

## READING A COLONIAL BUREAU: THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL INVESTIGATION OF THE NON-CHRISTIAN FILIPINOS

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### Abstract

Ethnography, as a scientific method of describing people, played a significant role in the policy of integration undertaken by the newly established American colonial government as regards the non-Christian population of the Philippines in the early 1900s. Such an assertion requires an interrogation of the colonial institution, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes, which was tasked, among other things, to conduct “special investigation” of the different ethnic groups (“pagans” and “Mohammedans”) living in the far-flung areas of the archipelago. This paper underscores the politics of ethnological research of the Bureau, and critiques its methodology using David Prescott Barrows’ guidelines for fieldworkers as a lens through which to examine the conduct of research. It analyzes the implications of the racialized methodology for the colonial policy of the United States towards the Philippines, and attempts to explore how such investigation, with the colonial knowledge that it produced, was translated into the native discourse.

In its dual capacity as an agent of science and advocate of change, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes stands in history as the precursor of the Philippine government agencies that established a highly contested policy of integration of the so-called “ethnic minorities” into the main body politic. The ‘expert knowledge’ that it produced was deemed instrumental in the material and moral uplift of colonial subjects, particularly the non-Christians. The “scientific expeditions” of the bureau generated data which eventually formed the corpus of knowledge for state legislation concerning the newly colonized peoples. However, the bureau advanced notions of racial typologies derived from the assumption of Western civilization as a standard for cultural evolution. Far from its professed agenda, the bureau also created artificial and heightened ethnic differences among Filipinos that easily translated into institutionalized dichotomies.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Ethnicity, Colonialism*

## Introduction

The Philippine-American War officially lasted from 1899 to 1901. In reality, however, it did not end with the pledge of allegiance by the conquered to the conqueror. War, in multifarious forms, went on beyond armed confrontation, brutalities, or physical violence. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Filipinos were actually fighting the “war” in two different but interlocking fronts: first the military/political, and second, the cultural/ideological. More than anything else, the short-lived Philippine Republic had to contend with the American expansionist culture and the psychology of empire that goes with it. Halili (2006) argues that white America’s belief in its cultural and racial superiority was one of the dominant ideologies circulating during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Race, taken as an ideology for dominance and control (Kramer, 2006), was behind the politics of ethnography in this era of American expansionism. As ethnography is increasingly recognized as a methodology that is reflecting upon its own politics of representation and knowledge production, it is deemed important to investigate how integral colonial ethnographic representations were to American colonial policy (Goh, 2007a, 2008). Equally important is how these racialized representations were translated into the discourse among the natives themselves, specifically between the Christians and non-Christians, as they struggled to become a nation.

Months after President Emilio Aguinaldo was captured and the central leadership of the revolutionary government fell in 1901, the United States Philippine Commission then headed by William Howard Taft embarked on a series of programs to undertake the new colonial policy. Espoused by Pres. William McKinley, this policy sought to integrate the newly colonized peoples into American political and cultural ideals, both in order to justify as well as to facilitate American control of the Philippines. It was in this context that the *Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes* (henceforth BNCT) was established under the Department of the Interior by virtue of Act No. 253 of the Commission on October 2, 1901. In the reconnaissance of unknown parts of the islands, the BNCT was tasked to conduct “special” investigation on the small tribes of “pagans” and “Mohammedans” inhabiting the highlands and far-flung areas of the archipelago (Barrows, 1901, p. 2).

While most historians have focused on the diplomatic history of the United States and the Philippines from the macro-perspective, it is also important to frame a reinterpretation of this history from the vantage point of a colonial institution that played a vital role in consolidating the newly established regime. In this light, an understanding of the BNCT, not only as a political but more significantly as a cultural phenomenon, may contribute to such reinterpretation.

Attempting to provide a holistic interpretation of the American colonial policy with regard to non-Christian Filipinos, this study analyzes the processes and contexts of such investigation from the standpoint of cultural studies. The study departs from the perspective and grand narrativizing of political economy, and draws on more recent discourses on ethnography as it intersects with race, ethnicity and nation (San Juan, 1999; Halili, 2006; Kramer, 2006; Goh, 2007a & b, 2008). While race is redefined by cultural studies experts not just as biological but to a greater extent, ideological (Miles, 2006), ethnicity and nation are also understood as integral to imperialistic ideology and strategy at that time. Ethnicity has something to do with “classification of people and group relationships in the context of ‘self-other’ distinctions” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 4). “Nation” is likewise an ethnic-like concept as it emphasizes the cultural similarity of its adherents, and draws boundaries *vis-à-vis* others. However, it differs from the ethnic group when compounded with the word “state” as in “nation-state.” The latter connotes “political embodiment of the community.” Buendia (2002) explores the paradox of “nation-state” which also intersects with ethnicity issues. He contends that from the state’s perspective, “nationality is conceived as a kind of super-ethnicity that supersedes all pre-existing ethnic differentiations (in case they are permitted to persist, they are considered as variations on the national theme) (p.7).”

It is within such intersecting past and contemporary discourses that this study grounds its analysis of a circular of information containing a set of guidelines for field workers that appeared in a booklet issued by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in 1901.<sup>1</sup> Authored by the founding chief of the Bureau himself, David Prescott Barrows, this document spelled out Barrows’ working hypothesis and outlined the procedures for ethnographic research, thereby allowing the reader to probe the politics of such investigation. To posit the possible meanings of this document as text, it will be further analyzed in relation to other “texts”, specifically, the annual reports on the non-Christians and the accompanying photographs submitted to the Philippine Commission.

### **Investigating Culture: Ethnography as Racialized Methodology**

The Cordilleras of Northern Luzon, the mountains of Mindoro,  
Palauan and Mindanao are not only unmapped and unexplored  
but have hardly been penetrated by white men.

