

The “Chosen Nation” Theme in Cold War Fil-Hispanic Poetry: A Reading of *Rimas Filipinas* (1964)

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ABSTRACT

This paper essays a reading of one Fil-Hispanic poemario, the poetry anthology *Rimas Filipinas* (1964), a joint collaboration between two poets, Emeterio Barcelón y Barceló-Soriano (1897-1988) and Francisco Zaragoza y Carillo (1911-1990). This poetry collection, according to one scholar who interviewed the two in the course of writing research on the anthology, was a project in which both poets agreed not to identify who wrote what in the work. The reading situates the work in the Cold War period and uses this as historical backdrop in looking at the “chosen nation” theme in the said poemario. The Philippines as a “chosen nation,” seen against the backdrop of the ideological conflict that was the Cold War, is a characteristic that emerges in *Rimas Filipinas*, where the country is imaged as a bastion of Christianity/Catholicism in the whole of Asia and receiving special protection from Mary. In turn, this Catholic identity is deployed in the Cold War rivalry between Christianity and the considered godless ideology of Communism. The affirmation of the country’s Catholic faith, seen in the totality of Fil-Hispanic literary discourse, is an affirmation of the Hispanic culture found in the Philippines, of which writers in Spanish emphasize three main components: 1) the Spanish language; 2) Hispanic customs, traditions, and practices; and 3) the Catholic faith.

KEYWORDS

Philippine poetry in Spanish, Philippine literature in Spanish, *Rimas Filipinas*, Emeterio Barcelón, Francisco Zaragoza, Chosen Nation theme, Cold War, 1950s-1960s, Communism, Catholic faith, Christianity/Catholicism vs. Communism

The concept of “chosen nation” in the Judeo-Christian or Westernized worlds can be traced to the Old Testament story of how ancient Israel forged a covenant with the God of the Ten Commandments in Mt. Sinai and, in the process, becoming his consecrated nation. Religion historian Karen Armstrong (*History of God*) contextualizes this “agreement” as one between a God figure and a 5th century BCE polytheistic Hebrew society, which promises to “ignore all the other deities and worship him alone,” highlighted by the command “Thou shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).

This idea of a covenanted/consecrated nation is also deployed in the discourse of Protestantism. Alec Ryrie notes:

For Calvinists, who emphasized that Christians were a covenanted people, set apart for God, predestination seemed almost natural. They were God’s chosen people: the new Israel (79).

During the age of colonization, the notion of a “chosen nation” appears in discourses about national destinies to be fulfilled. British Israelism or Anglo-Israelism (the belief that people from Western Europe are descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel) is a case in point.¹ One can thus look at the American “Manifest Destiny” idea as a product of the 19th-century spread of British Israelism in the United States. From a post-colonial perspective, it is an ideology devised by white men to justify westward expansion towards California, and eventually to the Pacific Islands and the Philippines, claiming dominion over those territories as the God-given destiny of Americans. European colonizers had

equivalent versions of the Manifest Destiny ideology — France had its “mission civilatrice”² (civilizing mission) version, and England had its “white man’s burden” — both concepts implying civilizing/Christianizing work to carry out among the non-European/non-white/non-Christian peoples of their empires. While self-assigned, it is made to appear as God-given.

In Asia, even Japan, the first Asian country to formally accept the military surrender of a Western power³ with its victory in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war, has its own version of Manifest Destiny, known as the “manifest deity concept” — the idea that Japan is a “divine country” ruled by emperors of divine descent (Bix 71-73, 199). No similar thinking can be found in the Philippines, which canonic Fil-hispanic poetry⁴ references as a Christian nation, due to its centuries-long embrace of Catholicism, the only one in Asia (until the emergence in 1999 of East Timor, a former Portuguese and then Indonesian colony). This Christian characterization is elevated to “chosen nation” status in *Rimas Filipinas*.

As Fil-Hispanic writing is one of Spanish colonization’s cultural legacies, one cannot ignore the literary production’s use of religion as a theme and its exaltation of Catholicism. This explains the abundance of religious references in poetry. Seen from the context of American colonization — its accompanying Americanization and the introduction of the Protestant faith — the Catholic tone in the literary corpus can be seen as the writers’ discursive foil against the marginalization of the Hispanic culture of their upbringing and training, which to them is an essential component of Filipino identity (de la Peña “The Thomasites”).

When dissected, Filipino Hispanic-hood, aggressively defended by Claro Recto (1890-1960), the most prominent of Fil-Hispanic cultural porte-paroles,⁵ boils down to three principal components: the Spanish language, the Catholic faith and Philippine membership in the international Hispanic cultural commonwealth, *la Hispanidad*.⁶ All three are ingredients of the Philippines being a *país hispánico* (Hispanic country).⁷

All 77 poems in *Rimas Filipinas*⁸ by Emeterio Barcelón y Barceló-Soriano (1897-1978)⁹ and Francisco Zaragoza y Carillo (1914-1990)¹⁰ display full consciousness of this Hispanic character of the Philippines. One cannot avoid not reading the religious references together with the textual hints suggesting that the poems were written in the 1950s, a crucial decade in the history of Philippine Communism.¹¹

But apprehension in Philippine society over the threat of communism had surfaced much earlier. In the 1940s, the Philippine Catholic Church issued a Pastoral Letter — what may be the last of its official documents written in Spanish — on the eve of the Pacific War:

...hay aquí, hoy [como] ayer, una contienda de principios y doctrina: a la civilización cristiana, que se trata de anular y destruir, se opone la civilización soviética y átea, que se trata de imponer. A este propósito se vienen sembrando ideas disolventes, áteas, destructivas y sensuales, procreadores de los “sin patria y sin Dios”....tienen por finalidad verdadera soliviantar dichas masas y lanzarlas en abierta lucha contra toda institución humana y divina, en provecho del ateísmo, — única razón suprema en que todas otras razones convergen. (Diócesis de Filipinas)

[there is at present, today as yesterday, a war between principles and doctrine: Christian civilization, which is being neutralized and ruined, opposes atheistic Soviet civilization, which is being imposed. For this purpose, authors of the idea of “no country and no God” are sowing divisive, atheist, destructive, and carnal ideas....their end-goal is to provoke the masses and launch them into an open conflict with all human and divine institutions, capitalizing on atheism — the only supreme reason to which all other reasons converge].

The seriousness of the perceived local Communist threat and the anxiety among Manila residents produced by the encircle-the-cities strategy proclaimed by the Huks resonate in *Rimas Filipinas*. The poets' response: affirmation of the Filipino/Fil-Hispanic¹² Marian cult, calling on Mary to save the Philippines, a country that they claim is consecrated to her worship.¹³

Setting the tone for this heightened tension on the American side was the Joseph McCarthy Communist witch hunts in Washington in the early 1950s; and the Korean War, which ended with an uneasy armistice in 1953. But it was just to be the beginning of a tension-filled decade: the Ho Chi Minh-led Vietminh, victorious over the French colonial army in Vietnam, in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, would advocate Communism and fight South Vietnam and the United States, raising fears in the West of the validity of the Domino Theory. Then came the Soviet military repression of a Hungarian rebellion in 1956, before the decade closed with Fidel Castro forces overthrowing the U.S.-supported Batista regime in Cuba.

