Social Criticism during the Commonwealth Period: Renato Constantino and the *Philippine Collegian*, 1939-1940

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ABSTRACT

Renato Constantino was one of the most prominent postwar public intellectuals whose works on Philippine history and society were either praised for its nationalist message or criticized for its controversial Marxist views. What is often neglected in appraisals and literature about Constantino were his prewar writings published on the official student organ of the University of the Philippines, the *Philippine Collegian*. Hence, this paper studies Constantino's *Collegian* editorials by showing that his early social criticisms were essential foundations of his more popular postwar intellectual works. To do this, the paper contextualizes Constantino's early life by underscoring his exposure to the nationalist undercurrents of the Commonwealth period. After tracing the factors that shaped Constantino's nationalist thinking, this paper then probes into his *Collegian* editorials so as to understand the general message

which he conveyed to his readers. To prove the significance of his *Collegian* editorials to his intellectual legacy, this paper expounds on how Constantino performed early social criticism in the context of a prewar Philippine society. Lastly, this paper locates the place of his prewar writings within the breadth of his intellectual contributions as a whole. In doing so, Constantino's *Collegian* editorials could be appreciated as a compelling starting point for a more profound form of social criticism which he practiced during the postwar years.

Keywords: Philippine Collegian, Philippine Commonwealth, prewar Philippines, nationalism, social criticism

Introduction

Renato Constantino is one of the most influential intellectuals of the postwar years. He was regarded as an important Marxist historian and social critic whose works underpin how class antagonisms, for example, operated in various historical events and how it continues to dominate the neocolonial condition of the Philippine society. In his numerous sociopolitical analyses, the chronic nature of colonial mentality or "colonial consciousness" is one of the more pronounced themes of his seminal works (see, for example, Constantino, 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, & 1971b).[1] "Counter-consciousness," a potent solution to the captive minds of the Filipinos, is another theme that takes a prominent role in his writings (Constantino, 1985).[2] This type of consciousness, according to Constantino, is one that is critical to the status quo. These ideas that Constantino had articulated represent his most comprehensive understanding of Philippine society and history known for their Marxist undertones.

In understanding Constantino's intellectual legacy, it is essential to know (1) the important turning points in his life which molded his nationalist thinking and (2) the manner by which he presented his ideas to his audience. Relating to the second point, most of his popular writings reprinted in volumes and anthologies were originally published in broadsheets and magazines while some were printed in pamphlets and/or delivered as speeches (Guiang, 2020, pp. 36-38). Needless to say, Constantino was a scholar who engaged multiple publics through a life-long career in journalism. His primary audience was the ordinary Filipino people, specifically the educated class and the petit bourgeois, who were common readers of periodicals. Constantino's engagement with the public was not surprising because he wanted to confront his fellow countrymen with truths about Philippine society and history that were often neglected or unpopular. For him, in order to incite radical change, a crucial awakening of Filipino consciousness had to take place first.

Constantino's intellectual legacy, without a doubt, created ripples of contention within academic and intellectual circles. To some of his colleagues, his Marxist views on Philippine history and society were insightful thoughts that amplified nationalist discourse of the postwar years.

Constantino, however, did not escape criticisms from scholars who saw his intellectual contributions as mere propaganda. Hence, scholars who had done appraisals of Constantino's intellectual legacy usually reference his most controversial postwar works. As mentioned above, these writings include magazine and broadsheet articles reprinted in volumes like *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (1970), *The Filipinos in the Philippines* (1971), *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness: Essays on Cultural Decolonization* (1978), *Nationalism and Liberation* (1988), to name a few. In addition to these publications, appraisal also refer to his books like *The Making of a Filipino: A Story of Philippine Colonial Politics* (1969) and the two-volume history series– *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (1975) and, coauthored with Letizia Constantino, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past* (1978). On the one hand, praises for his intellectual contributions can be read, for example, in *Partisan Scholarship: Essays in Honour of Renato Constantino* (1989) edited by Peter Limqueco and, more recently, in a book chapter written by Perlita M. Frago-Marasigan (2018). On the other hand, critical appraisals include a book review by John N. Schumacher (1975), a book chapter written by Glenn Anthony May (1987), and, more recently, journal articles produced by Lisandro E. Claudio (2013 and 2015). But what is often neglected in scholarly appraisals of Constantino's intellectual legacy were his writings produced in the prewar years. A comprehensive account of his prewar activities was well-documented in *Renato Constantino: A Life Revisited* (2001) written by Rosalinda P. Ofreneo. The biography discusses some of Constantino's writings when he took the helm of the *Philippine Collegian*, the University of the Philippines (UP) official student publication.

In relation to the points raised above, this paper is a narrative investigation of Constantino's prewar writings, particularly his *Philippine Collegian* editorials, which shows that his early social criticisms were essential foundations of his more popular postwar intellectual works. Constantino's editorials for the school paper from 1939 to 1940 featured topics that emphasized (1) the university's role in fomenting nationalist consciousness, (2) redefining student leadership, and (3) criticisms directed at the political establishment. These common themes in his prewar writings served as effective means of social criticism at the time when President Manuel L. Quezon's Commonwealth government prepared the Philippines for actual independence and confronted demands for social change coming from

various left-wing radical groups like the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas*. Social criticism is an interesting and vital aspect of Constantino's prewar works. As a concept, it can take various definitions and a compelling discussion of the term was provided in a transcribed interview with the American historian Christopher Lasch: "Social criticism has something in common with editorial writing… A social critic tries to catch the general drift of the times, to show how a particular incident or policy or a distinctive configuration of sentiments holds up a mirror to society" (Blake and Phelps, 1994, p. 1313; Guiang, 2020, p. 25). This type of editorial writing is glaringly present in Constatino's *Collegian* editorials which will be examined in the ensuing discussions.