— David Prescott Barrows, 1901

These were the words of Barrows as he prefaced the circular for volunteer field ethnographers. Three major imperialistic interests were behind the conduct of this “official ethnological investigation”: academic/scientific, commercial/economic, and political. The United States, in the age of “triumphant capitalism”, saw the advance of science and commerce as fundamental to its empire-building project. The use of the phrase “penetrated by white men” is clearly heavily informed by racialized ideology. Rydell (1984) defined racism as “a system of beliefs that holds that one group of people is superior to another in moral, cultural and intellectual qualities—qualities that are alleged to pass from one generation to another through heredity” (p.5). As the empire gathered impetus from the state officials, the U.S. Army, and American commercial interests, it drew its moral and ideological philosophy from the anthropological tenets at the time. At the core of the epistemological nature of the bureau’s research were issues of racism and notions of cultural evolution.

These were not only popular beliefs but also anthropological tenets from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century which coincided with the period in the development of American society marked by rapid industrialization, capitalist expansion, and the American quest for world recognition. The establishment of the bureau and its cultural investigation took place during this period which is also known as “triumphant capitalism.” And it was Darwinism and its subsequent elaboration (i.e., Social Darwinism) that served as the ideology of American expansionism (Goh, 2007a, p. 115; Hofstadter, 1992). It guided the dominant American groups personified by the big entrepreneurs and intellectuals in justifying the colonial expansion of the United States (Zayas, 1988, p.19). Having fused “moral philosophy, scientific naturalism, and ethnographic sociology,” (Goh, 2007a, p.115), Darwinism provided a racial theory and ideology which framed and legitimized the ethnographic representations of the natives as “savage” or “senile” races in need of protection from “God’s chosen people” (Beveridge as cited in Weston, 1973, p. 711). Predicated on the principles of “natural selection” and “survival of the fittest”, it established the relationship between physical characteristics (or biological traits) and the level of civilization attained. As “good” physical traits were based on the Western ideals and associated with modernity, “poor” ones were associated with savagery, thereby reinforcing the superiority of the whites over the non-whites. However, the alleged superiority comes with moral obligation of civilizing the world – this racialized discourse was enshrined in Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” (cited in Fermin, 1904, p. 149).

Take up the White Man’s Burden,  
Send forth the best ye breed.  
To wait, in heavy harness,

On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child.

The British poet wrote this poem to address the incursion of the United States in the Philippines and of Great Britain in South Africa in 1899— “to signify America’s preparedness to take all the risks of ‘imperial glory’” (Halili, 2006, p. 18); America was depicted as “father” and the colonized as “child” of civilization.

Indeed, central to colonial success was the production of expert knowledge on the natives. The Philippine Commission under Taft cast an aura of expertise over the entire colonial state. As part of its sponsorship to scientific research during its first years, it established scientific institutions and conducted surveys of the Philippines’ agricultural, forestry, and mineral resources, as well as “ethnographic” data (Kramer, 2006, p. 181). Both as a product and methodology of studying culture groups and races, ethnography assisted the colonialists as they dealt with the affairs of the subjects.

After his inauguration as the first American civilian governor of the Philippines, Taft made an urgent pronouncement as he addressed the problem of “peace and order” in the “unpacified” territories of the Moros and the Pagans in his annual report in July 1901:

It is evident that if we are not to fail in our duty toward the savage or half-civilized people of these islands, active measures must be taken for the gathering of reliable information concerning them as a basis for legislation (Finley, 1913, p. 327).

As a result of this, a law was enacted providing for the organization and operation of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes, which was later absorbed by further legislation, into the Bureau of Science. The latter became the home of the “principal scientific divisions of the Insular Government” (Finley, 1913, p. 327). The BNCT, therefore, was responsible for laying down the foundation of the corpus of “expert knowledge” on the non-Christians in the Philippines.

Who were the experts that constituted the bureau? The organizational make-up of the BNCT was reflective of the link between policy-discourse and ethnographic discourse. First and foremost, it was supervised by the secretary of the Interior Department, Dean C. Worcester, a zoologist-turned-ethnologist-and-politician who exerted tremendous influence in controversial areas of policy-making in the colony from 1901 to 1913. He had written more than 40 publications on the Philippines from 1894 to 1914, four of which were ethnographies on the non-Christians (Sullivan, 1991, pp. 1, 358-361).

Next to Worcester in stature, as far as the non-Christians were concerned, was David P. Barrows, an anthropologist at the University of California, who headed the bureau from 1901 to 1903.<sup>2</sup> Upon its creation in 1901, Worcester stated in an annual report that a skeleton organization, consisting of a chief of the bureau, one clerk, and an agent for Moro Affairs in the Jolo Archipelago was provided, and it was made incumbent upon the chief of the bureau (Barrows) at a later date to recommend a permanent organization. A year after, its workforce had been increased by the addition of an assistant chief, two clerks, and one employee. During this time anthropologist Albert Jenks was appointed Assistant Chief (and would eventually become its head when the bureau was redesignated the *Ethnological Survey for the Philippine Islands* in 1903, reflecting its vigorous program of surveying all non-Christianized groups). Worcester was happy to announce that “a considerable amount of valuable ethnological material has been gathered and is being cared for by employees of the bureau....” (Worcester, 1902, pp. 75-76). In less than three years, the bureau had enjoyed the services of notable scholars and experts. Among them were W. J. Boudreau, expert in charge of rice culture; William A. Reed, who took charge of the office work of the bureau during the absence of the Chief; Najeeb M. Saleeby, a medical officer in the United States Army who was appointed Assistant to the Chief of the bureau in charge of Moro Affairs; two noted anthropologists, namely Daniel Folkmar and Merton L. Miller, who were both commissioned by the United States to prepare the ethnological exhibit for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904; and P. L. Sherman of the Bureau of Government Laboratories, which supplied the BNCT official photographers (like George Ball and Charles Martin). Folkmar was reported to have been occupied with physical anthropometry of the natives in Bilibid prison. He also prepared a very interesting series of casts and busts. The results of his work were believed to place the Americans for the first time in possession of an adequate body of anthropometric data upon the typical tribes of the Philippine Islands, which, the report said, “would go far toward solving the general problems of the origin and affiliations of this race” (*Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1903, p. 779). In fact, after the BNCT was reconstituted by the Interior Department in 1917, the University of the Philippines Anthropology Department had offered certain courses under the latter’s (Interior Department) supervision (Tatel, 2009).