The 1960s witnessed U.S. involvement in Vietnam, which ended in the 1975 debacle. An era of détente would last until sometime in 1983, when tension started rising again in the wake of U.S. President Ronald Reagan's project of a satellite anti-missile defense system known as "Star Wars." In the 1980s, the Soviet Union's last premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated controversial reforms bannered as *perestroika* ("restructuring") and *glasnost* ("openness"), and which are believed to have contributed to the dissolution of the United States' ideological rival in the early 1990s.¹⁴

In the Philippines, the 1950s came in the wake of unprecedented national elections in 1949 marked with allegations of widespread cheating and violence. The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), outlawed shortly after World War II and deprived of congressional seats it had won in the 1946 polls, decided to leave the political arena, and, fuelled by the agrarian unrest in Central Luzon, transformed its fight into an open military rebellion. The PKP used a revived Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap or Huk) force, as its main fighting arm. A militarily-decisive but populist and charismatic Defense Secretary, Ramon Magsaysay (1907-1957), broke the back of this insurgency en route to his winning the presidency later.¹⁵

While the combined efforts of the Philippine and American governments successfully neutralized the Huk threat, a Pentagon document dated April 1947 belied the seeming importance Washington had assigned to Manila's fight against the peasants' insurgency. Historian Brendan Simms notes that a U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff paper listed allies and areas of operation according to importance: first in the list came European allies Britain, followed by France and Germany, ahead of Asian post-war friends Japan, China, and Korea. The Philippines came last in importance, after Belgium (397).

The "chosen nation" theme, seen from the context of the Cold War, particularly in 1950s and early 1960s Philippines, is particularly significant, given the uniqueness of the Philippine situation at the time of *Rimas Filipinas*' publication: the lone Christian country in Asia and a supposed showcase of democracy, being a strong ally of the United States, which had come out of World War II proclaiming itself the champion of democratic ideals. The "chosen nation" theme's religious aspects underline a component of the Cold War that went beyond the customary politico-economic jargon accompanying it. For beyond the rhetoric of the Cold War being the ideological rivalry between democratic and communist politico-economic systems, there is the undercurrent of tension between Christian beliefs and atheism, with the labeling of Communism as a "godless ideology," a reference not absent in *Rimas Filipinas*. The affirmation of the Marian cult as a manifestation of the Philippines' Christian character and the Philippines as a Marian nation ("pueblo amante de María". [Mary-loving country])¹⁶ becomes central to the "chosen nation" theme in the anthology.

From *España Imperialista* to *España Eucarística*

Rimas Filipinas opens with an invocation to Spain: not to the *España Imperialista*¹⁷ of poet Cecilio Apóstol (1877-1938), but to the *España Eucarística* [Spain of the Eucharist],¹⁸ the successful defender of the faith during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939),¹⁹ the bloody precursor to World War II and the Cold War. “A España Eucarística” calls the Philippines a “missionary in the Far East” and the poet persona calls on Spain to lend the country its soul, its mind, and its heroism to triumph over Communism, demonized through its representation as a serpent, an obvious reference to the Devil at the Garden of Eden:

*Filipinas misionera
está en el lejano Oriente
Préstale tu alma y tu mente,
España, y tu heroísmo,
para hollar del Comunismo
a la insidiosa serpiente.*

[Missionary Philippines
is in the Far East
Give it your soul and your mind,
and your heroism, Spain,
to crush the insidious serpent
of Communism].

(“A España Eucarística” [To Eucharistic Spain], 5)

The poet persona highlights the reign of the Faith in the former Spanish colony and underlines the continued existence of Apóstol’s *España Imperialista* (5-6):

*Sí, por voluntad divina,
ya los políticos lazos
quedaron hechos pedazos,
España, sobre esa ruina,
en mi tierra Filipina,
aún tu imperio queda en pie;
porque allí fulge y se ve
la luz de tu hermoso idioma;
y aún nuestras almas aroma
para esencia de tu Fe.*

[Yes, by divine will,
political ties
have been shattered,
Spain, on those ruins,
your empire continues to stand
in my land, the Philippines;
because over there the light
of your beautiful language shines and is seen;
and perfumes our souls
for the essence of your Faith].

(“A España Eucarística” 5-6)

It comes as no surprise that the poem chosen to open the anthology makes an inventory of Fil-Hispanic ideology’s principal assertions:

- a) The Philippines is now a political entity independent of Spain, a historical situation with divine sanction;

- b) While Spain is no longer the political overlord in the Philippines, its language remains in the former colonial territory; and
- c) Filipinos remain devout followers of the Catholic faith.

What Chosen Nation Embodies

In summary, the Philippines as a “chosen nation” embodies political independence, possession of the Spanish language and the Catholic faith. In *Rimas Filipinas*, the affirmation of Spanish and of Catholicism are central to that representation. “Canto al Idioma Español” [Song to the Spanish Language] spotlights the following characterizations of the Spanish language:

1. *It is the language of artistic and aesthetic expression.* Spanish is depicted as the language for the beautiful adornment of thoughts and feelings:

*Para dar bello ropaje
a mi pensar y sentir,
acentos voy a pedir
a nuestro español lenguaje.*

*En esa divina lengua
Se expresan bien los sentires,
Con los más bellos decires:
Y de la idea sin mengua.*

*El más estupendo brote
del genio artístico humano,
escrito está en castellano:
Es el libro del Quijote.*

[To beautifully clothe
my thoughts and feelings
I will ask for a voice
from our Spanish language.

In that divine language
feelings are expressed well,
with the most beautiful phrases
and with the undying idea.

The most wonderful product
of human artistic genius
is written in Spanish:
it is the book *Quijote*.]

(“Canto al idioma español”. [Hymn to the Spanish Language], 6)

2. *It is the language of religious expression.* Spanish is the language of the saints and evangelization.

*...si hablaran los santos,
lo harían en español.*

xxx

*Para las cosas de Dios
esa lengua es soberana.*

xxx

*Juan de la Cruz y Teresa
usaron el castellano,
cuando tomaron la empresa
de divinizar lo humano.*

*Y el gran apóstol Santiago,
al realizar su hazaña,
sin duda, sintió en España
de esa lengua el suave halago.*

[...if saints talked,
they would in Spanish.

xxx

For the things of God
That language prevails

xxx

John of the Cross and Teresa²⁰
used Castillian,
when they embarked on the work
to make the human divine.

And the great Apostle James,
while carrying out his feat,²¹
no doubt felt in Spain
the smooth flattery of that language.]
(“Canto al idioma español” 7)

3. *It is a “spiritual language”* (“espiritual idioma” [10]), a divine gift, and the language of divine doctrines, the Philippines’ greatest treasure. While one can easily presume that the allusion is on Church teachings, the reference is, surprisingly, about literature; specifically, the writings of Rizal and the other poets:

*Esa lengua ese cáliz de oro
en que bebió Filipinas
sus divinales doctrinas
que, hoy, son su mejor tesoro.*

*Cuando nuestro héroe, Rizal,
de libertad alzó el grito,
en ese idioma exquisite
escribió su obra inmortal.*

*Nuestros poetas mayores
aún nos dan en ese idioma
de sus versos el aroma,
de su inspiración las flores.*

[That language is a golden chalice
from which the Philippines drank
its divine doctrines
which today, are its greatest treasures.

When our hero, Rizal,
raised the cry of liberty,
in that exquisite language
he wrote his immortal work.

