

Our Cause is Also Yours and Your Children's: A Look Back at the Philippine Revolution

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As the Philippines celebrates the centennial of its revolution, in whose honor this issue of *Kasarinian* is produced, it is fitting to recall the values that fueled the struggle and sustained it despite the overpowering odds. That in the end the revolution did not succeed is perhaps cause for national reflection; that it was launched at the outset of a century that is about to end with a resounding challenge to the very idea of nationalism adds an uncanny twist to that reflection. For revolution is not always about victory, although success is its avowed goal. But it is nearly always about nationalism, sovereignty, liberation and justice, as the essays in this issue point out.

What makes the Philippine case striking is the warmth with which revolutionaries spoke of the motherland. Nearly a hundred years ago an unnamed warrior-poet from the mountains of Leyte set to paper this poem* in honor of the country he so loved.

'Tis is our good fortune
To return to your bosom, core of our soul
The compassion in your heart binds us
Taste once more the love that has faded

Oh, what incomparable joy
If we attain our goal
If we, your children, behold you
And offer our deep-felt reverence

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Because from you sprout the branches
The life we treasure and our bodies
Every action is also an offering
To willingly serve you and show you our compassion

**Philippine Revolutionary Papers*, Box I-37 (Public Instructions), 12 July 1910

This was the Philippine revolution – above all, an act of compassion for one's native land and one's people, whom leaders such as Bonifacio and Mabini looked upon not as strangers in the struggle for freedom, but a community bound as tightly as are brothers and sisters in a family. This compassion, which Iletto highlights in his *Pasyon and Revolution*, was deeply linked with the faith of the revolutionaries in their cause and in the people with whom they labored. Unfazed by the superior logistics and organization of the enemy, that faith caught on and grew. Unexplainable except as an act of irrationality, colonial authorities labeled the revolutionaries "fanatic," their "eyes rolling," and their hearts believing the fiction that once victorious, "independence" would be released from the "magic" chest that was paraded down the street. Who else indeed but *fanáticos* would launch such an unfathomable, hopeless battle?

Other colonial officials proffered an equally simplistic view. The revolutionaries were the restless middle class agitating (read, manipulating) the "poor and ignorant" Filipinos in contrast to the "rich and intelligent" (read, thinking) ones. In a single sweep, these two sets of pairs, uninterchangeable in both Spanish and American eyes, along with the edgy middle class, explained Filipino colonial society at the turn of century, at least from the point of view of the victors.

Yet the revolutionaries struggled on, fully cognizant that the burden of war could become too heavy to bear. To those unable to carry on or weary of war, Mabini – *intransigente* as the American government called him (or "hard-liner" in today's language) – offered these words of comfort:

You have done well. You have seen the journey is long and painful and you need to rest. Live contentedly and happily; but do not forget that there (in the struggle) lies the center of your gravity...Remember those who fell by the road and, above all, those who fell exclaiming: "Happy are those who can give proof, by means of their abilities, of their love of country!"

Understandably, the revolutionaries directed their hostility at the enemy. They, too, vented their anger at fellow Filipinos who had turned into outright *americanistas* or had tempered their position by accepting "autonomy" under foreign rule. Thrilled at the prospect of hanging the "suffocating and unbreakable chain of gold...around the collar of their country," these Filipinos "never sacrificed anything for our people and are content with whatever crumbs are thrown them by their master." Shame!

But these were Filipinos, too, sprung from the same soil. In an attempt to reach out to them, Isabelo de los Reyes had this to say:

Continue to carry out with honor the assignments you have received from the Americans — because your families need your salaries.

But the United States could also oblige you to turn against your country. If so, I earnestly hope you will use your influence with them so that they will treat our compatriots well who fall into their hands or who are in pacified towns. You would do well to denounce the abuses against these people in your newspapers. If you do not show them (the Americans) dignity, character and energy in defense of your rights, they themselves will not appreciate you and will get used to treating you as slaves.

As for us, leave us in peace to fight for the independence of our country. Do not do anything or do not answer the mockeries which we direct at the *americanistas* because we believe these are necessary so that *americanism* will not grow, knowing that true valor consists in knowing how to control one's passions. Do not fuel the fire of discord with your supposed remedies but be intermediaries with the Americans so that they will do us justice, and do not forget that our cause is also yours and that of your children.

Accepting their differences yet appealing to their core being as Filipinos was de los Reyes' way of extending the olive branch. His declaration that the cause of the struggle was not merely for the present generation but also the future was more than just a plea to former comrades. It was also a conviction that the success of the revolution would not be measured by a short-lived victory but rather, one that future generations of Filipinos could enjoy.

Over the decades, even as we obtained our independence and asserted it each time it was under threat, we have been painfully aware that the cause of the revolution has not been fully realized. True, we face different choices today, some far more complex than those Filipinos a hundred years ago had to make. But some things have changed little, despite, or some might argue, because of, globalization.

As we opened this century, so then must we close it, armed with the relentless passion and profound humanity of our predecessors who struggled for all Filipinos, earnestly and without thought of the cost to themselves or their families. Waging revolution against injustice, poverty and inequity in the 21st century will undoubtedly take different forms that will test our creativity and our resolve to the limit. But that, precisely, is the challenge the future brings. ♦