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**The censuses of the Philippine islands:  
From ethnological inquiry to the formalization  
of racial categories in the American-occupied  
Philippines from 1903 to 1939**

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ABSTRACT

The three censuses of the Philippine islands during the American occupation, enumerated in the years 1903, 1918, and 1939, comprise a dense and thorough documentation of the country's land, resources, and population. The census data were obtained through cooperation between the ethnological components of the United States civil government in the Philippine Islands and the Census Bureau. The significance of these documents transcended administrative boundaries because each census represented a different epoch of American administration of the Philippines, each reflecting the changing priorities of the American administration and the degree of Filipino participation in governance. The censuses translated and formalized racial classification as well as provided insights into the subtle yet salient ways by which the colonial authorities understood the concept of race. This paper examines how the Bureau of non-Christian tribes, followed by the Anthropology department of the University of the Philippines, cooperated with the Census Bureau to produce various taxonomies of the population. More significantly, the institutional interactions in the American-occupied Philippines demonstrate the idiosyncrasies of a colonial administration, especially in terms of the contingent position of science (in general) and anthropology (in particular) in the construction and formalization of racial categories.

KEYWORDS

Census, the American administration, ethnology, racial classification, colonial science

## Introduction

In the 1905 issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*, the first American census of the Philippines was commemorated as being “the most comprehensive, and able description of the peoples and geography of the islands that have yet appeared” (*National Geographic Magazine* 1905). Thirteen years later, then governor-general of the Philippines, Francis Burton Harrison, wrote of the 1918 census as “a genuine expression of the actual conditions of the Philippines with her riches and poverties fully exposed without pretensions, false modesty, or misrepresentation” (Bureau of Printing 1920b). The impression of the census’ objectivity and accuracy does not reflect its latent functions of identifying the boundaries of colonial control, facilitating policymaking in colonial setting, and codifying knowledge of colonial possessions (Asad 1994; Kirsch 2014; Pels 2000). These functions efficiently served the American administration in the Philippines while simultaneously forming a racial narrative of the Filipinos as a result of colonial rule.

The three American censuses of the Philippines were enumerated in 1903, 1918, and 1939. These contained two main categories used by the administration to identify and contrast between two groups of Filipinos—the Christians and the non-Christians (Bureau of Print 1904; Algue and Pritchett 1899). These categories, while terminologically religious, served as primary markers of racial differences for the Spanish authorities and, later, for the Americans. The division had roots in migration theory first proposed by ethnologists in the Philippines during the nineteenth century. According to migration theory, the populations in the Philippines can be clustered into three distinct racial groups based on a series of migrations that ended just before Spanish arrival in the 16th century. When the Spaniards arrived, many natives were Hispanicized, eventually leading to the division of the population into Christians and non-Christians (Brinton 1898; Folkmar 1904).

According to Ben S. Malayang III, these religious classifications depicted the social reality of Spanish rule in which the population was either “properly colonized” (Hispanicized and Christianized) or only partially colonized (non-Christians) (Malayang 2001). This division was accentuated by George W. Stocking’s concept of evolutionism, which provided the theoretical grounds for ethnology to classify categories of a population into a racial taxonomy. A taxonomy was argued by most colonial authorities and researchers as evident in the manifestation of the degree of “primitiveness” or “civilization” of different racial or tribal groups (Stocking 1968). In the censuses, the

Americans embraced this social reality and taxonomy, and the dichotomies of the population were used as primary indicators of racial differences between groups of Filipinos and between Americans and Filipinos.

While the categorization of the population as being Christian or non-Christian was made transparent in the censuses, there were several discrepancies between the “scientific” and “administrative” categories. The motley of scientific classifications, hereby referring to the classifications endorsed through ethnological research on the non-Christians, collided with the administrative need for simplification and led to the use of different terminologies and modes of classification (Vergara 1995; Rodriguez 2010). The censuses portray the level of compromise taken by scientific institutions and individual scientists in order to adapt to administrative needs. Thus, this paper aims to understand how ethnology and the American colonial administration collaborated in each census to produce classifications of the population.