Our great poets
still give us in that language
the aroma of their lines,
the flowers of their inspiration.]
(“Canto al idioma español” 9)

4. *It is a language of inheritance*, which provides much cultural wealth to the Philippines, and its disappearance from the country will mean a great loss. It is also imaged as a linguistic indicator of identity:

*Sí, nuestra es esa lengua de Cervantes
La heredamos de hispanos navegantes
De aquella noble y calumniada España
Que hazaña de Dios hizo de su hazaña
Que sí, humana, cometió errores
También nos dio el Amor de los amores.*

xxx

*Para nuestra cultura ¡cuánta mengua
La ausencia es de esa hermosa y rica lengua!*

[Yes, that language of Cervantes is ours
we inherited it from Hispanic seafarers
From that noble and maligned Spain
who made its feats, the works of God
And while, being human, made mistakes
Also gave us the greatest of Loves.

xxx

What great loss for our culture
Is the absence of that beautiful and rich language!
(“*Discurso necrológico en verso*,” [Eulogy in verse], 94-95)

*Si el nexo colonial hemos deshecho
¡castellano ha de ser cada latido
de la nativa gratitud del pecho;
[If we have cut the colonial bond
Each native’s heartbeat of gratitude
will have to be Spanish!
(“*Lámpara Vótiva*,” [Votive Lamp] 99)*

The Philippines’ “chosen nation” status means access to divine protection and favor. This means the deployment of poets in *Rimas Filipinas* as intercessors for the country, much like saints in Catholic ideology:

*El alma de las naciones
son los poetas y santos;
con sus rezos y sus cantos
imantan las bendiciones.*

[The soul of nations
are poets and saints;
with their prayers and songs
they make blessings come.
(“*Canto al Idioma Español*,” 7)

And so the poet persona declares his creed – to win souls over to the banner of Christ with the use of poetry, armed with his faith and his Filipino soul:

*Enarbolar yo quiero el estandarte.
de Cristo, Redentor del universo;
y, en esa redención tomando parte
conquistar muchas almas por el verso.*

[I want to hoist the banner
of Christ, Savior of the universe;
and, in that redemption to take part
conquering many souls through poetry.]
("¡Oyéme, Señor!" [Hear Me Lord!], 21)

*Culminaré en la trayectoria humana
Llevando por blazon la fe divina;
por cúspide: mi rima castellana
y por bandera: mi alma filipina.*²²

[I will end up in human history
Carrying as my coat of arms the divine faith;
As spear: my Castillian poetry
And as flag: my Filipino soul.]
("Blasón" [Coat of Arms], 31)

References to Fil-Hispanic Poets in *Rimas Filipinas*

Next to Rizal, Manuel Bernabé (1890-1960) and Recto are two poets celebrated in *Rimas Filipinas*. The two Tagalog bards, both good friends, had a reverse-image trajectory: both tried their hand in government and politics, Recto becoming a Supreme Court justice and a senator, before launching into a failed presidential bid; Bernabé, on the other hand, won a congressional seat to represent Parañaque. Recto's contention that his friend's foray into politics was a loss to Fil-Hispanic literature is belied by Bernabé's 1957 anthology, *Perfil de Cresta* [Profile of the Crest] (1957),²³ his second after his *Cantos del Trópico* [Songs from the Tropics], published in 1927. Bernabé, together with Jesus Balmori (1887-1948), promoted a Spanish-language joust they called Balagtasán like its Tagalog counterparts, and jointly won the Premio Zóbel (the highest literary prize in Spanish in the Philippines)²⁴ for it. Recto only came out with a single *poemario*, *Bajo los Cocoteros* (1911) and two one-act plays — *Sólo entre las sombras* and *La ruta de Damasco* (1914) — and established his stature as a Fil-Hispanic poet with the elegance of his writing.

Some postwar Spanish-speaking Filipino Catholics may know Bernabé as the author of the Spanish lyrics of a popular song sung decades ago during the mass, "No más amor que el tuyo" [No Other Love Than Yours].²⁵ In *Rimas Filipinas*, he is celebrated as a "poeta auténtico / de mi raza morena" [authentic poet / of my brown race] (36), a Catholic poet gifted with the Spanish language, and able interpreter of its nuances:

*La España misionera
su hermoso idioma a Bernabé le dio:
y el valioso oro de su fe sincera;
y, en alas de esa lengua y esa fe,
voló hasta la presencia
del Corazón Divino
con estrofas, transidas de belleza
y hondísima ternura,
que hoy adorman su frente de poeta.*

xxx

*Murió el eximio bardo que sabía
interpretar su lengua,
sus íntimos secretos,
su voz cascabelera.*

[Missionary Spain
gave Bernabé its beautiful language:

and the valuable gold of its sincere faith;
and, in the wings of that language and that faith,
he flew toward the presence
of the Divine Heart
with stanzas, filled with beauty
and profound tenderness
which now adorn the poet's forehead.

xxx

The famous poet who knew
how to interpret its language,
its intimate secrets,
its bells-like voice.]

(“A la Memoria de Manolo Bernabé”

[To the Memory of Manolo Bernabé], 37-38)

Unlike Bernabé, Recto quarreled with the Catholic Church in the mid-1950s when he pushed for the passage into law of the Rizal Bill,²⁶ which mandated the teaching and reading of Rizal's works in the educational system. The legislative measure, eventually signed into law as R.A. 1425 in 1956 following some compromises, met with vigorous opposition from the religious sector.²⁷ This may very well provide the context to the following lines in *Rimas Filipinas*:

*Como el sol tiene manchas, tuvo Recto
las suyas, más en su agitada mente
que en su noble y Cristiano corazón.*

xxx

*No hay hombre sin defecto.
Con su musa genial
dijo el pagano vate Juvenal:*

xxx

“...no errar, cual dioses, nunca fue de hombres.

[As the sun has defects, Recto had
his own, more in his agitated mind
than in his noble and Christian heart.
There is no perfect man.
With his ingenious muse
the pagan poet Juvenal said:

xxx

“...to not err, like gods, was never meant for men.”]

(“Ante el Cadáver de Recto” [Before Recto's Cadaver], 34)

But one point becomes clear: *Rimas Filipinas* highlights the social importance of literature, with the deployment of Rizal, Recto, and Bernabé as poets who carry out functions no lesser than those of angels in a “chosen nation,” the Philippines. Their being Fil-Hspanic literati is no accident — an important component of this “chosen nation” status is the country's *país hispánico* character. The reference to Spain and the Philippines as having the same Hispanic origin is thus juxtaposed with an affirmation of strong Catholic faith, bequeathed to the latter by the former:

*Son Filipinas y España
trozos de una misma entraña
y notas de un mismo canto.*

*Aunque impiedad rija y ladre,
mientras viva aquí la Fe,
Nombre que mayor te cuadre,
España, no hay que el de madre.*²⁸

[The Philippines and Spain, pieces from one sole insides and notes of one same song.

Although impiety rages and howls,
while the Faith lives here,
The name that befits you best,
Spain, is nothing but that of mother.]
(“Al Barco Español ‘Plus Ultra’”
[To the Spanish Ship “Plus Ultra”], 39)

Madre España

Spain as mother, the Philippines’ cultural mother, *Madre España* in the Fil-Hispanic literary discourse, the source of the Philippines’ “holy culture,” is recognized:

*Aquí la cruz radiante se levanta,
reinan tantas costumbres populares,
aquí, también, con rítmicos cantares
a la patria y a Dios se elogia y canta.*

*Tal obra, admiración de los extraños,
no se debe al azar. Trescientos años
de sublime labor educadora
son los que obraron tanta maravilla:
Tras nuestra occidental hechura brilla
el alma hispana, cual perenne aurora.*

[Here the radiant cross stands,
here popular holy costumes reign;
here, as well, with rhythmic songs
God and country are praised and exalted.

Such work, admired by foreigners,
is not produced by accident. Three hundred years
of sublime educational labor
are what produced such wonder:
Shining behind our Western form:
the Hispanic soul, like a perennial dawn].
(“A España” [To Spain], 78)

In bequeathing the Catholic faith to the Philippines, Spain is transformed into a mother in the eyes of Fil-Hispanic literati. This is an important point to consider, as the *Madre España* image is where Fil-Hispanic literary discourse separates from mainstream and non-mainstream²⁹ Philippine historiographic thinking. For the writers in Spanish, España was a dichotomized figure: on one hand, it is a cultural mother, *Madre España*, to whom the Philippines owes its socialization into Western civilization, including the Catholic faith; and on the other, a colonial tyrant, *España Negra*, the evil Spain of imperialist exploitation fame, executioner of Rizal, and the Spain against which the Katipunan staged the 1896 revolution (de la Peña “The Hispanista”).