Furthermore, such scientific pursuit offered a lot of commercial opportunities. Other employees like E. J. Cooke, Samuel B. Shiley, Richard C. MacGregor and Walter Gerbrick collected data for the Philippine Museum as well as for the ethnological exhibit of the exposition board that participated in the world’s greatest and most lucrative enterprise at the turn of the century, the

St. Louis Exposition in 1904 (Fermin, 2004, p. 188). Reinforcing the workforce were other private individuals who allegedly joined the investigation primarily for personal gains. Barrows made this very explicit when he said that:

In making this survey the bureau has been assisted by the continually widening occupation of the islands and by the exploration of private individuals, either prospecting for gold or searching for adventure (Barrows, 1903, p. 771).

The 1903 *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* moreover mentioned other cases of this sort. Moray L. Applegate for instance, allegedly opted to be left at the northern tip of Palawan to explore the territory of the Battak (sic.) and Tagbanua after accompanying the bureau's party that made some explorations of the "tribes" living along the southern coasts of that island. There was also E. J. Simmons who made "a collecting trip" into the mountains of Bulucan (sic.) inhabited by the Negritos of Bataan. The same was true for Orville V. Wood with the "tribes" of Davao.

To gauge the extent of this ethnographic research, a closer look at the BNCT methodology is necessary. The following were suggested as guidelines to the "fieldworker" in the procurement of data (Barrows, 1901, pp. 9-13), the entire text is quoted verbatim so as to expose the undertones of the instructions. The juxtaposition of some photographs taken from the reports of the Philippine Commission aims to enhance the possible meanings of the written text:

1. Learn carefully the names of the tribe, i.e., the name or names by which they are known to the Christianized peoples. Do they consider themselves to belong to some larger group or tribe or are there other and smaller groups affiliated with them? Are there other tribes speaking the same or similar dialects?
2. Study and describe the habitat or territory occupied by the tribe. Does it follow one or more river or stream valleys? Is it mountainous, timbered, impenetrable, etc.? If possible, get the native name for each "rancheria," "sitio," or village and make a sketch map locating each, with notes as to hills, streams and trails.

The first two guidelines manifest clearly the colonialists' purposive attempt to penetrate the territories occupied by the non-Christians, thus, knowledge of their location was "particularly valuable to the bureau." Who, exactly, were these non-Christians who became targets of the civilizing mission of the Americans? In 1901, Barrows, made a rough estimate: "...the pagan and Mohammedan tribes of the Philippines are (about) a million or a million and a

half of souls” (p.3). It even became more problematic when the American officials realized that these natives “formed not a homogenous race,” as was the case with the Indians of the United States, “but an unknown number of tribes and peoples belonging to no less than three or four races and to various mixtures thereof” (Barrows, 1901, p. 3). At the time the civilian government was established, the country inhabited by these “tribes” was largely unknown to the Americans. That was an “added difficulty,” though at the same time an “interest,” and, to ascertain the “habitats” of these tribes, as Barrows observed, one must exercise caution.

As one goes through the guidelines, it is noticeable that the researched was objectified. This could be seen in the way the fieldworker was instructed to obtain anthropometric data. Actually, these physical data would also be used to “determine the truth of the propositions” concerning the highly debatable racial classifications of the peoples of the archipelago, to wit: “Negritos,” Indonesians “A” and “B,” “Malayans of low culture,” “Malayans of later immigration,” and “true” Malays. As a matter of fact, the article in the booklet which precedes the guidelines is a long discussion of theories on race which set forth some propositions in support of the waves of migration hypothesis already subscribed to even by earlier scholars like Ferdinand Blumentritt and Joseph Montano (Barrows, 1901, pp. 5-8). This would also explain the seemingly overwhelming interest in the Negritos who, allegedly, were the earliest inhabitants of the archipelago and were later “annihilated” by the “stronger races” referred to in the text as the Malayans (pp. 4-5).<sup>3</sup>

3. ...Accustom yourself to notice physical features so as to gradually form in your own mind a correct description of the prevalent type. Notice color of the skin both on exposed and unexposed portions of the body; color of hair and eyes; character of hair, whether fine, coarse, straight, wavy, woolly, or growing in little spiral kinks peculiar to the Negro. Is the eye large and wide open or is it narrow with slanting or folding lid (mongoloid character)? Notice the muscular structure; are the limbs and body plump and rounded with full cheeks, or is the frame loose, flesh thin and cheeks sunken? Is there a well-developed calf to the leg, or does this muscle seem to be small and atrophied so that the heel bone projects backward? Are there unusual deposits of fat or adipose tissue in the body especially about the hips and buttocks? Does baldness occur? Note carefully the distribution and comparative abundance of the hair on the face. Does it grow low on the brow and is there, in addition, a fine growth distributed over the forehead? Are the teeth perfect?



If possible take the following six measurements: (1) stature in bare feet; (2) “*grande envergure*” or... the maximum reach of the arms and hands;... (3) the head length or the greatest diameter obtainable between the forehead and the occiput;... (4) the head breadth or the maximum transverse diameter that can be found; (5) the nasal length or the distance from the point of deepest indentation between the eyebrows to the point of union between the nose and the lip; (6) the nasal breadth or the extreme distance between the two walls... of the nose.... (7) the nasal index (which can be obtained similarly from the nasal breadth and length)... and (8) the cephalic index (which can be obtained by multiplying the breadth by 100 and dividing by the length).