The present article is divided into three main parts. The first section of this paper deals with a brief contextualization of Constantino's early life when important sociopolitical developments shaped his nationalist thinking. Ofreneo's biography of Constantino serves as a main reference for this purpose, among other sources. The second section of this paper probes into Constantino's writings for the *Collegian* during his editorship from 1939 to 1940. It is in this part that the major themes in his writings will be analyzed within the context of the Commonwealth period. The last section of this paper assesses Constantino's prewar writings by identifying the essential facets of his ideas and looking at how his views were received by readers. This part also locates the place of Constantino's prewar writings within the entire scope of his intellectual contributions by distinguishing how the "early Constantino" developed into the "later Constantino." In essence, this study aims to contribute to the existing appraisals on Constantino's intellectual legacy by tracing the origins of his nationalist thinking in the prewar years. More so, it seeks to provide a better understanding of Constantino's intellectual legacy by underscoring how his prewar writings served as the starting point of his more profound postwar social criticisms.

Renato Constantino's Encounters with the Nationalisms of the Commonwealth Years

The threat of Japanese expansion and concerns surrounding Philippine independence were among the most important issues of the 1930s. In 1931, the Japanese annexation of Manchuria triggered a debate among

American politicians concerning the military protection that the United States' (U.S.) would have to extend to the Philippines. By this time, the U.S. Congress had contending opinions about preparing the Philippines for eventual independence. The economic slump of the Great Depression after World War I left the U.S. Congress with no choice but to cut the expenditures allotted for maintaining colonies. Additionally, the idea of economic protectionism became urgent as local American products found it difficult to compete with the importation of Philippine crops which were duty-free. The continuous immigration of Filipino workers to the U.S. also threatened the American working class because companies preferred cheap labor. Hence, the 1930s saw the Democrats and the Republicans scrambling for a suitable pro-independence legislation for the Philippines (Guerrero, 1998, pp. 139-141). Similarly, Filipino politicians were also eager to acquire such support from Washington D.C. A succession of independence missions was sent to the American capital in order to lobby the quick passage of an independence bill from the U.S. Congress. In 1933, the OsRox mission headed by Senator Sergio Osmeña and House Speaker Manuel Roxas brought home the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act which finally granted independence to the country. This, however, led to a political intramural within the Philippine Legislature that resulted to the rejection of the 1933 law, only to be replaced with a similar pro-independence legislation in 1934–the Tydings-McDuffie Law credited to then Senate President Quezon (ibid., pp. 143-148).

The clamor for independence became a rallying point for different political formations and groups in the Philippines. The *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) is one example of an anti-colonial left-wing party that demanded for genuine social change from the political establishment. The party's foundations could be traced from various labor groups and formations that proliferated in the 1920s. In fact, most of the PKP's founding members came from the *Partido Obrero de Filipinas*, a labor party that was critical of the policies of the dominant Nacionalista party. The radicalization of the *Partido Obrero* members, together with other labor groups, led to the creation of a "mass political party" in a convention of labor and peasant formations affiliated with the leftist *Katipunan ng mga Anak-Pawis sa Pilipinas* (KAP). From 1929-1930, the KAP formulated the principles of the party derived from the policies of the Communist International or the Comintern. Hence, the PKP was born in 1930 carrying a Marxist-Leninist orientation (Richardson,

2011, pp. 138-140 & pp. 248-249; Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas). The emergence of the PKP was timely because its members called for the dismantling of American imperialism that was already in turmoil because of the Great Depression. Another influential group in the 1930s was the *Sakdalista* movement which was formed in the context of various incidences of racial discrimination by the Americans in the early 1930s. A notable example of racism happened in Watsonville, California that cost the life of Fermin Tobera, a young Filipino migrant worker.[3] In Manila, a massive student strike was triggered by racial slurs thrown at Filipino students by a certain American teacher in one of the city's high schools. Shortly after the strike, violence broke between U.S. Naval sailors and Filipino civilians in Manila due to these incidents (Terami-Wada, 2014, pp. 11-14). This was the sociopolitical backdrop that Benigno Ramos witnessed who, after working as campaign orator for Quezon and the Nacionalista Party, established the *Sakdalista* movement. Ramos was said to be radicalized when he attended the Manila student strike. He was drawn to the protesters' anti-American sentiments and eventually became one of the strike leaders. Because of his involvement, he was asked by Quezon to resign from his post (ibid., pp. 11-16). Thereafter, Ramos dedicated himself to anti-Quezon and anti-Nacionalista campaigns through a weekly publication called *Sakdal* ("to accuse"). The movement was actually a resultant of the weekly paper's success whose readership may have been as high as 200,000 to 400,000 individuals. It was largely popular amongst the masses who shared the profound anti-American sentiments. The avid readers and supporters of the weekly paper created a group called *Malayang Bayan* which became the core of the *Sakdalista* movement (ibid., pp. 16-19). These formations and social movements–the PKP and the *Sakdalista*s to name a few–articulated the society's frustrations with the prevailing milieu that was still under American tutelage and supported by prominent members of the political establishment.

Renato Constantino's early years, extensively documented in Ofreneo's *Renato Constantino: A Life Revisited* (2001), unfolded in the context of these important sociopolitical developments. Born on March 10, 1919, Renato was raised in Manila by his parents, Amador Constantino and Francisca Reyes. He was the oldest of three siblings that included Elsa and Jesus Constantino. Much of Renato's household had a profound influence in what became his anti-colonial and nationalist perspective. His father, a lawyer,

was interested in politics. Ofreneo (2001, pp. 1-5) recounts that Amador was very critical of Quezon for having abandoned the idea of absolute and immediate independence. Likewise, he was appalled of Emilio Aguinaldo whom he considered a traitor for causing Andres Bonifacio's execution and for capitulating to the Americans. The father imbibed the spirit of the 1896 Philippine Revolution and was thus watchful of self-interested politicians who had the tendency to be subservient to the colonial masters. In addition to this, Renato's maternal grandmother, Lola Teang, was staunchly anti-American and anti-cleric. She saw the friars as representations of immorality and the Americans as brutalizers who tortured revolutionaries during the Filipino-American War. Ofreneo (ibid.) notes that Renato experienced a "clash of cultures" in his household in that his father and grandmother were both critics of the American colonizers while his maternal aunts were products of American education being teachers by profession. These contending viewpoints within his immediate family and relatives vis-à-vis the prevailing colonial setting was crucial to Renato's consciousness.