While Fil-Hispanic writing, *Rimas Filipinas* included, makes no denial of the bloody revolution which triggered the political separation between Spain and the Philippines —

*Caprichoso el Destino con su clava
un día quiso ¡memorable día!
Cortar el lazo secular que unía
La hija valiente con la madre brava.*

[Destiny is whimsical with its whip,
one day – what a memorable day! -- it wanted
to cut the tie which united
the valiant daughter and the brave mother].
("A España" [To Spain], 78)

— Philippine poets in Spanish utilize the metaphor of birth to represent this parting of ways:

*La hija se emancipó...
De su madre, que, al irse, le decía:
"Ahí te dejó entera el alma mía"
Y su habla y religión aquí dejaba.*

*De estas tierras en todos los lugares:
En templos, en tribunas y en hogares,
¡hasta en casa de nipa y débil caña!³⁰
exhalan aún su celestial aroma
la fe de Cristo y el hispano idioma:
Marchóse el soberano, mas no España.*

[The daughter obtained emancipation...
from her mother, who, upon leaving, the latter told her: “
Here I leave you my intact soul”
and thus she left her language and religion.

In all places in this land:
In churches, in the courts, and in homes,
even in houses made of nipa and fragile bamboo!
they continue to exalt the celestial aroma
of the faith of Christ and the Spanish language:
The king is gone, but not Spain!
("A España," 79)

The figure of the poet -- earlier referenced as fulfilling angelic functions, and later, in “A Una Religiosa Española” [To A Spanish Religious], as someone with divine attributes³¹ -- is again appropriated and combined with the idea of *Filipinas* as a country equipped with “the faith of Christ and the Spanish language.” What emerges is the image of a Spanish-speaking Catholic poet, an important component of the “chosen nation” characterization:

*Y en Filipinas brillan, cual dos soles,
tu lenguaje y tu fe, que adoro tanto:
Por eso, en español alzo mi canto.*

[And in the Philippines shine, like two suns,
your language and your faith, which I adore so much:
That is why I sing my song in Spanish].
("A Cervantes" [To Cervantes], 81)

The poet is an important member of the cast of characters in a “chosen nation” struggling during an era of Cold War tension, where the Faith is perceived to be threatened by a godless ideology. The poet becomes a missionary, a harbinger of light, a reminder of things spiritual in an existence surrounded by much worldliness and consumerism. In “Faltan Poetas” [Lack of Poets], we see a summons for poets to fulfill their role in a “chosen nation”:

*No arriconéis, poetas, vuestra lira
No importa digan que es un disparate,
en esta edad del dólar, ser un vate³²
que por lo spiritual sueña y suspira.*

*Esta vida a trocar en cielo aspira
el corazón que por lo bello late;
ni tiene al vil metal por acicate,
ni es el poeta un hombre que delira.*

*Es luz, es flor que esparce sus olores,
misionero que va sembrando amores,
y predicando paz y caridad.*

*Hoy hierve el mundo en odios y rencores,
y afean el vivir negros dolores:
¡Porque faltan poetas de verdad!*

[Do not hide your lyres, poets.
It does not matter that they say it is madness
in this age of the dollar to be a poet
who dreams and aspires for the spiritual.

The heart which lives for beauty
Aspires to trade this life in heaven;
a poet is not a man who talks nonsense,
nor one scarred by evil metal.

He is light, he is a flower which spreads its fragrance,
a missionary who sows love,
preaching peace and charity.

Today the world is filled with hatred and rancor
and life made ugly by dark sorrows:
Because there is a lack of true poets!
("Faltan Poetas" [Lack of Poets], 84)

It must be recalled that in the mind of the poet-persona, the reference to "poets" pertains to the Fil-Hispanic kind, not the one writing in the indigenous nor English languages. The designation cannot be more specific (emphasis mine):

*Y en Filipinas brillan, cual dos soles,
Tu lenguaje y tu fe que adoro tanto:
Por eso, en español alzo mi canto.*

[And in the Philippines, like two suns shine,
Your language and your faith, which I love so much:
That is why I sing my song in Spanish].
("A Cervantes" [To Cervantes], 81)

The Christian trope of a traitor Judas is equally deployed in *Rimas Filipinas*. While Spain is represented as a mother of refuge, and Mary – also a mother – as the country's protector at a time of spiritual conflict that the Cold War was, there is recognition of the presence of "traitorous" Filipinos, ungrateful ones, *ingratos* – appropriation of the Filipino languages of this Spanish adjective has not lost the latter's negative connotation -- to the cultural and spiritual legacies of Spain:

*De ti en este noble suelo
perduran recuerdos gratos;
siempre ha sido nuestro anhelo
que fueras, España, un cielo,
aun a tus hijos ingratos.*

*Ahora que Cristo y Luzbel
deslindando el campo van,
anuncia de lid cruel,
sé a tu amor de madre fiel,
tus hijos contigo están.*

[In this noble land,
beautiful memories of you remain;
it has always been our aspiration
that you, Spain, be a haven
still to your ungrateful children.

Now that Christ and Lucifer
are marking the battlefield,
an announcement of fierce combat,
be faithful to your mother's love
your children are with you].

(“Al Barco Español ‘Plus Ultra’”

[To the Spanish Ship “Plus Ultra”], 40)

Marian Devotion in the Philippines and in *Rimas Filipinas*

The reverent worship for Mary in a predominantly Catholic country with strong affinity to the Virgin resonates strong in *Rimas Filipinas*. The Marian figure is strongly embedded in Filipino socio-political consciousness: in the post-war era, in 1948, what started as revelations of Marian apparitions in Lipa, Batangas by a 21-year-old postulant from an affluent Batangas family, Teresita Castillo, turned controversial with the Vatican's declaration that the event was not of supernatural origin.³³ Another series of Marian apparitions, some 41 years later, courtesy of Judiel Nieva from Agoo, La Union, caused much uproar, and thanks to television — a technology still absent in the country in 1948 — generated much public interest. A theological commission from the Catholic Church later declared the alleged apparitions as *Constat de Non Supernaturalitate* or “clearly evident to be not supernatural” (Tallara 567).³⁴

The discredited reports of apparitions, notwithstanding, Marian devotion remains very strong in the Philippines. The dominant languages in the country register in their vocabulary the many names by which the Virgin Mary is called: from the Spanish period's “Nuestra Señora” to the American era's “Our Lady,” “Blessed Mother,” “Mother Mary,” to the Filipino “Ina” and “Ilay” to the presently-popular “Mama Mary” (Doyo, “Pueblo amante de María”).

In 2013, the CBCP issued Circular Letter No.1 to announce the Celebration of the National Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on June 8. According to Philip Sarmiento —

the letter expressed the views of the CBCP that tremendous flow of divine grace through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary is attributed to her maternal care for those who implore her intercession, especially at the height of the unfortunate events that happened in the country;³⁵ hence, as stated in the circular letter, “...it is always our dream and hope that we, as a Filipino nation, may not only **grow in our devotion to Mary**, but above all, may acquire a deeper understanding of Mary's role in the Church in the Philippines (emphasis mine) (Sarmiento 74).