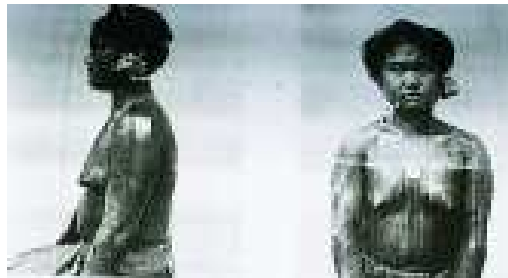
In addition, the flatness or prominence of the nose, as well as the shape and position of the nostrils, should be noted, whether visible from the front or opening downward.



**Mangyan man: Photo from the *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1903. Part 2***



**Young Igorrote Woman of Ambuklao, Benguet: Photo from the *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1903. Part 2***



**Bontok Woman: Photo from the *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1903. Part 2***



**Subanon woman: Photo from the *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1903. Part 2***

Head and face measurements to be satisfactory must be taken with special calipers, but in the absence of these, some rough measurements can be taken by placing the person's head against a wall and using a square. In such cases, always describe just how your results were obtained and state that they are only approximately accurate.

...If photographs can be taken, get two bust views of each individual, one full face showing both ears, and the other an exact, sharp profile of the left side of the head.

Frequently in the same tribe there will be found to be more than one type. Do not try to average the characteristics of these, but describe each type separately and with care, and notice if the different types occupy any different social position, or appear to differ in intelligence.

Apparently, there was much preoccupation with phenotypes or the observable physical characteristics of people because these would be used eventually to argue for the alleged “savagery” of these groups. In the preceding article, Barrows upheld Blumentritt’s diffusionist view that differences in phenotypes were attributed to “several waves of immigration” with their accompanying level of civilization from “peoples of low culture” inhabiting the highlands to those who settled the coast and the plains “with greater capacity for civilization.” The latter were distinguished from the former as “the seven great civilized tribes” namely the Ibanags of Cagayan Valley, the Ilocanos of the northwest coast, the Pangasinanes and Pampangos of the median plain of Luzon, the Tagalogs of central Luzon, the Bicolanos of southern and northern Camarines, Albay, and Sorsogon, and the Visayans of the central islands and northern Mindanao (pp. 5-6).

Likewise, there was a strong interest in documenting art objects, ornamentations, and other cultural artifacts of that sort as these are good indicators of social status.



**Yakan Moros of Basilan: Photo from the *Report of the Philippine Commission, 1903. Part 2***

4. Notice and describe all artificial deformations, tattooing, scarifying, teeth filing; is deformation of the head practiced upon infants, such as flattening of the forehead and occipital? Discover whether the object is ornamentation, religious or superstitious belief, or indicative of tribal relationship or social status. Upon whom are such deformations practiced?
5. How is the hair worn? Is it cut differently among different classes and with what significance? Copy also all body or face paintings, noting colors, patterns, occasion and significance and learn the materials or pigments used.

6. Study dress and ornaments and especially the dress or articles worn in dances and religious ceremonials...; full notes should be made on the spot; notice who take part and in what capacities; how they are dressed; the things done in the dance or rite; their meaning and purpose; the music, both instrumental and vocal; of the music itself note if it is in a minor key and if the range of notes is limited. If possible learn songs, writing down both words and score.

Fieldworkers were also instructed to collect data on social and political organization:

7. The religious belief and life, both in its outward ceremonial and in the ideas upon which it rests, is of great interest. ... All possible information should, however, be collected and every rite and ceremony carefully observed. Discover also if there is a priestly class. Do the women take part in the religious or ceremonial practices?
8. Who are the controlling element in the tribe; who are the leaders in peace and war; through whom property descends, etc.? Be careful not to use misleading terms or designations. When describing officials give their native names, and then detail their functions. Their duties and station will probably not be found to correspond with those of any officials whose names we might apply to them from our own language or the Spanish. Study also public and private morality of the tribe. What constitute crimes and how are offenders tried and punished? Does slavery exist, and if so how does it arise?

Such preoccupation with social order reflected the interest of the colonial government in maintaining orderliness among the natives, consistent with Taft's instruction that an investigation be conducted "systematically... to get the best of the Filipino servants...one must know them and study their traits" (Taft, 1903, as cited in Kramer, 2006, p. 181).

To solve the labor question that concerned the U.S. officials and investors who complained of the alleged "indolence" of the Filipinos, they also had to document the daily life and industry of the natives:

9. Who are the industrial members? What division of industry is based on sex? Tabulate and describe their various arts and attainments. What do they manufacture? Do they work in metals?

Another focus was on the application of scientific and organizational expertise to the development of natural resources. Hence, there was also an interest in ethno-botany as can be gleaned from the following: “Specimens of each plant and plant product should be secured” (Barrows, 1901, p.12). In 1904, the Chief Geographer of the United States Geological Survey Henry Gannett stated that by controlling the resources of the Philippines, the United States “shall become the dominant power of the Pacific, both politically and commercially” (1904a, p.112, cited in Tuason 1999, p.43).

The fieldworker also had to secure a grasp of their language:

10. ...as soon as possible...obtain a small vocabulary from many different tribes for comparative purposes.....everywhere the following vocabulary of words should be secured. It can be taken in a few moments and if possible should be procured from a number of different villages within the same tribe. These words are especially selected as subject to slight variation or misunderstanding and as not likely to possess synonyms: man, woman, head, mouth, eye, nose, teeth, ear, arm, breast, leg, earth, sky, sun, moon, star, water, fire, white, black, blue, red, green, yellow, uncooked rice, tobacco in the leaf, day, night, cloud, rain, thunder, cold, hot, large, small, good, bad, rich, sick, dead, here, there, no, yes, to sleep, to jump, to run, to fight, to eat, to drink; numerals as far as they can count. A few questions or exercises to test their power to use numbers will prove suggestive. In taking down these words be certain to get the proper word of the tribe and not some term that has been derived from outside sources. One must especially guard against words introduced from the Ilocano, Tagalo, and Bisaya. It is well to get this vocabulary from several individuals at different times. Some garrulous old women will be found the most reliable linguists. Women retain the native speech longer and have a better use of language than the men.