What really exposed Renato to activism in Manila was during his student years at the Manila North High School (now Arellano High School). His social awareness was reinforced because of certain individuals whom he associated with, especially during the time when he earned a reputation at school as a skilled debater and a potential candidate for the student council. Renato's peers included Crispin Baizas, a law student who aided him in formulating speeches that highlighted the theme of social justice; Charles Baizas, Crispin's brother who was one of the leaders of the Manila student strike; Teodoro Asedillo, Crispin's friend who was a communist; and Aurelio Valdez, Renato's friend who was a *Sakdalista* (ibid., pp. 10-11). These individuals allowed Renato to see the realities of Philippine society beyond the confines of the classroom.

Interestingly, the school itself had been a crucial element that fomented strong anti-American sentiments unto Renato. As mentioned earlier, there was one particular instance when an American English teacher who repeatedly threw racist remarks on Filipino pupils caused a walk-out of over 3,000 students on February 19, 1930.[4] After their demands for the dismissal of the said teacher was met, the students of the high school were outraged by the expulsion of four student leaders who organized the walk-out. This

prompted for a larger student protest which occurred on March 4, 1930 in the form of a strike that included all four city schools in Manila. Although Senate President Quezon dissuaded the students from participating in the demonstrations, the Director of Education was forced to close the schools due to the wide support for strike. As a "face-saving solution" for the education bureau, every student involved in the strike who had a passing grade were declared promoted and/or graduated. This, of course, included the previously dismissed student leaders (ibid., pp. 9-10). Teodoro A. Agoncillo (1976, p. 22), who was also a student of Manila North High School and a participant of the student strike, provides a vivid account:

> The following day, the streets–Teodora Alonzo, Doroteo Jose, Lope de Vega, Rizal Avenue from Azcarraga to Requesens, Magdalena, Misericordia, and the side streets near the Manila North High School–became the classrooms of students who refused to attend their classes. We demanded that the offending teacher be shipped back to the United States… When the strike gained momentum, the more eloquent among my classmates and those in the other senior and junior classes took to the hustings. They spoke of patriotism, of standing up to the white colonizers, and of unity in the ranks. Other students, less eloquent but nevertheless imbued with high idealism, passed the hat around to receive contributions from the strikers as well as from well-wishers… The strike lasted for two months, almost three.

Aside from this, it is important to consider Manila North's geographical location that exposed Renato and his classmates to various rallies at Plaza Moriones where labor groups expressed their demands. The propaganda materials in these gatherings also introduced them to famous names in the PKP and the labor movement like Crisanto Evangelista, Guillermo Capadocia, and Mariano Balgos (Ofreneo, 2001, p. 13).

Nationalism continued to mold Renato's consciousness when he entered the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1936 which was then at Padre Faura, Manila. The university was already known for its long-standing

tradition of activism. For example, six years before Renato's matriculation in UP, an incident of racism happened in September 1930 when an Australian professor who came from Oxford mentioned in a speech that approximately 90% of Filipino students cheated in the examinations. The students and some Filipino faculty members took this remark as a glaring racial bias against the Filipinos. Even Carlos P. Romulo, a UP professor back then, aired his disappointment against his colleague in an editorial published in the *Manila Tribune*. The Australian professor left the university as a result of the controversy (Agoncillo, 1976, p. 24). Another instance that caused large student rallies was when Quezon presented a bill to the Philippine Legislature that included a provision to raise the remuneration of politicians. Wenceslao Vinzons, a popular student activist, quickly assembled the university community to condemn Quezon's move which was clearly a way to gain political patronage. In response, Quezon removed the questionable rider from the bill. Activism in the university even intensified when the academic community debated on the adoption of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Law in 1933. Vinzons, together with several faculty members including Dean Maximo Kalaw of the College of Liberal Arts, led the faction of "Pros" who asserted for the law's passage in contrast to the "Antis" led by Dean Jorge Bocobo of the College of Law who campaigned for the law's rejection (ibid., pp. 25-26).[5] What made matters worse is that Quezon intervened in university affairs by pressuring UP President Rafael Palma to resign. Whether or not Jorge Bocobo, who replaced Palma as UP President, was "favored" by Quezon because of his "Anti" stance, the turn of events caused outrage among students and faculty of the university (Ofreneo, 2001, p. 16). Eventually, Senate President Quezon triumphed and, through the passage of the 1934 lydings-McDuffie Law, gained enough political milage to win the Presidential elections for the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935 (Guerrero, 1998, pp. 153-155).

Even though the issue regarding the independence bills was already settled, the university remained critical of Quezon's apparent subservience to the U.S. government. Aside from Vinzons, student leaders like Lorenzo Sumulong, Arturo Tolentino, and Ambrosio Padilla were among those who kept the spirit of activism alive. Progressive groups in the university like the League for the Defense of Democracy and the Civil Liberties Union were very active in tackling issues such as Quezon's stance on independence and the threat of Japanese expansionism. When Renato entered UP in 1936, he

was immediately exposed to the university's activism. In fact, even the subjects which Renato took for his Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree influenced his political biases. The university, at that time, had faculty members who were self-confessed Marxists and communists. For example, his English 2 teacher, Professor Ignacio Manlapuz, was a communist who taught Spengler, Marx, and Hegel instead of grammar and usage (Ofreneo, 2001, pp. 16-18).

Remarkably, Renato's extracurricular activities made him a popular student in the university. He gained the recognition as a skilled debater. Ofreneo (2001, p. 28 & p. 32) notes that debates held within the university were filled with spectators composed of both students and professors. The UP debate team travelled to provinces like Iloilo, Nueva Ecija, Camarines Sur, and Pangasinan to compete with provincial teams. Debating was an integral part of Renato's undergraduate and law school life. This is significant because debates tackled pressing social issues. Competitions served as venues where audiences could elicit contrasting views about society's problems. Moreover, this gave Renato the chance to showcase not only his penchant for argumentation but also the depth of knowledge that he had on matters of national import. Another extracurricular activity which really prepared Renato for a career doing social criticism was his stint as editor of UP's *Philippine Collegian*. He applied for the student paper twice, being rejected for the first time in 1938 during his sophomore year in the A.A. program. Ofreneo (2001, pp. 19-24) recounts that out of 50 examinees which included the future dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos, Sr., Renato topped the examination for the editorship of the school paper. Unfortunately, the final selection for the paper's editor was influenced by a candidate's fraternity affiliations which, at that time, Renato had none. Hence, he was given the associate editor post after the Upsilon Sigma Phi fraternity requested him to give way for Alex Sycip. In 1939, during his freshman year as a law student, he took the *Collegian* editorship exam for the second time which successfully propelled him to the helm as chief editor. The Upsilonians thought that they could influence Renato by supporting his editorship because the fraternity had no other candidate to endorse. However, Renato already had the support of the Phylons–a study group formed in 1938 by 13 individuals which included him. This support group found its use because he recruited most of his editorial staff from the Phylons. Additionally, Renato received significant backing from the Alpha Phi Beta fraternity which he also helped establish during his time as *Collegian*