Josefina Manabat gives as evidence of strong Marian devotion in the Philippines the presence of “various manifestations that are embedded in the religious cultures and consciousness of our people. In the Philippines alone, such manifestations include numerous parishes, barrio chapels, shrines, and oratories dedicated to her, not to mention the innumerable institutions and establishments like schools, hospitals, and even business and sports facilities, named after her or after one of her many titles and invocations” (11).

Sarmiento and Manabat both highlight the ubiquitous presence of Mary in important religious celebrations in the Philippines that do not necessarily have her as the center figure: the dawn masses known as *Simbang Gabi* from December 16 to 24 are celebrated as votive masses for her; the Nativity scene, while focused on the baby Jesus, invariably includes Mary’s presence as the mother; the *Panunuluyan*, the dramatic reenactment of Joseph and Mary looking for an inn in Bethlehem; and during Holy Week celebrations, Mary is present in the *Via Crucis* (The Way of the Cross), in the recollection of the *Siete Palabras* (Last Seven Words), and in the Good Friday procession as Mater Dolorosa (Sarmiento 74; Manabat 11-12).

In the 1960s, with Vatican II, despite efforts of the Catholic Church to tone down Marian devotion, or to move away from “Marian centering,” in the words of Baring, Marian piety has remained strong in the Philippines (Baring 2-3). The devotion has even extended to the *Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*, (the Sacred Heart of Jesus), deployed in *Rimas* as one common family practice:

*SEÑOR: Gobierna y reina en esta casa,
En ella sea ley Tu Voluntad,
Tu poder no halle límite ni tasa*
xxx

No abandones jamás esta morada,
do en cada pecho tienes un altar
no mires el valor de nuestra nada,
quédate aquí, y bendice nuestro hogar.

[Lord: Rule and reign in this house,
may Your Will be law in it,
may your power not find limit nor equal.
xxx

Never abandon this dwelling place,
where you have an altar in every breast;
do not look at the value of our nothingness,
remain here, and bless our home.]

(“Al Sagrado Corazón” [To the Sacred Heart], 48-49)

The affirmation of the Fil-Hispanic soul – Catholic (not Protestant) and Spanish-speaking (not Anglophone) -- is also seen in

*El alma Filipina sigue siendo española
a pesar de la ola que otra agua reverbera*
xxx

*Se oye un eco de siglos en la nativa entraña
Y a poco que se rasguen cortezas del pasado,
saltan pedazos vivos del corazón de España.*

[The Filipino soul continues to be Spanish
despite the waves coming from another sea]
xxx

A centuries-old echo is heard in the native heart
And when the past is revealed
living pieces come out from the heart of Spain.]
("Simientes de Eternidad" [Seeds of Eternity], 18)

In the minds of Fil-Hispanic poets, the Filipino soul is identified by its possession of the Spanish language and adherence to the Catholic faith, an affirmation repeatedly resonating in *Rimas Filipinas*.

*Sus brazos fueron cuna de nuestra edad primera.
El jugo que nos nutre: la savia de su idioma.*

[Her arms were the cradle of our early years.
The milk that sustains us: the sap of its language].

and

*Se ahilan en el alma raíces de diamantes
-- cordajes inconsútiles que el tiempo no desdora --
la fe del Nazareno, la lengua de Cervantes.*

[Diamond roots have lined up in the soul]
-- seamless cordage which time does not tarnish --
the faith of the Nazarene, the language of Cervantes].
("Simientes de Eternidad" [Seeds of Eternity], 20-21):

Being Catholic and Spanish-speaking, the Philippines is thus seen as sharing fraternal ties with Latin American countries, and a short poem that seems to have been written prior to the Fidel Castro-led overthrow of the Batista government in Cuba³⁶ highlights this bond:

*Pregunté, Cubita bella,
a tu mar, que es un encanto
¿Por qué te pareces tanto
a la tierra mía aquella
que es más linda que una estrella?*

*Y con voz de barcarolas,
Me dicen tus rientes olas
estas palabras divinas:*

*Es que Cuba y Filipinas
son dos almas españolas.*

[I asked, beautiful Cuba,
your wonderful sea:
Why do you look so much
like my land
which is more beautiful than a star?

And, in a voice of barcaroles,
your smiling waves reply
with this divine words:

Because Cuba and the Philippines
are two Spanish souls.
("A Cuba," [To Cuba], 49)

The Cuban missile crisis and the Berlin Wall blockade are two harrowing events from two generations back and may not figure prominently in the minds of post-1986 Filipinos. But the Philippines' political affiliation with the United States would inevitably send jitters among the foreign policy sectors in the country, especially those familiar with the warning words of the then-deceased Recto about the U.S. military bases being targets that could embroil the Philippines into another U.S. conflict (Constantino 254).

Among the clearly anti-Communist poems in *Rimas Filipinas*, "A Filipinas Redimida" [To The Redeemed Philippines] stands out in its preaching about religion and liberty, and its warning about the dangers of a godless ideology, undoubtedly a reference to Communism. Read in the context of a Cold War, the anti-Communist stance it makes leaps out of the page. It opens with a message that a country never betrays its beliefs, and that a liberty lived without religion and a belief in God is fake liberty:

*No hay patria que no se hunda
si traiciona a sus creencias;
xxx
¡Qué triste estar siempre en pos
de una libertad fingida;
pues no es libertad ni es vida
la vida sin fe y sin Dios!
Sin religión que es virtud,
libertad es un vocablo,
inventado por el Diablo
que equivale a esclavitud.*

[There is no country that does not collapse
if it betrays its belief;

xxx

How sad to always be pursuing
a fake liberty;
life without faith and without God
is not liberty nor life!

Without religion, which is a virtue,
freedom is a word
invented by the Devil,
which means slavery.

("A Filipinas Redimida" [To the Redeemed Philippines], 54-55)

The poem goes on to remind the country that the "fe santa" (holy faith) guided earlier Filipinos, and that a nation's redemption is obtained not by warriors nor saints, but by the word of God:

*Se salvarán las naciones,
no por guerreros y sabios;
sino por oír de labios
del Salvador las lecciones.*

[Nations are saved,
not by warriors nor saints;
but by listening to lessons
from the lips of the Savior]

("A Filipinas Redimida" [To the Redeemed Philippines], 55)

Religion is thus presented as the path to glory for the Philippines; and part of that glory is becoming a spokesperson for divine doctrine.

*Si, pues, pueblo filipino,
grande quieres ser un día,
preserva con valentía
de tu fe el oro divino.*

*Te abrirá ella sus caminos
que conducen a la gloria;
tu brillarás en la historia
con tus gloriosos destinos.*

*Pues serás el portavoz
de las sublimes doctrinas
que, como en ondas divinas,
de Dios transmiten la voz.*

[Thus, Filipino nation,
if you want to be great one day,
bravely guard
the divine gold of your faith.

It will open to you its paths
which lead to glory;
you will shine in history
with your glorious destinies.

You will proclaim
sublime doctrines
which, like divine waves,
transmit the voice of God.]

(“A Filipinas Redimida,” 55)

In the figure of the Philippines being a missionary in Asia, a chosen nation by God, as earlier alluded to in another poem, the Enlightenment’s light-as-redemption symbolism is deployed side by side with the exhortation to grow in grace and sanctity, and fight the “aves de la iniquidad” (birds of iniquity). Interestingly, the reference is an intertext with the “aves de rapiña” figure connected with the infamous 1910 *El Renacimiento* editorial which eventually led to that nationalist newspaper’s closure:

*Crece en gracia y santidad,
pueblo que Dios ha escogido;
y en ti no pongan su nido
aves de la iniquidad.*

*Fiel a tu noble misión,
difunde la eternal luz
que brota desde la cruz,
símbolo de la redención.*

[Grow in grace and sanctity,
people whom God has chosen;
and may no nest be built in you
by birds of iniquity.