The above data were considered “of a scientific nature.” The bureau, however, also demanded full information on the practical condition of different tribes; some more questions which further guided the researchers (Barrows, 1901, p. 14) are as follows:

1. Are they warlike and troublesome? If so, how can they best be controlled?
2. Are they themselves secure from attack and molestation?
3. Are they subject to famine and want?

4. Does their political status require to be defined or are they well enough left alone?
5. Could new foods or agricultural products be introduced among them?
6. Do they raise any cattle? If so, how is the breeding?
7. Is the country they occupy likely to attract settlers or prospectors?
8. Would it be a practical advantage to open trails or roads through the territory?
9. Are there contagious diseases such as smallpox among them?
10. Do they barter or exchange their products for goods coming from a distance? Could American trade with mutual profit be developed among them?
11. Are there practical ways in which the Government could or should improve their condition?
12. Is this territory being encroached upon by other and more civilized tribes?

On top of these, there was also an attempt to generate data on the following subjects of general anthropology in addition to ethnology: miscegenation in the Philippines, racial pathology, racial psychology, criminal anthropology, and viability of the Chinese population.<sup>4</sup>

A racialized ethnography—such was the BNCT legacy that can be gleaned from the kind of questioning employed by the above guidelines. What sort of information did the bureau obtain to formulate the appropriate typology? How were they able to obtain the data? And how did it affect their perception of their subject of study? The meticulous and very systematic way of data gathering was indicative of strict adherence to the tenets of positivism (i.e., “scientific naturalism”) of the early ethnographies, which posit that truth could only be ascertained by empirical, observable, and measurable evidence.

There seemed to be an obsession for anthropometric data which would also be used to determine the level of civilization (or lack of it) of these people. In one instance, Barrows claimed that it was very rare to find a people with a nasal index that is above 100, that is, nasal width is more pronounced than nasal length, or an extraordinarily very flat nose. He further noted that the index obtained by the bureau from the Negritos of Mariveles surpassed the 122 index of one Negrito measured by Montano (Barrows, 1901, p. 11). Similarly,

the cephalic index which was deemed very important in physical anthropology was used to emphasize the “queerness” of the Negrito. While the “Malay race” was classified as “brachycephalic” with 75 to 80 index, meaning possessing a short head, the Negrito was said to be “very brachycephalic” with “a very short head” and “in some recorded cases exceeding 96” (p. 11). Earlier, Worcester described the Negrito as “weaklings of low stature, with black skin, closely-curling hair, flat noses, thick lips, and large clumsy feet”, therefore “at or near the bottom of the human series...incapable of any considerable degree of civilization” (Schurman Commission 1900-1901, p. 11).

When viewed from today’s standard of anthropological inquiry, such ethnological investigation was so extensive, intensive, and intrusive that arguably, it violated the ethics of research. The extent to which the bureau explored the territories of the non-Christians can be shown in this account two years after its establishment:

... it is a mistake to infer... that there are large unexplored areas which no white man has crossed and savage tribes which no man has seen (Barrows, 1903, p. 669).

Indeed, the BNCT did not fail to objectify the non-Christians as mere specimens in a laboratory or artifacts in a museum. In the words of Fred W. Atkinson, the first General Superintendent of Education, “the Philippines became an ethnic museum on which we can study the human race in its manifold forms” (Atkinson, 1905, p. 227). As Benito Vergara, in his analysis of colonial photography in the early American period pointed out, “the word ‘museum’ was used to convey different connotations: ‘collection,’ ‘display,’ ‘immobility,’ and ‘objectification’ ” (Vergara, 1995, p. 72).

Part of the task given to the chief of the bureau was supervision of the Museum of Ethnology, Natural History and Commerce for the Philippine Islands in the expenditure of its funds for the purchase of collections. The U.S. Philippine Commission aimed to procure collections which would fully represent the ethnographic repertoire of every “tribe”, and also aimed eventually to make such provision for the housing and display of this material. Based on the belief that “primitive” cultures were fast disappearing, cultural change was the most favored topic of research. At the outset, there was a seeming concern for the material heritage of the Filipinos. Thus, they did not only conduct a cultural inventory of “articles of native use and manufacture.” They also deemed it necessary to secure specimens of these artifacts, e.g., implements of war, of industry, of fire making, tools and pigments used in tattooing, ceremonial objects, articles of dress and adornment, and native plants, fruits, flowers, roots and

woods (wild or cultivated). The bureau issued instructions on how the following data should be carefully catalogued: name of articles/items, provenance, by whom made (man or woman), by what tribe, by whom used, of what materials made, a detailed description of its use, and lastly, the cost or value of articles bartered therefore (Barrows, 1901, pp. 15-16). As knowledge is power that can also be translated into cash, it may also be surmised that this cultural inventory was potentially seen in support of business enterprise.

Equally powerful as the bureau's ethnographic inquiries were the accompanying photographs taken by commissioned photographers (not to mention those by Dean Worcester, himself), who would be among those chiefly responsible for the visual (mis)representation of the non-Christians (Zayas, 1988). Originally taken to support travel and ethnographic accounts, the collection of photographs, however, became an end in itself and catered to Americans' fascination for exotic non-western peoples such as the non-Christian Filipinos. Together with colonial photography, the ethnographies that were produced by the bureau highlighted and intensified perceived cultural differences among the natives.

To move the discussion forward to the larger context of this knowledge production, the politics behind the use of "tribes" as a 'scientific' label and its implications will be dealt with.

### **The Filipinos as "Tribes": Racial Politics of Naming and the Policy of "Benevolent Assimilation"**

*"Tribus independentes"*, "a collection of tribes" — this was how colonial ethnographies represented the Filipinos as justification for colonization within their "civilizing mission". Forms of differentiation preceded colonialism, but the historical colonial politics of divide and rule solidified certain differences. The Spaniards first created the key division of people in the Philippines into the Christianized/'civilized' (*civilizados*) and the unbaptized/'wild' (*infieles*); but it was the Americans who, by creating the Bureau of non-Christian Tribes, intensified and institutionalized it.