editor. His leadership of the *Collegian* made the student paper a decisive tool for social criticism. Ofreneo (2001, p. 20) discusses that he banned "gossipy and flippant articles" and focused on issues that uplifted the social consciousness of the students beyond the confines of the classroom. This is evident in the editorials that Renato had written for the student paper.

The critical and anti-establishment nature of the *Collegian* had unfortunately caught the attention of both the Philippine and foreign authorities. Ofreneo (2001, pp. 27-33) narrates the time when Renato wrote a strong piece criticizing President Quezon's idea of a one-party system that basically consolidates government power towards the executive department. The editorial was published uncensored and immediately captured Malacañang's ire. Quezon, in response, called for a convocation in UP to explain his side. Speaking in front of the faculty and students, the Commonwealth President even tried to woo Renato by praising the latter's style of writing. In another instance, Renato was summoned by American intelligence officers to their headquarters in Fort Santiago after having published another editorial in the *Collegian* which underlined American hostilities at the onset of colonialism. He was interrogated and scolded at Fort Santiago by a certain Major Raymond who stressed that Renato's critical views against the U.S. was tantamount to treason as they were in the brink of war with Japan (Ofreneo, 2001, p. 33). And due to the commencement of the Pacific War on December 7, 1941, Renato failed to graduate from law school. His early reputation as a staunch critic of the Commonwealth government came to an abrupt end as well.

Indeed, Renato's prewar life had been crucial to his formation as a nationalist scholar and social critic. From the household up to the years spent in high school and the university, several types of nationalisms–whether conservative (pro-independence Nacionalista politicians), progressive (liberal-minded intellectuals), or left-wing (Sakdalista, Marxist, socialist, communist) in nature–were factors that molded Renato's consciousness on the existing sociopolitical milieu. After the interlude caused by the war, he would eventually find the means to return to journalistic writing and articulate his ideas about the chronic/historic problems of postwar Philippines.

Renato Constantino as Editor of the *Philippine Collegian*

In tracing the origins of Renato Constantino's nationalism, it is best to interrogate the editorials he had written for the *Philippine Collegian* during his time as editor from 1939 to 1940. Considering all the factors in his early life, Constantino's thinking as articulated in his works for the school paper was distinctively nationalist and critical of the Commonwealth government. Ofreneo (2001, p. 20) mentioned that during Constantino's stint as editor, he prohibited shallow and superficial articles to focus on topics of national import that could rouse the social consciousness of university students. His vision for the school paper was admired by his colleagues. Angel Baking (1940), editor of the *Collegian* from 1940 to 1941, provides a good summary of the school paper's direction under his predecessor:

> Under the leadership of the former editor, Mr. Renato Constantino, the *Collegian* has deserved an enviable reputation in college journalism… the *Collegian* has deservedly won the serious attention of the reading public in and outside the University. In any national issue presented for public consideration, the *Collegian* has not failed to lend its voice; unfrightened by the ever-looming danger of official censure and armed with its sincere and honest desire to contribute its mite in the discussion of vital public questions, the *Collegian* has courageously dared to take up issues in its editorial columns.

Indeed, pressing social issues always took prominent roles in Constantino's editorials. For example, in an editorial entitled "The True Christmas Spirit" published on December 16, 1939 which was about UP's donation drive for poverty-stricken communities, he makes certain to underscore the social realities of the time so as to remind students what needs to be done: "The cleavage between the wealthy and the poor appears to be widening day by day. We have shown neglect for our fellow men" (Constantino, 1939a). Aside from matters of national import, Constantino also provides his readers important insights on international developments. After the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 which marked the start of the Second World War in Europe, he wrote "Shall We Be Another 'Lost Generation'" which was published on

September 5 of the same year. The editorial talks about the horrors of wars and the absurd idea that wars were appreciated as money-making ventures: "We are alarmed as we hear some men speaking of war as something synonymous with economic prosperity, as if a lapse in world morality and the butchering of men can be justified by a boost in the price of commodities" (Constantino, 1939b).

These editorials are some examples of Constantino's writings which clearly provoke university students to be outspoken on political matters and to engage in national discourse. But the strong nationalist identity of UP was always challenged by none other than President Quezon. For example, Michael D. Pante discusses this issue in an article about the relocation of the UP campus from Manila to Diliman. Pante (2018., pp. 504-509) argues that while the transfer of the State University was an important part of Quezon's "vision for remapping Manila," it was also a way of uprooting the university community from the politics of Manila which had "contaminated the minds of UP students, who by then had formed a significant, if not radical, opposition to the government." Indeed, the geographical location of UP was an important factor in the radicalization of its students like Constantino. As discussed by Ofreneo (2001, pp. 13-18) earlier, high school and college students in Manila were exposed to radical ideas articulated by labor groups and communists through mass demonstrations in the city's public spaces. The nationalist tradition of UP permeated into Constantino's consciousness and manifested in his *Collegian* writings which provoked the likes of Quezon.