In this article, the analyses of the census begin from the colonial identification of the Christians and non-Christians and how these divisions are represented as “racial categories” in the census. Additionally, this article aims to demonstrate how these categories are negotiated between different individuals and institutions representing the American administration. “Census is curious texts”, wrote Vincente Rafael, “...they contain no single author, for standing behind them is not a person, but the state apparatus” (Rafael 1994). Colonial authorities presented the census as a comprehensive, neutral and accurate document, which introduced the development of a modern state and was meant to be a testimony of order and stability. Many historical and political elements influenced racial classifications in the census, particularly in the translation of “religious” into racial categories and in the employment of ethnology (Emigh, Riley, and Ahmed 2016).

Therefore, the censuses were performative and influential in formalizing the racial classifications of the Filipinos. The role of the American institution, particularly the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes (BNCT), paired with the historical experience in the Philippines, significantly contributed to the formation of the primary dichotomization of the population and the identification of more nuanced categories, i.e., tribes. In the American colonial government, the census was a technology of the administration to surveillance groups of people who were relatively foreign and unknown to them. This essay will first delve into the background of the BNCT, an institution that actively adopted racial classification and ethnology as a foundation of governance. Following that, the essay proceeds with the individual examination of the censuses from 1903, 1918, and 1939.

## The Bureau of non-Christian tribes and ethnographic enquiry in American-occupied Philippines

The United States occupied the Philippines from December 1898 to July 1946, after its victory over Spain in the Spanish-American war in May 1898. Then President of the United States, William McKinley, formed two consecutive commissions, known as the Schurmann Commission in 1899 and the Taft Commission in 1900 to oversee the situation in the Philippines and administer the islands. In this process, the United States came to survey and gather preliminary information on a cluster of islands populated by diverse and ethnologically elusive groups of people (Agoncillo 1974; G. Zaide and F. Zaide 1987; Brands 1992; de la Costa 1965). The American administration understood that a gradual but immediate accumulation of data about the population must be carried out before any effective and cohesive rule can take place (Rodriguez 2010).

The American administration found a solution through the creation of the BNCT, which was founded by Act no. 253 of the Philippine Commission on 2 October 1901. The BNCT was placed under the authority of the Philippine Department of Interior, which was led by its secretary, Dean Worcester, from 1901 to 1913 (Bureau of Print 1904; Rodriguez 2010). At the time of his appointment as a member of the first Philippine Commission, Worcester was the most experienced American official in the Philippines. Prior to his appointment, Worcester had participated in the Steere Expedition in 1876 and the Menage Expedition in 1890 (Sullivan 1991). Both expeditions were only meant to collect zoological and botanical specimens in the Philippines, but Worcester took the liberty of recording his observations on the population of the islands. It was from the knowledge he gathered from these early observations, and from his extensive readings on the ethnology of the Philippines, that he made the following conclusion in his first report to the president of the United States: “There is a present lamentable lack of accurate information as to the non-Christian tribes of the Philippines” (Bureau of Print 1904). He went on to declare the possible relevance of a bureau established specifically to study the non-Christian population:

It is evident that if we are not to fail in our duty toward the savage or half-civilized Philippine peoples, active measures must be taken for the gathering of reliable information concerning them as a basis for legislation, and an act has therefore been passed to the commission creating the Bureau of non-Christian tribes. (1904, 162)

The establishment of the BNCT was tied to the personalities who saw the need and advocated for ethnological studies in the islands. Worcester’s

conviction that the Filipinos needed protection and enlightenment was based on his religious background. Worcester, the son of a country doctor, was known among the civil servants and officials in the Philippines as a principled and rigid man. During his tenure as Secretary of Interior from 1901 to 1913, he made it clear that his utmost concern was the well-being of the non-Christian tribes (Sullivan 1991). From his observations during the Menage expedition (1890–1893), he became familiar with the power dynamics between the Spanish authorities, the mestizos and the other non-Christian Filipinos and felt that the non-Christians were susceptible to oppression and were in dire need of “civilization” (Hutterer 1998; Rice 2014). As Sullivan argues, Worcester’s visits to the islands had a profound influence on his policies as commissioner and as Secretary of the Interior in the years to come (Sullivan 1991).