At the height of the Philippine-American War, Dean C. Worcester suggested the use of the word "tribes" to refer to all the inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago, both Christians and non-Christians alike. He defined tribe as "a division of a race composed of an aggregate of individuals of a kind and of a common origin" who share the same physical characteristics and cultural traditions "but not constituting a political unit subject to the control of any single individual nor necessarily speaking the same dialect" (Worcester, 1906,



p. 803). Apart from this definition, he identified three sharply distinct races: the “Negritos” whom he described as “subhuman”; the “Indonesians” who are “physically superior to the Negritos and comprising the inhabitants of Northern Luzon and Mindanao”; and the “Malays” who constitute the lowland Christianized Filipinos. These three major groupings were further divided into 84 tribes, seven of which were considered “civilized.” By constructing Filipinos as diverse “tribes”, the Americans were able to rationalize and end the war of aggression (Kramer, 2006, p. 130), which was followed by the establishment of a civil government that would materialize the policy of “benevolent assimilation.” Concomitantly, the self-proclaimed “uplifting, Divine mission” of America in the Philippines acquired a new meaning: a Filipino nation-state was to be born under their “strong and guiding hand” (Miller, 1901, p. 44). Barrows (1907), though opposed to the use of the term “tribe” for the Filipinos, made this even more clear by emphasizing the reason for not granting them immediate independence:

The power of a nation (the United States) so strong and so terrible,...shields the Filipino from all outside interference and permits him to expend all his energy in the development of those abilities to which his temperament and endowment inspire him (p. 319).

Implicitly, to call the peoples of the Philippines “tribes” was to cast the Filipino nation as an “imperfectly developed state” (Barrows, 1907, p. 318), an image of a “child of civilization” not capable of self-government. The ambiguity of the term “tribe” received strong criticism from some American intellectuals who were sympathetic to Philippine independence; one of them was Dr. David H. Doherty, a Chicago physician who had written on the ethnology, history, and language of the Filipinos. Even Barrows, the chief of the bureau himself, recognized the inappropriateness of the term *tribe* in the Philippine setting, thereby rejecting it. He proposed the use of the term *culture area* instead, to denote regional variations in some cultural elements. In spite of heated debates on the issue, Worcester’s view was upheld, thereby reinforcing the observation that “the voice of Worcester is the voice of God” (Stanley 1984, as cited in Sullivan, 1992, p. 2).

Benevolence took on different forms as the Americans launched their project of political education among the Filipinos. For the Christianized Hispanicized elites it signified fraternalism, treating them as “little brown brothers,” in the words of Taft. Having supported the Americans for their commitment to modern science and technology as engines of progress, these elites were perceived by the former as potential allies for state-building. Taft’s

secretary James Le Roy recognized the need for collaboration as he made this statement: “while military success always depend upon force, civilian government must rest upon conciliation” (Le Roy, 1902, p. 105). On the other hand, for the non-Christians whom they projected as “exemplars of incomplete civilization, but more frequently as victims of Christian depravity in the absence of US protection” (Kramer, 2006, p. 32), it meant “paternalism”, treating them as “children” who were still in the age of innocence as they live in savagery. This resulted in the institutionalization of the new racial formation as a “bifurcated racial state” (p. 161). Christians and non-Christians were ruled differently; the former were assimilated in the American electoral politics as the campaign for “Filipinization” of government offices heightened, whereas the latter were administered through non-electoral systems of authority that empowered the US politico-military officials (p. 162). This would culminate in the creation of “special provinces”: the Moro Province and the Mountain Province in 1903 and 1908, respectively. Kramer reflected on the profound implication of this “bifurcated racial formation”: “(it) confirmed the relative civilization of Filipino Catholics...especially their distinction from Christians” (p. 208). Integral to these structures of collaboration were the “racialization of religion and territory” and “territorialization of race” (p. 162). As the majority of the educated Christianized/Hispanicized Filipinos collaborated with the Americans, the term “Christian tribe” faded accordingly, while the label “tribe” ultimately remained with the non-Christians.

### **The Non-Christians as “Tribes”: Native Translation of the Colonial Discourse**

As the Spaniards used the Christian religion to pacify the natives, being Christianized was equated with colonization. Those who resisted religious conversion remained free. But freedom was tantamount to primitivism and savagery as subjugation was equated with civilization. For the American civilian government, this constituted the so-called “Moro problem” as well as the “heathen” counterpart. How would they bring these “wild men” to the fold of “civilization?” The category “non-Christians” sprang from the lack of a convenient or more ‘politically correct’ term to be used by the Americans to refer to the natives who were not effectively colonized and Christianized by their Spanish predecessors. It was Secretary of the Interior Worcester who proposed the use of “non-Christian” in lieu of the more condescending terms such as “pagan,” “wild men,” or “savages.” Worcester claimed that there were those who were not pagans in the strictest sense, because the Muslims were, after all, believers of Allah. And there were also those who were not really “wild” but, in their view, “gentle.” Hence they coined euphemistic labels like

“noble savages” or “savage gentlemen” to refer to those groups that were not really lacking sophistication because in the first place, they had attained a certain degree of political organization. Furthermore, Barrows perceived the Moros as “orientals” (not “savages”) whose own civilization “was now in retrogression, ...to be supplanted by the superior civilization offered by the Anglo-Saxon American” (Goh, 2007a, p. 130). Nevertheless, the term *non-Christian* was also a euphemism to make it sound “more natural, pure/pristine, and exotic” — an image which titillated the curiosity of the colonialists. The term evoked the idea of “new frontiers” ready to be explored and exploited in the name of science and religion. The following account by Barrows (1903) illustrates this point:

The relatively large numbers of the Negritos in the Zambales Mountains had for more than a year drawn our attention as a most promising field for the study of these famous blacks (p. 775).

In 1903, only two years after the establishment of the bureau, the chief was proud to announce that:

...a preliminary exploration of all portions of the Archipelago has been finished; that the field parties of this bureau will have explored every region of the islands, visited every non-Christian tribe, and secured the geographical and ethnological data necessary to complete our knowledge of the Archipelago (Barrows, 1903, p. 771).