Considering Constantino's *Collegian* editorials in its entirety, it is noticeable that most of his writings tend to focus on the following topics: (1) university's role in fomenting nationalist consciousness, (2) redefining student leadership, and (3) criticisms directed at the political establishment, particularly the Commonwealth government. Much of his writings explored the idea that the university should take the lead in redirecting the country towards the path of awakening a nationalist consciousness. For example, an editorial entitled, "Nationalism and the University" published on January 9, 1940, discusses how the university and its students could lead the nationalist endeavor. Constantino (1940e) introduces the idea of "practical nationalism" where the academic environment provides students an avenue to exercise nationalism in simple ways such as adhering to one's duties as a citizens of

the nation, appreciating the customs and traditions inherent to the Philippines, and showing respect to the national symbols, heraldry, and heroes. These patriotic deeds and values should transcend the confines of the university and find its place not only in one's personal affairs but also in dealing with matters of national import. For example, nationalism allows students to fully appreciate the sacrifice of their parents and recognize the worth of their self-sacrifice. Constantino (1940e) stresses that as the youth should be more engaged in the national cause after learning patriotic values from the university. He also stresses that nationalism in its full realization could reconcile the differences brought about by regionalism and contending political biases. Patriotism, therefore, should be used as a tool for national unity (ibid.). In relation to the nationalist pursuit, he also suggests that the patriotic values taught to university students should ultimately translate in service to the people. Constantino (1940h) asks an important question to his readers in "The University and the Masses"–a contest piece published in the *Collegian* on February 27, 1940:[6] "Does University education keep one far above the masses or in the service of the masses?" He then makes a general assessment of the society: the masses stand at the opposite end of the spectrum, the wealthy rests on the other end, and the intellectual elite vacillates in between. The poorer sectors of the society are continuously exploited by individuals like corrupt politicians and even self-scheming labor leaders. The intellectuals, products of educational institutions, have all of the means to change the status quo and stand in solidarity with the masses. Constantino (1940h) suggests that immersing with the masses is a necessary part of university education in order to gain insight about the glaring realities concerning worsening state of poverty. He further explains this point:

> Seeing how these people actually live and unearthing the untold misery they have suffered may make the University students who are being trained to serve, more conscious of the existence of the nation's backbone, and may awaken in them a more sympathetic attitude towards the masses. (ibid.)

Ofreneo (2001, p. 21) remarks that through this editorial, Constantino had already begun articulating, though indirectly, the essence of the slogan "Serve the People" which will be popularized in the First Quarter Storm three

decades later. What should be worth noting is that, as early as his student days, Constantino already asserted a distinct nature of nationalism that it is not only sentimental but, more importantly, aimed towards the emancipation of the oppressed. Yet despite his pronouncements on the role of the university in providing an education that serves the people, he has also observed the misguided tendency of learning. In "Stunted Giants" published on July 16, 1940, Constantino (1940i) argues that professional dogmatism in university education dissuades students from "seeking further knowledge in the other branches of human endeavor." He further explains that "the university education instead of awakening in them [students] new interests in the various phases of human life appears to them as an end in itself rather than a mere means to a greater end" (ibid.). This type of education fetters the development of nationalist consciousness and produces graduates who are excessively career-oriented and indifferent to issues of social relevance.

Moving towards the path of nationalism also involves provoking a radical form of leadership that is crucial for national development. Constantino devotes several editorials which expound on the special role of students in producing astute leaders who uphold the ideals of democracy. Constantino (1939c) gives his readers an idea on who to emulate in "Chief Justice Avanceña," published on September 19, 1939, in honor of the latter receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws from the UP administration. He describes the chief magistrate as "a man of integrity and sterling character, his life may well be made an example for our Youth" (ibid.). Constantino (1940j) reminds his fellow students in "Lest We Forget," published on January 23 1940, to be always dignified and decorous in order to gain the people's trust as future leaders of the country. The potential to become future leaders should entail an awareness of the pitfalls of self-aggrandizement. In "Students Unite" published on June 11, 1940, he points out that a common practice amongst Filipino politicians is to publicly declare themselves as guardians of democracy and its institutions. These "promises" are eventually betrayed because of "blind partisanship, greed, and opportunism." Political maneuvering, personal ambition, and vested interests are the very aspects that transforms leadership into a form of corruption (Constantino, 1940g). Hence, Filipino politicians see elections as a means to gain economic advantages and political prominence instead of public service. For Constantino, what could be a remedy is "a militant leadership–an

organization of civic-minded individuals–which is non-political, non-partisan; an organization with an aim which cannot be measured in terms of pecuniary estimation" (ibid.). In other words, "militant leadership" is a leadership that is devoid of self-aggrandizement and strives to put the country's needs to the fore. Hence, students should take the helm of leadership because they "have no deeply entrenched economic interests, are firmer in convictions, and are completely aliens to the highest bidders" (ibid.). Furthermore, he emphasizes that it is imperative for student leaders to be principled in order to avoid falling into the mold of corrupt politicians. In "Re-defining Student Leadership" published on June 25, 1940, Constantino (1940f) expresses utmost concern that even within UP, there are student leaders who seem to have strayed away from their mandate of service to the people. For example, there are student leaders who consider the practice of good leadership as simply organizing social gatherings/parties while many of their constituents are actively engaged in confronting urgent national issues. There are also student leaders who are obsessed with grabbing title-positions and acquiring fame in the campus. He concludes that a "re-defined" student leader is one that is "dynamic and militant" and can carry the name of the university on a national scale with dignity and seriousness (ibid.). Constantino, as a student leader himself, gives high regard to the capacity of students in provoking radical change. He takes after his personal experience having witnessed huge demonstrations organized by various student formations in the 1930s. These student-led mobilizations have proven to be potent means for political pressure. More so, the prominent student leaders of his time have exhibited decisive leadership which even challenged the toughest individuals in the political arena such as President Quezon. These factors have obviously left a lasting impression upon Constantino as evidenced in the editorials cited above.