Worcester personally selected David Barrows, a teacher from the California State Normal School in San Diego, as the first director of the BNCT (Clymer 1976). Worcester and Barrows shared many ideas about how to govern the Philippines and harbored a similar fascination with the various biological and cultural attributes of the islands’ population. The shared vision of Barrows and Worcester made the former’s appointment a logical choice. Barrows was also the right candidate due to his education. He obtained his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1897 (*Journal of Education* 1910), and his dissertation on Cahuilla Indians showcased his skills in anthropological research and in-depth knowledge of this field of study (Clymer 1976).

In 1901, Barrows published a booklet containing detailed instructions for BNCT operations entitled *Bureau of non-Christian tribes for the Philippine islands: Circular of information, instruction for volunteer fieldworkers* (hereafter referred to as the “Circular”). The instructions comprised a list of the datatypes that fieldworkers must collect from the tribes they were studying (Barrows 1901). These included the nomenclatures with which the tribes were known by, physical characteristics (including skin color and craniometrics), the signs of tribal membership (e.g., tattoos and jewelry), and the geographical features of the settlements. The *Circular* guided fieldworkers in collecting data on the non-Christian tribes. These fieldworkers were volunteers consisting mainly of teachers and provincial officers stationed all over the country. Barrows also extended an invitation for fieldwork to Filipinos and US Army Navy officers in the Philippines. A survey ensued from such an invitation, and from 1901 to 1903, an extensive collection of data concerning various non-Christian tribes were compiled. The BNCT’s name was revised in 1903 to become the Ethnological Survey of the Philippine Islands (Rodriguez 2010). In the same year, the BNCT changed

directorship from Barrows to Dr. Albert Jenks, former assistant chief to Barrows. Jenks continued carrying out the surveys and assisted in organizing an exhibition on the Philippine islands at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, hailed as “one of the most impressive exhibits of alien life and customs ever assembled” (McGee 1905; Kramer 1999).

On October 1905, the BNCT was reorganized as the Division of Ethnology and was then absorbed into the Bureau of Education (hence, the bureau shall be referred to as BNCT for clarity and brevity) (Government Printing Office 1906). The Division was led by Dr. Merton L. Miller who continued to carry out the surveys. In 1914, after years of stagnancy on government-endorsed ethnological research, Governor-General Harrison wrote in the Commission’s annual report: “Research work of an ethnological nature or interest solely to the scientific world should be undertaken and conducted by private enterprise rather than government agency” (Government Printing Office 1914).

The decline of BNCT’s surveys and ethnological research activities coincided with the growth of the Philippines’ path toward independence and Filipinization. Filipinization is commonly understood to be an era from 1912 to 1916, which focused on increasing the number of Filipino officials in the government to gradually shift the responsibilities of administering the country from the Americans to Filipinos (Agoncillo 1974). Filipinization was galvanized when the Congress of the United States approved the Jones Act to concede that the United States would “withdraw their sovereignty over the Philippine Islands and to recognize their independence as soon as an independent government can be established therein” (Government of the Philippine Islands 1916). The BNCT was resuscitated in 1916 as part of the provision of the Jones Act with specific instruction to

...bring about a complete and permanent amalgamation of the Christian, and the non-Christian, and pagan peoples of the Philippine Islands. That the Jones Law...should provide for the organization of the bureau to have general supervision over the public affairs of the non-Christian inhabitants of the Philippines is evidence of the unequivocal desire on the part of the Congress of the United States to have the assurance that these elements of our population will be adequately taken care of under an autonomous Philippine Government. (Sanvictores n.d.)

The BNCT, henceforth, became an institution that focused on narrowing the socio-economic gap between the Christians and the non-Christians through revisions of state policies and assimilation. Although the BNCT no longer focused on ethnological research, this did not mean that ethnology became obsolete in the country.