Faithful to your noble mission,
spread your eternal light,

which springs from the cross,
symbol of redemption.]
(“A Filipinas Redimida” 56)

The redemption the Philippines enjoys is contrasted with the “fall” of many nations seduced by a godless religion, a “viciado patriotismo” [corrupt patriotism].

*Hundiéronse en el abismo
muchas naciones enteras,
por tremolar las banderas
de un viciado patriotismo.*

xxx

*Y no debes darte el lujo
De vivir sin religion:
que eso es poner la nación
del mal bajo el vil influjo.*

[Many nations
sank into the abyss
for waving the banners of a corrupt patriotism.

xxx

And you should not indulge
in a life without religion:
that is putting the nation
under the influence of evil].
(“A Filipinas Redimida”, 56)

The poem repeats its reminder: a nation without God nor religion is a blind nation, a nation destined for ruin; it is a nation without ideals, without a future, and – referencing the ideas of a poem which formed part of a work which won the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest prize for poetry – a nation which does not know how to be strong “like the molave.”³⁷

*No nos llamemos a engaño:
Pueblo sin Dios y sin fe
es un pueblo que no ve
que lo hace para su daño.*

*Es pueblo sin ideal,
sin mañana, que no sabe
ser fuerte como el “molave”
cuando arrecia el vendabal.*

[Let us not deceive ourselves:
A country without God and without religion
is a country which does not see
that what it is doing is for its ruin.

It is a nation without ideals,
without a future, which does not know
how to be strong like the “molave”
when the gale gets worse.

(“A Filipinas Redimida” 57)

The poem ends with a warning: abandoning the faith will be rewarded by a crown of thorns. Yet the poet-persona, a firm believer in the Nazi then Cold War slogan “mejor muerto que rojo” [better dead than Red],³⁸ utters a wish should the Philippines turn Communist:

*Pero antes de verte esclava,
que te arrasen huracanes,
o te entierren tus volcanes
bajo su candente lava.*

[But rather than see you enslaved,
may hurricanes ravage you
or may your volcanoes bury you
under their burning lava.]
(“A Filipinas Redimida,” 57)

Preserving the Philippines’ Catholic legacy is an important part of the “Chosen Nation” discourse. The Philippines’ Catholic nature is in fact, for the two authors of *Rimas Filipinas*, the country’s mark of identity as a consecrated nation. “A España Eucarística” references the Philippines as a missionary in Asia (“Far East” in the Spanish perspective); another directly utilizes a Church/temple metaphor (65): “*Es Filipinas templo, / el templo de Tu Amor*” [The Philippines is a temple/the temple of Your Love]. These specific instances of consecration entitles the country to divine protection; calls for such protection are found in several poems in *Rimas Filipinas*.

The first protector summoned is Mary, who is projected as

*Atrás satélites del mal atrás:
Este pueblo es herencia de María,
aquella Virgen que, en un fausto día,
hundió bajo sus pies a Satanás.*

[Go away, satellites of evil, go away:
This country is Mary’s legacy,
that Virgin who, one fateful day
crushed Satan under her feet].
(“¡Oyéme, Señor!” [Hear me Lord], 22)

Mary’s legacy is a concept tied to the country’s political independence, as can be seen in “Oración por Filipinas,” whose lines suggest the poem’s birth in 1946, the year the United States granted Philippine independence:

*Oye, Señor, la oración
que a Tu Majestad elevo,
en nombre de esta nación,
hecha hoy un Estado nuevo.*

*No permita Tu Bondad
perdamos la independencia;
que no nos roben la herencia
de nuestra fe y libertad.*

[Hear Lord, the prayer
which I lift to Your Majesty,
in the name of this nation,
transformed into a new State today.

May Your Kindness not allow
us to lose our independence;
may they not rob us of the legacy
of our faith and liberty].
(“Oración por Filipinas” [Prayer for the Philippines], 60)

That legacy of faith is a faith directly tied to the narrative of Filipino heroes led by Jose Rizal, the story of the Philippine struggle for independence:³⁹

*Por esa libertad santa
el gran Rizal se inmoló;
tanta vida y sangre tanta
a la patria se ofreció.*

*Por esa Fe Salvadora
bendice, Señor, a España,
Premia a la libertadora
América por su hazaña.*

[For that holy liberty
the great Rizal sacrificed himself;
so much life and so much blood
was offered to the country.

With that Saving Faith
Bless Spain, oh Lord,
Reward emancipating
America for its deed].

(“Oración por Filipinas,” 61)

In “Oración por Filipinas,” the poet-persona’s prayer for the Philippines concludes with a wish that the country be always subservient to the divine will and laws, be protected by the Cross, and that the country’s top executive always recognize God as King, his ways illuminated by divine guidance:

*Que este mi pueblo sencillo
siempre obedezca Tu Ley;
que de mi raa el caudillo
te reconozca por Rey.*

*De tu gracia con la luz,
alúmbrale su camino;
y, al amparo de Tu Cruz,
guarda al pueblo filipino.*

[May this simple country of mine
always obey Your Law;
may the leader of my race
always recognize you as King.

With the grace of your light,
illuminate his ways;
and protected by Your Cross,
protect the Filipino people.

(“Oración por Filipinas,” 61)

The Fil-hispanic Catholic poet is not alone. Together fulfilling his mission, is the country itself – the missionary country in Asia, a “chosen nation” -- making use of its gift of the Catholic faith, giving birth to more missionaries:

*De almas nativas en la tierra buena,
aún siembran misioneras generosas
de su fe ardiente las divinas rosas.*

[Native souls in the good land
still produce generous missionaries
divine roses of their fervent faith.

(“A una religiosa española,” [To A Spanish Nun], 81)

One of the last poems in the *Rimas Filipinas* collection highlights the continuing life of Spain, the spiritual mother, in a new Philippines. There is a passage in “A la Madre Justa Dominguez” which references the Communist threat and Catholic fears of the disappearance of Spain:

*Si un negro día manos asesinas
matan a vuestra España en Filipinas,
la madre muerta en la hija vivirá.*

[If one dark day assassin hands
kill your Spain in the Philippines,
the mother will live in the daughter]

(“A la Madre Justa Dominquez”

[To Mother Justa Dominguez], 86)

Though published in the mid-1960s, *Rimas Filipinas* continues to defend a pre-war literary ideology spotlighting the important role of the Philippines in Asia, seen from Hispanic eyes. It affirms Fil-Hispanic culture and deploys its religious component (the Catholic faith) by highlighting the Philippines’ “chosen nation” status in the poets’ eyes as an important foil to the so-called Communist threat during the Cold War.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A work premised on this theory is Herbert Armstrong’s *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* (1967), which claims that the key to understanding biblical prophecy is the knowledge that the people of the United States and Britain are the Hebrew patriarch Joseph’s descendants, blessed by his father Jacob. The work expands the idea further by suggesting that people of Western European countries constitute the modern-day lost ten tribes of Israel.
- 2 For more discussion of this mission civilatrice, see Nadeau and Barlow (2006), where the imperialist ideology frames the discussion of French colonization and the development of the French language.
- 3 I must say that the Philippines was the first Asian country to defeat a Western power militarily, in the 1896-98 revolution against Spain. But due to Spanish authorities’ insistence in defending Spain’s honor, they refused to surrender to besieging Filipino forces, but instead negotiated a surrender to American troops after a mock battle on 13 August 1898.
- 4 This is a little-studied area in Fil-Hispanic literature. Ma. Elinora Imson’s unpublished dissertation, “The Poetry of Manuel Bernabé: Prologomena to Reading a Cultural Text” (1991), unravels the “cultural code” in the poetry of American-period Fil-Hispanic poets and lists religion as an important element of this code. The subject poet, Bernabé (1890-1960), declared in 1950 as *Poeta Nacional* (National Poet) in Spanish by the University of Santo Tomás, is the author of the thickest Fil-Hispanic *poemario*, *Cantos del Trópico* (1927), and which carries one entire section of religious poetry.
- 5 See Farolan (1983) and Fernández Lumba (1980).
- 6 An idea conceived after the loss of empire in 1898, *Hispanidad* is the label used in the Hispanic cultural world to group Spain, Latin America, Ecuatorial Guinea, the former Spanish Morocco, and the Philippines as one cultural commonwealth united by religion, language, and culture. Spanish writer Ramiro de Maetzu’s *Defensa de la Hispanidad* (1934) outlined an idea of *Hispanidad* which would be prevalent during Spain’s Franco years. For discussion of Philippine *Hispanidad* see Fernández Lumba (1980) and de Veyra (1961).
- 7 An interesting Spanish insight on this idea is found in Piñar Lopez (1957).
- 8 In a conversation a few years ago with Dr. Carmen Gloria Ventanilla, retired professor of Spanish in U.P. Diliman and who had worked on the poetry of Emeterio Barcelón for her Master’s thesis (1980), she told me that the two poets had agreed to collaborate on a single poemario, which would not identify which poet authored any