One of the most interesting aspects of his *Collegian* editorials were those that boldly criticized the Commonwealth government. For example, Constantino discusses in "For A More Conscious Deliberation," published on February 6, 1940, the occasion when the socialist Atty. Pedro Abad Santos was invited to speak before a convocation of UP faculty and students. The editorial shares the guest speaker's radical speech that attacked the capitalist system and suggested the "youth to align itself with Labor in the coming class struggle" (Constantino, 1940c). Relating to Abad Santos' criticisms of

sociopolitical milieu, Constantino (ibid.) urged university students to adopt a critical perspective and study the conditions of the laborers in order to gain deeper understanding of the Philippine society's dire state. As expected, the Commonwealth government criticized the convocation and the radical ideas imparted unto its audience. In response, Constantino decried the attempts to prohibit the freedom of discourse within the university in a separate editorial entitled, "In Defense" published on February 13, 1940. Here, he relates that a certain cabinet secretary–who remained unidentified in the article–admonished the UP administration for allowing a resource person to subvert the government before the faculty and students of the State University. According to Constantino (1940d), the cabinet secretary argued that a private institution should have been a more appropriate venue for such an occasion. On the contrary, Constantino contends that the university encourages its students to be broadminded by inviting the likes of Abad Santos who have dissenting political views. For him, the more students hear about the contending sides of a certain issue, the more that they could develop a critical mindset towards matters of national import. Students are actually being prepared for the real life beyond the campus by exposing them to ideas that are unpopular or radical. Furthermore, he points out that the attempts of the government to discredit UP for the convocation curtails the university's exercise of academic freedom (ibid.). In another university convocation, the UP administration invited Secretary of Labor Jose Avelino as guest speaker. As if echoing the critical stance of Quezon on student activism, the cabinet secretary expressed his views on student leadership which was condescending and demeaning: "Generally, leadership is not for the Youth… their leadership is uncertain and… doomed from its very inception, because it is circumscribed by immaturity and inexperience" (cited in Constantino, 1940k). Constantino replied to Avelino's statements in a lengthy editorial entitled, "Our Answer" published on February 27, 1940:

> How can we be matured and experienced, if the necessary experiences are denied us? How can we gain self-confidence if our elders do not trust us? YOUTH DOES NOT AIM TO WREST LEADERSHIP FROM THOSE ADVANCED IN YEARS, BUT YOUTH MUST EXPERIENCE IT IN ORDER TO LEARN. (ibid.)

Constantino continues by explaining that youth leadership is essential in shaping national discourse because the youth do not have economic interests that require them to kowtow to authority. More so, the youth are "conscious of their rights and liberties and they would criticize any order or system that is debunking rather than court the favors of the administration for selfish personal motives" (ibid.). He also asserts that youth leadership is fundamental because their education molded them to be attuned to the plight of the masses and other neglected issues of the society. Constantino (ibid.) finishes the editorial with an indirect tirade against the political establishment:

> Once more, Youth has proven that it is free to dissent when there is any point of dissention in direct contrast to some big political organizations of older men (who in fact and in reality, angle for government positions) whose timid personalities are kept united by the towering personality of one.

It remains unclear whether Constantino was referring to Quezon or Avelino when he wrote that traditional politicians "are kept united by the towering personality of one." But what is certain is that he found it absurd for any government personality to discourage or castigate students who exercise their right to articulate dissent. He expounds a similar assertion in an editorial published on July 2, 1940 entitled, "Bootlicking as a Profession." Here, Constantino (1940a) sheds light on the importance of dissent and criticism in holding those in power to account:

> Our leaders should withstand criticism… Leadership does not mean infallibility of personal viewpoints and opinions. Social and political success welcomes criticisms as an aid in the attainment of more fruitful ends not for personal aggrandizement of an individual but for greater welfare of the Cause… Democracy demands freedom of expression. It condemns suppression from above and repression from within… Freedom of expression should be encouraged if Democracy must be preserved.

Constantino also reminds his fellow students to strengthen their resolve and reject the possibility of becoming "bootlickers" or subservient agents of those in power. In relation to this, he calls out former liberals and radicals who chose to surrender their principles by acceding to the rewards and favors offered by the authorities (ibid.). Bootlicking, for Constantino, makes a mockery of criticism as a form of democratic expression because it validates the authorities' manipulative ways of silencing dissent.

Constantino's most controversial editorial was a lengthy criticism directed at the Commonwealth President. In "Democracy up to Date" published on July 23, 1940, he attacks the pronouncements of Quezon about the creation of a one-party system which was aimed at eliminating partisanship in the political system and diminishing the flaws of democracy. On the contrary, Constantino (1940b) argues that though democracy has its defects, Quezon's vision of a one-party system only exposes his desire to consolidate political power and eradicate the dissenting views of his political rivals. Constantino also explains that a one-party system breeds blind supporters which, in the process, corrupts critical thinking. Only when there are contending political parties would individuals be able to practice their freedom of choice in the electoral system. A two-party system is thus the best option because it represents the essence of democracy (ibid.). As mentioned by Ofreneo, this particular editorial prompted Quezon to visit UP and clarify his stance on the issue.

Through the editorials cited above, Constantino exposes how the Commonwealth government struggled to control the freedom of discourse in the university and, to some extent, clamp down activism among students and faculty. Considering the entirety of Constantino's *Collegian* editorials, his writings conveyed the necessity of nationalism in nation-building, the importance of student leadership in influencing national discourse, and the value of dissent in challenging authority. Given the clear message of Constantino's prewar writings, interesting points of interrogation for the last section of this paper include the following: (1) what are the important facets of his prewar ideas? (2) How was his messaged received by his peers and detractors? (3) How do his *Collegian* editorials compare to the rest of his more popular writings in the postwar years?

Assessing Renato Constantino's *Collegian* Editorials

In evaluating the contributions of Constantino's *Collegian* editorials to his intellectual legacy as a whole, it is essential to identify how his ideas and writings were accepted by his audience, mainly the UP community and his readers outside the university. His vision for the *Collegian* did not only reap praise and admiration from his peers but it also received recognition from journalistic organizations like the College Editors Guild (CEG). In 1940, the *Collegian* won the coveted trophy of the annual CEG contest, thereby being hailed as the "Best Edited College Newspaper" in the Philippines and obtaining the Romulo Gold Quill for the academic year 1940-1941 (Philippine Collegian, 1940a). Furthermore, Constantino's "The University and the Masses," as mentioned above, was considered the best editorial of the year. He also placed second best editor after Mr. Artemio Garlit of the National University's *The National*. Both editors received the Roxas medals for excellence in editorial writing. In addition, Constantino's editorial team won awards for excellence in column writing, newswriting, short story writing, and interview (Philippine Collegian, 1940b). The *Collegian* staff saw these awards as "a vindication and virtual endorsement of its policies" (Philippine Collegian, 1940a). Even the UP administration acknowledged the *Collegian's* achievements. In a letter dated February 29, 1940, UP President Bienvenido Gonzalez relayed his praises for Constantino and the *Collegian* staff: "I wish to congratulate you and, through you, the members of your Staff… These honors are a recognition of the high standard and lofty ideals which characterize your editorial policy" (cited in Philippine Collegian, 1940c). These accolades can be appreciated as nods of approval for the nationalist direction that Constantino and his editorial team charted for the school paper. More importantly, their victory was an important feat for militant student leadership that incessantly confronted the political establishment.