Most of the ethnological research since 1914 was undertaken by the University of the Philippines under the helm of Henry Otley Beyer. Beyer's first exposure to the Philippines began in 1904 when he visited the Philippine Exhibit at the exposition in St. Louis after having just recently obtained his MA in Chemistry and Geology from the University of Denver (Solheim 1969). Intrigued by what he saw, Beyer applied for a timely opening for an anthropologist at the BNCT. Despite lacking any formal qualification for the position, he was selected. Unfortunately, a reorganization in the civil government meant that, upon his arrival in Manila in 1905, the post that was promised to him was annulled. Barrows had instructed Beyer to continue working on the surveys under the guise of being a teacher (1969). Hence, from 1905 to 1908, Beyer served as a teacher and an ethnologist working with the Ifugaos. As Beyer never had any formal training in anthropology, he left the Philippines in 1908 and pursued his graduate studies in Anthropology at Harvard until 1910. In 1914, he was offered a position related to the field of anthropology at the University of the Philippines. In 1925, he established the Department of Anthropology and became its first chairperson (Solheim 1969; Zamora 1974).

As a professor at the University of the Philippines, Beyer published *The Population of the Philippine Islands in 1916*. In 1914, after obtaining an official position in the University of the Philippines, Beyer attempted to produce an estimation and categorization of the population, but he lacked any substantial data. Beyer thus approached municipal officers, school teachers, and individuals who may have possessed "special knowledge" about the conditions of each province, specifically the demographics of the areas (Beyer 1917). He gathered information from these individuals and triangulated data from the archives with help from his students. This project resulted in a broad ethnological survey that, in many ways, mirrored the previous efforts done by BNCT, including such examples as *The Nabaloi dialect* by Otto Scheerer, *The Bataks of Palawan* by E.Y. Miller, and *Studies in Moro history, law and religion* by Najeeb M. Saleeby (Government Printing Office 1911).

Beyer explicitly stated in the *Population* that determining the racial origins of the Filipinos was a tedious task. He also asserted that while a compilation of languages of the Christian tribes was complete, the same cannot be said for the nomadic non-Christians. At the same time, he made explicit criticisms of the 1903 census in the *Population* and decided to compensate the data shortcomings using his surveys as the *Population* two years before the enumeration of the second census of the islands (Beyer 1917).

The BNCT, through the works of Worcester, Barrows, and Beyer, advanced the polarized view of Filipinos as being Christians or non-

Christians. In 1903, after being officially recognized as the Ethnological Survey of the Philippine Islands, efforts to consolidate data about non-Christians accelerated partly due to the preparation for the Philippine exhibit at St. Louis in 1904. After the Jones Act of 1916, the role of the BNCT was changed to meet the administrative needs of the colonial government, and it no longer participated in research—a role that, by then, was owned almost exclusively by the University of the Philippines. The changing roles of the BNCT were met with the evolving political circumstances in the islands. The progress of nationalism, while not posing an overt interference on ethnological work, had redirected research priorities. Even as the University of Philippines took up the responsibility to conduct research about non-Christians, the concern of the administration toward ethnological works had considerably lessened. The declining significance of ethnology in the American administration consequently affected the forms of classifications in the succeeding censuses.

### **The three American censuses of the Philippines**

The analyses of the three censuses illustrate the degrees of American intervention in the Philippines and BNCT involvement in colonial administration. This section demonstrates the forms of racial classification that appeared in each census and how these corresponded to the political circumstances and anthropological interests of the United States at the time each census was taken. Subsequently, the censuses are analyzed based on the forms of continuities and discontinuities of the racial taxonomy used in previous censuses.

#### ***The census of 1903: Consolidating knowledge of the Philippines***

The Census of 1903 is often cited as the Census of the Philippine Islands 1905, in reference to its date of publication rather than its year of enumeration. The significance of the Census of 1903 lies in the way the United States utilized the enumeration process and the data collected to consolidate its position in the Philippines. Analysis of the Census of 1903 includes looking at the selection of personnel as a means of galvanizing American-Filipino relations, the factors that resulted in the creation of different schedules for Christians and non-Christians, and the classifications of tribes or racial groups produced by these schedules during the enumeration.



