argue, in this paper, that one such subject-position is the "homosexual" — a pathologized identity inaugurated by the new sexual logic that was "implanted" in the Philippines during the American occupation.³ From the early 1900s onwards, this logic of *homo/hetero* has become increasingly salient in the lives of contemporary Filipinos, on account of the growing influence of

western biomedicine and the modernization of various local institutions of education, governance, and the mass media, that all assume the inevitability and “naturalness” of this distinction. Soon enough, certain Filipino homosexuals may be seen to engage in different projects of “inversion,” identifying with the very label that has pathologized and oppressed them while simultaneously refunctioning it to serve surprisingly “liberationist” ends. In other words, while it is American colonialism that has brought the malady of “homosexuality” and all its discontents into the Philippines in the first place, it is also the persistence and increasing virulence of this same colonialism that have provided a bit of the “cure”: gay liberation. As I will argue, the ways this liberationist discourse is articulated by Filipinos demonstrate not just instances of discursive reversal or transgressive reinscription, but rather forms of hybridity and “postcolonial appropriation,” as well.

My recourse in this paper to postcolonialism, and particularly, to Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, signalizes an attempt to rethink—and reevaluate—my earlier work on the history of homosexuality in the country, in order to situate it within the broader frame of transculturation, and the colonial and neocolonial relations between the Philippines and the United States, and to make it respond to the vexed and vexing question of Filipinoness. Needless to say, an animus still exists in Philippine academic circles against supposedly colonial-minded or foreign-derived theories, and indeed, my work has been so critiqued and, as is often true with impassioned nativist rhetoric, dismissed.⁴ Of course, such dismissal emerges from a kind of postcolonial hubris that is sadly misinformed, for it refuses to see that the national and indeed the native position themselves are made possible precisely by and inside the narrative of colonialism, of which there can be, unfortunately, no simple “essentialist” forgetting.⁵

Among other things, what this continuity of nativist-nationalist perspectives foregoes is a productive engagement with alternative and more complicated reckonings of colonial power, and consequently, of postcolonial agency. Bhabha’s theory on the ambivalent, negotiable, and fetishistic relations of mimicry and hybridity between the colonizer and the colonized offers just

this reconceptualization—one that resonates with and, as I hope to argue, clarifies, the Foucauldian thesis on power's productivity, especially where the colonial encounter is concerned. On the other hand, by using the figure of sexuality—in particular, of homosexuality—in a discussion of postcolonial opposition or subversion, I am not only performing a counterintuitive move in what is, in the Philippines at least, a generally erotophobic field of knowledge that routinely ignores, plays down, or glosses over the difference that homosexuality makes, I am also calling attention to what is increasingly becoming a well-known fact: that the sexual and gender questions are not merely epiphenomenal but are rather central to the imperial and national projects themselves.⁶

Bhabha sees colonialism as being, in the main, a discursive or representational project imposed upon the colonized that constructs their identity as inferior and therefore needing tutelage and amelioration. And yet, precisely for this reason, this identity can only exist in relation to the colonizer's, which it maintains and which maintains it, and the same dynamic may be said to obtain the other way around. As such, both the colonizer and the colonized are anxious positions in this relationality, and are caught up in a mutually constitutive economy of fantasy and desire. Their respective senses of self live inside the "differentiating order of otherness"; meaning, the Other against which they define themselves in fact resides inside them as their founding repudiation.⁷ Thus, they can only simultaneously hate and crave it, revealing an ambivalence that is uneasily if only partially assuaged by fetishistic attachment. As the compulsively reiterated fetish of the colonial stereotype illustrates, even as the colonizer may outwardly revile or fear the colonized native, in the very act of reviling or fearing he silently acknowledges and actively desires him.⁸

On the other hand, mimicry is another manifestation of the ambivalence of colonial presence. It is predicated on the colonized subject's required and qualified resemblance to the colonizer: "a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."⁹ Colonialism, as a civilizing project, expects and coerces its