Constantino's *Collegian* editorials from 1939 to 1940 undeniably reflected his principles and nationalist thinking. He devoted his writings to expound on the necessity of nationalist consciousness, the crucial role of student leaders in national discourse, and the importance of dissent in preserving democracy and keeping the government's authoritarian maneuverings at bay. As evidenced in "Bootlicking as a Profession" (1940a),

"Democracy up to Date" (1940b), "In Defense" (1940d), and "Our Answer" (1940k), Constantino did not hesitate to articulate sharp criticisms against the political establishment and certain government officials like Avelino and even Quezon. These writings show that freedom of discourse and dissent is essential in affecting political affairs. In editorials like "Nationalism and University" (1940e), "The University and the Masses" (1940), "Re-Defining Student Leadership" (1940f), and "Students Unite" (1940g), Constantino underscored the need for principled students whose education should ultimately serve the people and the goals of nationalism. Needless to say, his editorials functioned as one of the means for UP students to be attuned to sociopolitical realities that surrounded the university. In relation to this point, Constantino strikingly practiced social criticism by boldly engaging the pressing issues of the time. To cite a point raised in the introduction for this paper, Lasch defined social criticism as catching the "general drift of the times," hence the social critic would find it necessary to pass judgement and take sides about a certain issue (Blake and Phelps, 1994, p. 1313). In many ways, Constantino was this social critic. His vision for the *Collegian* was to transform it into a vehicle for social criticism and incite a nationalist awakening among the youth. Constantino did not claim impartiality in his works. Rather, he made pronouncements that were unpopular and, at times, incurred the wrath of the political establishment. In fact, his works unraveled the authoritarian nature of Quezon's Commonwealth government in the latter's attempts to dissuade students from engaging in political matters. This was not surprising as the frequent interplay between the university community and the political scene in Manila has engendered UP students and faculty who frequently clashed with politicians on issues of national import. Case in point, even after his stint as *Collegian* editor, Constantino was entangled in yet another attempt by a university official to put restraints on academic freedom in UP. Representative Guillermo Z. Villanueva, a member of the UP Board of Regents, barred university professors from commenting on live political issues and restricted them from discussing political ideologies outside the purview of academic matters. Villanueva argued that "academic freedom is not the absolute, unrestricted right of faculty members of the U.P. in criticizing the President of the Philippines on political, non-academic issues" (cited in Philippine Collegian, 1940d). This incident was stirred by an interview with Dr. Bernabe C. Africa, a political

science professor, whose statements were deemed unfavorable by the government. In response, Constantino defended Dr. Africa and scorned both Villanueva and Quezon for their attempts at stifling the university's academic freedom:

> The question now is whether President Quezon believes in the theory of democracy but is afraid of its practice. The question is whether Representative Villanueva, as a member of the Board of Regents, in proposing to muzzle professors, is speaking in the interest of the university which he is expected to represent, or whether he is merely trying to forestall what Mr. Quezon would like to do with anyone who dares say anything not in praise of his administration or of his smallest statements. (Philippine Collegian, 1940e)

Again, what is evident here is the consistent and adamant stance of Constantino against the authoritarian tendencies of Quezon and his cohorts. On a side note, it is also remarkable that as early as Constantino's time in UP, academic freedom was already a highly debated issue. Academic freedom, in its most basic definition, is the epitome of pursuing knowledge and exploring its applicability to various sociopolitical realities (Nelson, 2010, p. 1). In an academic sense, it pertains to the "freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action" (American Association of University Professors cited in ibid., p. 3). Constantino's tirades against Villanueva was a clear example of how he considered academic freedom a vital component of university life. The same can be said when he criticized Avelino and, for a number of instances, Quezon through his *Collegian* editorials. His pronouncements about nationalism, dissent, and freedom of discourse were possible because he was well aware of his right to practice academic freedom. Constantino's sharp views and analysis on social realities, in other words his social criticism, will be most pronounced in his postwar writings.

Another important aspect in assessing Constantino's *Collegian* editorials is to locate the place of his prewar writings within breadth of his intellectual contributions. What remained consistent in his works from the

prewar to the postwar years? What are significant changes from his prewar to postwar ideas? Was there any ideological shift in his writings? It is evident enough that Constantino had been already practicing social criticism ever since his stint as *Collegian* editor. He favored topics of social relevance above anything else and this defined the nationalist nature of the school paper under his leadership. After the interlude of the war, Constantino would be recognized as one of the foremost nationalist intellectuals of postwar Philippines. "From the 1950s onwards, he produced works that dispelled the myths of American benevolence… underscored the need for partisan scholarship to invoke the development of a nationalist consciousness among Filipinos" (Guiang, 2021, p. 4). Comparable to what he did in the *Collegian*, he would continue to engage multiple publics by publishing his most important works in magazines and broadsheets like the *Sunday Post*, *Manila Chronicle*, and *Graphic* (ibid.; Guiang, 2020, pp. 37-38). And similar to how the Commonwealth government reacted to Constantino's *Collegian* editorials, Constantino would experience government repression on several instances in the postwar years: (1) in 1951 when his house was raided by government agents to confiscate "subversive" books in his personal library, (2) in 1961 when he was accused as a communist and invited for interrogation before the Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA), and (3) in 1972 when he was put under house arrest after the declaration of Martial Law (Ofreneo, 2001, pp. 110-124 & pp. 185-192). Despite state repression, nationalism and social criticism remained indelible features of Constantino's intellectual legacy starting from his *Collegian* editorship up to his career as a postwar public intellectual. Furthermore, Constantino's historical inquiry for which his postwar writings became popular was noticeably absent in his *Collegian* editorials. Ofreneo (2001, p. 116) notes that his interest in history peaked when he worked at the Lopez Museum in 1960. Being exposed to primary sources in Philippine history, Constantino's works henceforth was an embodiment of a "historically-informed social criticism" or a social criticism guided by historical analysis–a "marriage of social criticism and historical inquiry" as defined by Lasch (Guiang, 2021, p. 11; Mattson, 2003, pp. 377-378). Additionally, Constantino's "historically-informed social criticism" had an obvious ideological underpinning that was clearly Marxist. For example, his scholarship offered a "reading of Philippine history that stresses how material conditions through the economic base (mode and relations of production) and superstructure influence the society in shaping the events

in Philippine history" (Guiang, 2021, p. 16). The same can be said with his social commentaries that exposed the class antagonisms of postwar Philippine society. Notably, he did not openly mention Marxism or quote Marx in his works because he was, after all, writing for the general public through print media. Constantino probably wanted to do social criticism and relay his nationalist message devoid of academic jargons (ibid.).