The American civil government established for the Philippines the Census Bureau under the Department of Public Instruction in 1902. Section 6 of the Act of Congress of 1st July 1902 stipulated that, upon achieving peace, the Philippine Commission was to follow presidential orders to take a census of the islands (United States Bureau of Census 1905). The first director of the Census Bureau, General J.P. Sangers, identified the three main challenges to taking a census in the Philippines:

- i. The doubtful peaceful conditions of the islands- although the Filipinos and Americans had agreed to a truce, the remaining rebel presence in the interior can cause potential harm to the census personnel.
- ii. The absence of a reliable map of the island.
- iii. Selecting the personnel - the Americans needed Filipinos who knew Spanish, the official language of the census, and several local dialects. (1905a)

The employment of Filipinos was applauded as a positive reinforcement to ensure lasting cooperation between them and the Americans. However, the employment of the Filipinos in collecting the census did not proceed without reservations. Eventually, 7,627 people were employed. The distribution according to nationality is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**National distribution of personnel for the census of the Philippine islands 1905**

Nationality	Number of Personnel
Filipinos	7502
Americans	118
Chinese	6
Japanese	1

Source: United States Bureau of Census 1905a.

The bulk of the employees were Filipinos, followed by the Americans, and other nationalities, such as the Japanese and Chinese (although there were only a few of them in the group). The Filipinos were mainly appointed as enumerators and special agents (1905a). Filipino influence in forming racial classification was very minimal in the Census of 1903. In the decades to come, the level of Filipino participation in the censuses increased, with consequences for its goals and the subsequent depiction of racial categories.

The next step following the personnel selection was to form census schedules to guide the enumeration process. The scheduling began when

the supervisors of every region or district met in Manila on 17 November 1903 for a briefing; the scheduling was not completed until the assistant directors of the census, Henry Gannett from the United States Geological Survey and Victor Olmstead from the Department of Agriculture arrived on December 1 (*National Geographic Magazine* 1905). The outcome of the scheduling process was that the Christians and non-Christians were highlighted as the primary classification for almost all matters the Bureau wished to include in the census, even in the ethnological component of the census report written by Barrows.

The schedule for Christians focused on acquiring individual data on land ownership, education, and occupation, whereas the non-Christians were enumerated based on their villages or *rancherias*. The non-Christian tribes were quantified based on the cumulative average of births, deaths, number of schools in the village, and economic activities. There was no apparent justification given in the report as to why there were different schedules for Christians and non-Christians but weighing in on several variables an informal and restrained inference can be made (United States Bureau of Census 1905a). As had been stated by Sangers, there were security issues in several areas, most likely in the interiors that were unreachable by American soldiers (1905a). Additionally, southern Philippines was an area of exceptional risk due to piracy and the ongoing enmity and suspicions that the Moros had of the United States (Amoroso 2003). Thus, the southern Philippine islands were considered areas of considerable risk for the enumerators.

Although security issues can be cited as one reason as to why the Census Bureau had to design different schedules for the Christian and non-Christian populations, there was scientific validity and even historical precedence for such an initiative. The Spanish civil censuses of the islands only included an estimate of the non-Christian population. Before that, early Catholic orders were only interested in keeping baptism, marriage, and death records of the Christian population. The numbers in these records set off the American administrators with only a rough estimate of the non-Christian population (United States Bureau of Census 1905b). In the report on ethnology and population in the first volume of the census, Barrows identified the Christian tribes “in its conversion and long subjugation to friar power”, further acknowledging that “all parts of the islands have received similar grades of culture” (1905a). Barrows did not ignore the more nuanced differences beyond the similar architectural, religious, political, and social structures of the Christian tribes:

Despite these facts, the population remained separate into practically the original tribes or groups, each speaking different idioms and feeling a strong separateness from the others. Each of these tribes has adhered strictly to its

own original habitat, although there has been some migration of Ilocano into the Cagayán valley and south into the Pangasinán, and small colonies of Tagalog have settled in certain towns in the Visayan islands. (1905a, 448)

On the contrary, the non-Christians were more diverse. As Barrows wrote:

The classification of the non-Christian tribes of the Philippines is a comparatively easy task. We have varied information, including dictionaries and grammars of these languages, that has been slowly accumulating for the three centuries but we attempt to classify and enumerate the pagans and Mohammedan tribes, which at this point we have purposely left to one side, the result is not so satisfactory. (1905a, 453)

The classification formulated under the jurisdiction of the BNCT had so far, as Barrows illustrated, taken into consideration the historical and the ethnological characteristics of the tribes to designate them to groups or justify their positions as being Christian or non-Christian beyond what the religious connotations imply. Barrows additionally remarked that there was still work to be done in terms of classifying the data collected, even though he has already made radical revisions from the earlier classifications obtained from the archived materials. The BNCT revised classifications made by Austrian ethnologist, Ferdinand Blumentritt (82 groups) and the Jesuits (67 groups), reducing the total number of tribes to 16 (1905a). The classifications of Christian and non-Christian tribes are listed in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

**Table 2**  
**List of Christian “civilized” tribes as found in**  
***The Census of the Philippine Islands 1905, volume II: Population***

Bicol	Pampangan
Cagayán	Pangasinán
Ilocano	Tagalog

Reference: United States Bureau of Census 1905b.