of the 77 poems in *Rimas Filipinas*; that is, all poems but one: “Relicario” (194-195), dedicated to “Don Emeterio Barcelón, el cantor de la Eucaristía” obviously belongs to Zaragoza.

9 Barcelón was a professor of law of Spanish in several universities, aside from being a regular contributor to pre-war Philippine newspapers in Spanish. He headed the Spanish department of the Manila Archdiocesan Seminary in 1958 and in 1961 won the *Premio Zóbel*, the now-extinct highest literary award in the Philippines for a writer in Spanish. He was a member of several academic organizations: the Academia Filipina, the Royal Literary Academy of Sevilla, and the Royal Academy of Legislation and Jurisprudence (Brillantes 2006, 209).

10 Zaragoza started his writing career as a journalist and wrote for Spanish-language publications in Manila like *Voz de Manila*, *El Excelsior*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Debate*, and *La Opinión*. He also was editor for the magazines *La Mujer* and *Relámpago*.

11 From an international perspective, the 1950s would begin a 25-year escalation of the Cold War, with the United States and the Soviet Union engaging in proxy armed conflicts (the Korean War, the Vietnam War of Independence against the French, the Cuban Revolution), and an arms race metamorphosing into a space exploration competition. The decade kicked off to a nervous start, concluding the 1940s with the lifting of a nerve-racking Berlin Blockade, and five months later, in September, with the victory of the Mao Tse Tung forces over Chang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist troops, resulting in the formal establishment of two Chinese states: the Communist People’s Republic of China and the democratic Nationalist Republic of Taiwan. That same month, the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb, triggering a new level of Cold War tension.

12 “Fil-Hispanic” is inserted here to highlight the significant presence of the Marian cult in Filipino writing in Spanish, not just in non-Spanish Filipino production. While “Filipino” as an adjective can very well stand independently, the use of the hyphenated Fil-Hispanic label refers to elements in Philippine culture that have yet to be fully assimilated as “Filipino”. (de la Peña, “The Thomasites”).

13 This current reading of *Rimas Filipinas* calls to mind the Cold War anxieties found in the short fiction of Gregorio Brillantes, especially in his collection, *Distance to Andromeda and Other Stories* (1960). While *Rimas Filipinas* deploys Marian intervention as a defense, Brillantes’ characters struggle with what a critic has called “expulsion from Eden” (Grow 491, 494).

The adoration of the Virgin Mary in the Philippines is so strong that political circles have taken cognizance of its importance. In 2017, the government enacted Republic Act No. 10966 declaring December 8, feast day of the Virgin Mary, as a non-working official holiday in honor of her being the patroness of the country. (Interestingly though, one must wonder when Japanese bombs fell on the country, ushering it into World War II). Interestingly, the law comes 76 years after the Japanese bombing of military targets in the Philippines on December 8, 1941, and one wonders what Filipino Catholics must have felt on that day of the Feast of Immaculate Concepcion. That notwithstanding, the Marian cult remained strong in the country and in February 1986, devotees deployed the Virgin Mary as a protector figure, an idea backed up by newspaper photos of nuns praying the rosary while carrying out the blockade of EDSA during the People Power Revolution against Ferdinand Marcos (1917-1989).

14 An interesting non-politician’s view of Gorbachev’s role in easing Cold War tension and his struggles with his domestic reforms is found in the account of one of his English-language interpreters, Igor Korchilov (1997).

15 During the last twenty or so years, and in the wake of the restoration of democratic space in 1986, personal narratives from the side of the Huks have surfaced and cast light on hitherto unknown aspects of the rebellion. A partial list includes Kerkvliet (1979), Saulo (1990), Pomeroy (1994, 2009), and Lanzona (2009).

16 The Spanish phrase is from the pen of Barcelón himself, part of the lyrics for the official hymn composed by Fr. Norberto Carceller — for the 1937 International Eucharistic Congress held in Manila (Doyo, “Pueblo amante de María”; Brillantes 209).

17 The title of an Apóstol poem written to commemorate the visit in 1914 of Spanish poet Salvador Rueda (1857-1933) as the personal envoy of Spanish King Alfonso XIII (1886-1941). In the poem, Apóstol proclaims the existence of a new “imperialist” Spain out to conquer the world – this time, not in search of new territories, but to spread her culture and language, in an attempt to create a “spiritual empire.”

18 It is possible that this poem was written sometime in 1952, the year Spain (still on international pariah status because of its overthrow of a duly-constituted government in 1939 and its partnership, although nominal, with the Axis Powers during World War II) hosted the first post-war International Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona, 41 years after the congress was held in Madrid (“Hoy que, por **segunda vez**/ el Dios de la Eucaristía/para premiar tu hidalguía / te alza a ti sobre el pavés”. [Today, for the second time/ the God of the Eucharist /to reward your

nobility / designates you as leader] Emphasis mine). The Philippines hosted the congress in 1937, an event with much significance to Catholic Filipinos. It hosted the gathering again in 2016.

19 The Spanish Civil War's effect on the early Commonwealth Philippines is one topic hardly examined by contemporary Filipino historians. The Spanish and Fil-Hispanic elite found themselves in a quandary with the war, as the United States declared neutrality. Then Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon illustrated this conflict in 1937 during a speech in San Juan de Letrán, when school authorities permitted the playing of the Franco hymn. Quezon reacted: "That Franco Hymn should not have been played here. The Franco Government is still unrecognized. The United States Congress has enacted a neutrality law and it is my duty to enforce that law in this country. I would not have said what I have said, and would have ignored this matter, if the Franco rebellion were still in its initial stage; but now that it seems to be winning, there is so much more reason for protesting, as I now protest, against such an act. Let no one say that I yield when a cause is about to triumph. What has happened has been a great mistake and a lack of consideration for the President of the Philippines" (Speech of President Quezon at the San Juan de Letran Alumni Annual Banquet). Proof of the predominant pro-Franco sentiment among Spanish residents in the country was the number of young men who volunteered to go to Spain — Spanish language newspapers would run news items listing the names of the volunteers — to fight on the side of the rebels led by putschist general Francisco Franco (1892-1975). One can still see today a big plaque honoring a group of these volunteers in one of the corridors of the Casino Español in Manila. A good source for information on the effects of the *guerra civil* on the Philippines is Spanish historian Florentino Rodao's *Franquistas sin Franco* (2012) and "Spanish Falange in the Philippines, 1939-1945" (1995).