In retrospect, his *Collegian* editorials were essential precisely because they served as the foundations of his early social criticism. In other words, the social criticism in his prewar writings functioned as a template for the more comprehensive social criticism evident in his postwar works. Arguably, what could define the idea of an "early Constantino" is the inception of a social criticism that stresses the importance of nationalism, the role of student leadership in nationalist awakening, and the necessity of dissent that keeps the powers that be in check. This social criticism, articulated through the *Collegian*, was influenced by a multitude of factors which included his exposure to prewar left-wing nationalism that was anti-colonial, anti-American, and radical in nature. Constantino's social criticism would eventually mature in the postwar years. His basic orientation with Marxist literature and left-wing ideas would deepen his social criticism when he continued his career in journalism after the war. What made Constantino's postwar social criticism more potent were his Marxist analyses of Philippine history and society–a perfect characterization for what could be the "later Constantino." This stage in Constantino's intellectual legacy distinguished him as a social critic who, as in the words of Lasch, "show[s] how a particular incident or policy or a distinctive configuration of sentiments holds up a mirror to society, revealing patterns that otherwise might go undetected" (Blake and Phelps, 1994, p. 1313).

Conclusion

This paper has thus established that Constantino's *Collegian* editorials served as the essential foundations for his more profound social criticism in the postwar years. His early social criticism was a product of being exposed to the nationalist undercurrents of the society during the Commonwealth period. Important social issues like racial discrimination opened his consciousness to the harsh realities of being a subject of American

tutelage. As early as his high school years, he witnessed a brand of activism that was inherently anti-American and anti-colonial. Moreover, the interplay of radical forces and the political establishment, via mass demonstrations or public debates, had inevitably inculcated in him a critical viewpoint on sociopolitical issues. His time in Manila North High School and UP introduced him to progressive and radical individuals who saw the society in a particular way that significantly influenced his left-wing nationalist thinking. Specifically, the academic freedom in UP allowed him to freely express his views both in writing and speech.

Based on Constantino's writings for the *Collegian*, it can be presumed that he appreciated the university as a haven for activism where the potential to incite social change thrived. For him, the larger society was a place where the actual struggle for social emancipation transpired in the midst of a political establishment controlled by authoritarian-like leaders such as Quezon. Nevertheless, Constantino's optimism for militant student leadership occupied his *Collegian* editorials because he saw it as means to possibly reverse a corrupt political system. This viewpoint is understandable because, in his student days, he experienced firsthand the potency of student activism in affecting national discourse. Constantino's career as a young journalist would be confronted by the Japanese occupation where he took an active part in the guerilla efforts.

Looking at the major themes of Constantino's prewar writings, nationalism, militant student leadership, and freedom of discourse defined his early social criticism. His editorship undeniably lay the grounds for his more potent social criticism in the postwar years. Hence, his *Collegian* editorials find their place at the very beginning of his scholarship where the "early Constantino" performed social criticism, taking the side of left-wing nationalism to produce sharp criticisms of the Commonwealth period's sociopolitical milieu. This phase in his intellectual history would develop in the postwar years where the "later Constantino" did social criticism coupled with a Marxist historical analysis. His postwar writings functioned as a mirror of a complex Philippine society in the context of the Cold War and the Martial Law years. It is thus fascinating to conclude that Constantino's nationalist project which had influenced generations of young activists in the postwar years, had actually unfolded as far back as 1939 during his *Collegian* editorship.

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ENDNOTES

[1] *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (1970) and *The Filipinos in the Philippines* (1971) contain some of Constantino's major works that highlight colonial mentality and the neocolonial condition of Filipinos. Some of these reprinted articles include "Our Captive Minds" ([1957] 1971a), "The Miseducation of the Filipino" ([1966] 1971b), "The Filipino Elite" ([1968] 1970a), and "Roots of Subservience" ([1969] 1970b), among others. It is also interesting to note that Constantino wrote in English despite criticizing the Filipinos' "captive mind" driven by American colonial education (see Teodoro 1977). However, in "Culture and National Identity" ([1969] 1970c) he stresses the importance of a "counter-culture" as a potent way to challenge the Americanization of local culture. This includes, of course, the promotion of Philippine languages.

[2] Constantino extensively expounded the idea of "counter-consciousness" in a pamphlet entitled, *Synthetic Culture and Development* (1985).

[3] The Watsonville, California altercation involved around 500-700 Americans who destroyed Filipino homes and properties with around 50 Filipinos beaten and a 22-year old worker, Fermin Tobera, shot to death.

[4] Agoncillo (1976, p. 22) provides a detailed account of this particular incident: "The American teacher of English berate a student and his sister for allegedly being dirty. 'You Filipinos,' said the teacher with a half-smile that made her look more sinister than she really was, 'do not take a bath. You look like savages.'" Agoncillo also mentions that the controversial incident took place in January 1930 with the strike occurring on February 19, 1930 and lasting for two to three months.

[5] Agoncillo recalls that the heated debates between the two factions forced UP President Rafael Palma to intervene and "advise the people and especially the students to exercise their right of free choice: the right to be free and independent." Palma even invited then Speaker of the House Manuel A. Roxas to speak before the faculty and students of UP. This angered Senate President Quezon who threatened to cut the university's budget.

[6] Constantino's "The University and the Masses" won 1st place in the aforementioned contest organized by the College Editors Guild (CEG).

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