Amidst this seemingly gargantuan task, he sounded very optimistic as he concluded his report:

...the practical problems of administration are less difficult than they appeared a year ago. The ferocity of these tribes... breaks down more quickly than could have been expected in the presence of the American Government. Head-hunting in the north and slavery and raiding in south can be stopped just as soon as a proper effort is made (p. 789).

Meanwhile, these gains would not be made possible without the assistance of the local fieldworkers. Barrows recognized the important role played by the Christian Filipinos.

Of the valuable contributions to our knowledge of the tribes of these islands, made by volunteer workers from time to time during the year, *many of them by Filipino gentlemen* whose excellent reports reveal an aptitude for this class of scientific investigation,

the following may be mentioned as especially worthy: “The Ifugaos,” by Señor Wenceslao Valera, Bayombong, N.V.; “The Buquidnones of Oriental Negros,” by Señor Santiago Gonzales; “Manguianes,” by Señor Servulo Leuterio, Calapan, Mindoro; “Negritos of Bataan,” by Señor Vicente Rodriguez; “Tinguianes,” by Señor Emeteru Molina, Dolores, Abra (p. 779).

Consistent with the logic of collaboration, Barrows enjoined the participation of the Filipino elite in the likes of Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, Joaquin Luna, and other local officials. In fact, the first publication of the bureau was a reprint of Pardo de Tavera’s *“Etimología de los Nombres de las Razas de Filipinas”* which he translated into English (“Etymology of the Names of the races of the Philippines”). Not only did Filipino Christians act as researchers but also as administrators of the Bureau. Upon the ascendancy of Gov. Francis B. Harrison in 1914, he would launch a vigorous campaign for the so-called “Filipinization of the ‘White Man’s Burden’ *vis-à-vis* non-Christians.” Joaquin Luna, for instance, would be the first Filipino governor of Mt. Province.

From 1914 until 1920, governance over the seven provinces of Mindanao and Sulu was assumed by the Secretary of the Interior exercising its powers through the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. Such structure was extended from 1920 to 1936, after which the Office of the Commissioner for Mindanao and Sulu took over from 1936 to 1945, when these agencies were then headed by Christian Filipinos (Gowing, 1983, p. 272). This culture of collaboration effectively widened the gap between Christians and non-Christians. Consciously or not, the former became instrumental in marginalizing their non-Christian brethren.

It is interesting to note how the knowledge produced by the ethnological research shaped the perceptions of the natives among themselves. The annual ethnographic reports on the non-Christian tribes always emphasized the peculiarities and disparateness, the divergences between non-Christians and Christians. In 1905, Governor Melchor Flor of Ilocos Norte declared that “the inhabitants [of the center] exercise their rights and perform their duties with much regularity...and have so much respect for the constituted government, its laws, and authorities.” On the other hand, the “pagan tribes” of the same province, were reportedly preserving the “inhuman custom and sanguinary instinct of killing any person they find in isolated places when influenced thereto by their belief in spirit propitiation” (*Fifth Annual Report of the Executive Secretary for the Philippine Islands*, 1906, p. 296). In another report, the Bicolos were highly praised for being “pacific and industrious, not shrewd... intelligent and apt at learning... sober.” They allegedly respect and keep the law. Thus, in many

respects the Bicolos were said to be “distinctive” as compared with “other tribes” (p. 134), whereas the Aetas of Iloilo were described as “not adapted to the industrious life of the towns and therefore continue as is their inveterate habit, to lead a nomadic life...” (p. 318). Another Negrito group to the east of the Cagayan River in the north was described as “cannibals and drinkers of human blood” and was allegedly feared by the Cagayanos (the Christianized dwellers) (Barrows, 1903, p. 787).

And how did the ‘non-Christians’ respond to all of these imagings and imaginings? In 1906, the non-Christians of Ilocos Norte were reportedly saying that they were not willing to be consolidated with the Christian pueblos (*Fifth Annual Report*, p. 295). Forty years later, upon the grant of independence by the United States to the Philippines in 1946, Muslim leaders expressed their vehement objection to be included in the “government of the Filipinos.” Datu Mandi, for one, made a strong assertion. He said:

As I look about, I see far more Moros than Filipinos... and if that is so, that is the reason we call this the Moro Province ... If the American government does not want the Moro Province anymore, they should give it back to us. It is a Moro Province and it belongs to us (quoted in Sadain, 2000 emphasis added).

(At that time, Christian natives in Mindanao numbered only about 70,000, compared to half a million Muslims.) And we cannot simply ignore what Datu Sakaluran said: “I am an old man. I do not want any more trouble. But if it should come to that, that we shall be given over to the Filipinos, I would still fight” (Sadain, 2000). Ethnic differentiation became even more alarming in the pronouncements made by another Muslim leader:

We are a different race. We are Muslims, And if we should be given over to the Filipinos, how much more would they treat us badly...? We prefer to be in the hands of the Americans, who are father and mother to us now, than be turned over to another people (Hadji Abdullah Nuno, as cited in Sadain, 2000).

The foregoing gives us an indication of the alienation felt by the Muslims from the Christians, and their non-identification with the term “Filipino” which had become associated with Christians. So effective had been the policy of “Benevolent Assimilation” (which shifted through different approaches from the establishment of military rule to civilian-nation), that some Muslim leaders would rather stay under American tutelage than be integrated into the independent nation-state of and by the “Filipinos”.