20 San Juan de la Cruz (St. John of the Cross, 1542-1591) and Teresa de Avila (1515-1582) are acknowledged as the great mystics of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, the Golden Age of Spanish literature, which straddles the European Renaissance and the Baroque periods

21 The Apostle James is believed to have done evangelization work in Spain and is believed to be buried in northwestern Spain, in the city that now carries his name (Santiago de Compostela). This city became a medieval pilgrimage site — the journey was done on foot from the Franco-Spanish border and through the entire length of Spain's northern coast — after the Ottomans won control of Jerusalem. His feast day (25 July) is a national holiday in Spain, he being the country's patron saint.

22 Only 20 years or so separate *Rimas Filipinas'* "Blasón" and the much-quoted "Blasón" of Jesús Balmori (1886-1948) from his 1939 Commonwealth Literary Contest-winning *Mi Casa de Nipa* (My Nipa Hut) *poemario*. But while *Rimas Filipinas'* "Blasón" banners its poet persona's Christian faith, Balmori's focus, while not denying the Fil-Hispanic poet's Christian nature, was on ethno-cultural identity (Balmori 27-28): *Soy un bardo indo-hispano. En mi pecho cristiano / Mi corazón es vaso donde mezclada está / La sangre de Legaspi, el Capitán hispano, / Con la sangre tagala de la hija del Rajá.* ["I am an Indo-hispanic bard. In my Christian breast / My heart is the vessel where / the blood of Legaspi, the Hispanic captain, is mixed / with the Tagalog blood of the daughter of the Rajah"]

23 Bernabé's most-anthologized poems "¡Bataan! ¡Corregidor!" And La romería de la muerte" [Pilgrimage of Death], about the USAFFE defeats in World War II and the Death March are found in this collection.

24 The prize, which had to be cancelled not just once due to lack of published authors during given years, is no longer being offered. Lourdes Brillantes, a former UP Diliman professor of Spanish, has written its history in Spanish, *80 Años del Premio Zóbel* (2000). She came out with an English version, *81 Years of Premio Zobel: A Legacy of Philippine Literature in Spanish*, in 2006.

25 The lyrics are taken from Bernabé's hymn, "Al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús" which appears in *Perfil de Cresta*.

26 In its opposition to the Rizal Bill, the Catholic Church issued a statement where it said it found "passages which disparage divine worship...especially the veneration of images and relics, devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints...". (CBCP, "Statement of the Philippine Hierarchy on the Novels of Dr. Jose Rizal, Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo")

27 The vigorous opposition of the Catholic Church for a legislative project would not see a repeat until the late 1990s, when progressive legislators pushed for the controversial Reproductive Health Bill, that would see its passing a third and final reading in both houses of Congress in late 2012.

28 Spain and the Philippines being separate parts of one entity, being mother and child, echoes a line in a Bernabé poem, "Mi Casa Es Tu Casa" [My Home Is Your Home]: "...quien dice España dice Filipinas" ["...s/he who utters Spain utters the Philippines"] (Bernabé 1957, 75)

29 Historian Reynaldo Ileto's pathbreaking work, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (1979), analyzes the millenarian discourse on Spain, which is notable for its monolithic view of the former colonizer, that of the oppressive tyrant, or *España Negra* in the language of the Fil-hispanic writers. For an example

of Hispanista historiography, see Encarnación Alzona's *El Legado de España a Filipinas* (1956) and Rafael Palma's *Historia de Filipinas* (1968)

30 Rizal exerted a significant presence in Fil-hispanic poetry (see Coronel 2001-2002 and Maranan 2001-2002). The five preceding lines up to this point bring to mind specific stanzas in his poems "Ultimo Adios" and "Mi Retiro."

31 "ser poeta es ser divino" [to be a poet is to be divine] in "Canciones del Camino" [Songs on the Road] (82)

32 Accompanying the characterization of Filipinas as a Spanish-speaking *pais hispánico* is a Catholic and moral Philippines. This sense of morality cannot be divorced from the image of a religious and God-fearing nation. Interestingly, this image became a discursive foil against the Americanization thrust of U.S. colonization – in American-period Fil-hispanic literary discourse, America is depicted as a corrupting and immoral influence in Philippine society, a representation seen in the 1950s in Benigno del Río's *Yo, Aprendiz a Poeta* (1954) [I, Poet Apprentice] and as late as the 1980s in Edmundo Farolan's *Tercera Primavera* (1981) [Third Spring].

33 A Catholic miracle researcher, Michael O'Niell, commented to a writer of the Catholic News Agency (CNA) that the devotion for Mary, Mediatrix of all Grace in Lipa, Batangas, was a rare example of a practice being allowed despite a negative Vatican judgment on a reported apparition (Farrow 2016).

34 Curiously, the uproar caused by Nieva seems to indicate that the Filipino masses are either non-critical in their religious beliefs or are programmed, by their blind faith, to look for miracles in a desperate attempt for some hope in a pitiable physical existence. The crowds that went to Agoo in search for miracles call to mind the crowds in the 1982 movie *Himala* (Miracle), directed by Ishmael Bernal. The message "Walang himala!" [there is no miracle] shouted by Elsa, the Marian visionary character portrayed by award-winning veteran actress Nora Aunor, seems to have been easily forgotten seven years later. A 1993 theological commission declared Nieva's apparition reports as fraudulent (Linao 1995). But what is interesting with the Nieva case and its movie precedent, *Himala*, is their happening in the decade following the reported Marian visitations in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia in 1981. In what may just be a coincidence, Marian apparitions/visitations — like the Fatima appearances in 1917 — seem to happen some time before a major event of either local or international significance. In the Fatima case, the famous message about Russia preceded the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; the Medjugorje appearances came shortly after the death of post-war Yugoslav dictator Josep Broz Tito (1892-1980), which unleashed a series of events that culminated in the Yugoslav civil war and the disappearance of Yugoslavia, formally created in 1918, in the 1990s. Nieva's apparition reports first emerged months before the bloody coup by forces led by cashiered colonel and Gringo Honasan against the government of Corazon Aquino.

35 In October 15, 2013, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck the island provinces of Bohol and Cebu, killed 144 people, injured almost 300 more, and damaged many structures, including Spanish-era churches. Three weeks later, on November 8, the strongest typhoon ever to hit the country (international name: Haiyan; local name: Yolanda) wreaked havoc in the Visayas, especially in Samar and Leyte. The death toll reached some 6,300 and the injured numbered more than 28,000 and more than 1,000 people were reported missing. Some 3.4 million families, or 16 million persons, were affected, most of them rendered homeless (Bueza, "In Numbers: 3 Years After Super Typhoon Yolanda").

36 The Fidel Castro-led revolution made Cuba one of the Cold War hotspots during the 1950s. Eventually, it led to the infamous Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, which, combined with the previous year's Berlin Wall crisis, heavily tested the will of the Kennedy administration in Washington in its ideological rivalry with the Nikita Khrushchev-directed politburo in the Soviet Union. See Schulzinger (1990).

37 The phrase obviously borrows from Rafael Zulueta da Costa's poem "Like the Molave" which won in the 1940 Commonwealth Literary Contest.

38 Translation of the phrase "Lieber tot als rot" invented by Hitler's Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels to motivate German soldiers to fight Russian troops to the bitter end.

39 It is noteworthy to insert at this point that even Philippine independence is considered a heavenly gift: "...la Providencia / en sus designios divinos / otorga a los filipinos / su anhelada independencia ["...Providence / in its divine design / gives to Filipinos / their desired independence"] ("¿Por qué?" [Why?], 73).

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