Intense ethnic differentiation or what Kramer called “hierarchy of differences” among Filipinos was the profound implication of such ethnological survey. After announcing the success of preliminary investigations, Barrows concluded that “we have tribes representing the whole scale of culture from savagery to civilization...” (1903, p. 789). “Civilized” versus “primitive,” “industrious” versus “lazy,” “clean” as against “filthy,” – these were just some of the categories used in the annual reports of the Philippine Commission to differentiate Christians from non-Christians. These binary oppositions, including the images of non-Christians as “noble savages”, “savage gentlemen”, “head-hunters”, “primitive Philippine tribes”, would eventually find their way into the anthropological literature of that era; among which were publications of *Ethnological Survey*, *Philippine Journal of Science*, *National Geographic Magazine*, *American Anthropologist*. These would, in turn, provide the basis for the transformation of non-Christians into minorities and second-class citizens. William Henry Scott, an expert in Cordillera studies, had this to say:

Thus by the magic of the colonial alchemy, those who changed most became today’s Filipinos while those who changed least were actually denied this designation by a former president of the state university. In this way a cultural minority was created where none had existed (1982, p. 41).

In 1903, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes was transformed into the Bureau of Ethnological Survey, still under the Department of the Interior. Among its publications was Albert Jenk’s *The Bontoc Igorot*, which also made emphasis on ethnic differences among the Bontoc people. Roughly less than a hundred years later, Arnold Molina Azurin (1995), a Filipino historian, refuted Jenk’s claim and asserted that:

...if they [the Igorots] share basic agricultural and social models, as well as a common origin even as they conduct acculturative exchanges or mutual borrowings with their neighbors, how can any objective scientist talk of ‘long isolation’—or of ‘many and wide differences’ in the same breath? (p. 27).

But in 1908, seven years after the Philippine-American War concluded, Edith Moses, wife of Philippine Commissioner Bernard Moses, wrote to her fellow Americans: “There is far more difference between the Igorrote of Benguet and the Tagalog of Manila than between the latter and ourselves” (Kramer, 2006, p. 159).

## Conclusion

By probing the politics of knowledge production about the non-Christian Filipinos in the early American colonial period, this study illustrates how ethnography as espoused by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes played a key role in the integrationist policy of the United States in the Philippines. As this paper explored the complexity of such policy, it also exposes the paradox that non-Christians were integrated into the main body politic only to be marginalized and minoritized by their Christian counterpart. Going through the manual for field workers, it may be argued that the process of minoritization/marginalization was already apparent in the conduct of research. Firstly, the BNCT methodology, which was tremendously informed by racialized ideology, objectified and projected non-Christians as savages, uncivilized or semi-civilized. Secondly, by using the term “non-Christian”, the BNCT transformed savagery from a politico-military to a religio-cultural category. And most significantly, by enlisting the interests not only of the Americans, but especially of the Christian Filipinos as collaborators, the bureau institutionalized the alleged superiority of the latter to their non-Christian brethren. The Americans, through the ethnographic knowledge produced by the bureau, politicized ethnicity to intensify mutual antagonisms between Catholics and non-Christians. To this day, the latter’s identification as “ethnic minorities”, or even the politically correct “cultural communities” or “indigenous peoples”, is still stigmatized as not only marginalized but also “backward” or inferior. As they assert rights to self-determination, they must continue to engage with the hegemonic and homogenizing discourse of the nation-state.

On the whole, the racialized methodology of the BNCT is reflective of early ethnography which in the words of Terence Chong (2008) “focused on the static lines and boundaries between ‘peoples,’ ‘cultures’ and ‘civilizations’, thereby depicting such groupings as “timeless and unchanging (p. 7).” Having developed closely in tandem with the policy agenda of the Americans, such cultural investigation ended up promoting or reproducing racialized discourses which legitimized the colonial state. As it utilized the “objective” approach on ethnicity, the bureau highlighted cultural dissimilarity and heterogeneity among different ethnic groups in the Philippines to continuously fuel the debates on defining and constructing the Filipino nation.

The series of ethnographic research, punctuated by the “scientific expeditions” of the bureau, generated data which eventually formed the corpus of knowledge for state legislation concerning the newly colonized peoples. The BNCT was deemed instrumental in the material and moral uplift of colonial subjects, particularly the non-Christians. On the other hand, this colonial institution

advanced notions of racial typologies derived from the assumption of Western civilization as a standard for cultural evolution (Stocking, 1987). Far from its professed agenda, the bureau also created artificial and heightened ethnic differences among Filipinos which easily translated into institutionalized dichotomies. They have now found expressions in Muslim-Christian conflict, upland-lowland animosities, center versus periphery or the city versus ethnicity, and elite nationalism vs. ethno-nationalism discourses.

In its dual capacity as an agent of science and advocate of change, the bureau stood in history as the precursor of the Philippine government agencies that established a highly contested policy of integration of the so-called “ethnic minorities” into the main body politic. On the face of it, one may say that the bureau left voluminous written materials about Philippine history and culture, from which contemporary Filipino anthropologists, historians and other social scientists would benefit tremendously. Nevertheless, whatever contributions it made to Filipino scholarship may be deemed accidental or secondary. More lasting and fatal is a malady that “imperial imaginings” inflicted on the psyche of the Filipinos as a people, resulting in our selective memories of brutalities committed during the Philippine-American War. Reportedly, one Filipino collaborator testified before the Schurman Commission in 1900, that he was waiting for the day when “the Filipinos will be more American than the Americans” (Sullivan, 1991, p. 86).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This booklet contains three articles, to wit: “The Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes,” “Circular of Information Instructions for Volunteer Field Workers” and “The Museum of Ethnology, Natural History and Commerce.”

<sup>2</sup>He was formerly City Superintendent of Schools in Manila from 1900-1901 and became Director of Education for the Philippines from 1903-1909 after his two-year stint as Chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes.

<sup>3</sup>It was said that the Spanish friars who speculated on the origins of the inhabitants of the archipelago first advanced the wave migration theory. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European Filipinists like Ferdinand Blumentritt, also subscribed to this. In the 1950s, however, Prof. Henry Otley Beyer made this theory very popular and it was generally accepted for several years until it was challenged by a Filipino anthropologist, Felipe Landa Jocano, in 1975.

<sup>4</sup>Some state officials made a lot of profit from dealing with the Chinese in contracting businesses (Kramer, 2006, p. 167).



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