**Table 3**  
**Classification of the non-Christian tribes as listed by David Barrows in**  
***The Census of the Philippine Islands 1905, volume I:***  
***Geography, history, and population***

Ata	Mangyan
Bilan	Manobo
Bagobo	Negrito
Batak	Tagabili
Bukidnon	Tagbanua
Ilongot	Tiruray
Mandaya	

Source: United States Bureau of Census 1905a.

In other sections of the census, an alternative system of classification was used. In the section on “Population”, which can be found in the second volume of the census report, an explicit reference was made to race as a category. This section was not written by any researchers from the BNCT but the Census Bureau’s personnel. In one instance, the section entitled “Color” shows that 99 percent of the Christian population was considered to belong to the “brown” race (United States Bureau of Census 1905b). The Chinese and Japanese, who made up six-tenths of 1 percent of the population, were classified as “yellow”, and the Negritos were classified as “black”. This was followed by a classification of the population based on skin color in every province (1905b). In another example, the mortality rate was also color-coded into white, brown, black, and yellow (1905c).

The variances of classification terms and potentially, methods, imply that racial categorization was pursued based on the local knowledge of supervisors assigned to every province and that such practice was mirrored by the enumerators. Within the sphere of census work, classifications made by the provincial supervisors and the BNCT were disjointed and inconsistent. Barrows acknowledged this himself:

In Volume II of this report, a copy of the “wild tribe” schedule will be found. Although this schedule called for a variety of statistics more or less interesting and desirable, it was thought that the most crucial fact to ascertain was the number of people, and to this everything else was made subordinate. (1905a, 23)

As a result of the enumeration, 83 non-Christian tribes were identified. This, however, did not sit well with BNCT’s classification. The BNCT surveys and research into past ethnological studies of the Philippines culminated in a total of 16 non-Christian tribes. For the census report, Barrows compared the classifications acquired from the census and the ones made by the Jesuits and Blumentritt and found numerous cases of omissions on both sides. Barrows also noted that there were names in the enumerators’ lists that were not found in either the Jesuits’ or Blumentritt’s reports. Furthermore, there were names in these lists that were omitted from the enumerators’ lists (1905a). Issues on accuracy aside, it can be inferred from Barrows observation of the “omissions” in both categories that the conflicted labeling between the different parties involved provided the colonial government and the BNCT with a concise, revised list of tribes. In other words, through the comparisons from the various lists of non-Christian tribes, the census enumerated in 1903 had converge an otherwise confounding array of information. While consideration was given to both ethnological classifications proposed by the BNCT and the census personnel’s local

knowledge, ultimately, the practice of using administrative classifications continued in the subsequent censuses.

The Census of 1903 was a gesture of assimilation through the employment of Filipinos, forming a contingent ground upon which to nurture the cooperation between the Americans and the Filipinos. Meanwhile, the scheduling affected how the enumeration was performed. With a clear-cut distinction between the Christian and non-Christian tribes, the enumeration data ultimately provided the census with an alternative classification that was clearer than those proposed by Blumentritt and the Jesuit priests. It also contrasted with the classification proposed by Barrows taken from BNCT research findings, suggesting that the administrative classifications were made to revise and simplify ethnological classifications. The supervisors were instructed to create temporary divisions of their provinces to enable systematic enumeration. As a finished product, the United States was able to declare that it had obtained, as described by the *National Geographic Magazine* in 1905, “the most comprehensive, and able description of the Filipino people” (*National Geographic Magazine* 1905). The Census of 1903 demonstrates the dissenting views between the BNCT and the census in terms of the classification of the Filipinos into racial groups, and subsequently, tribes. The continuous use of the term “tribe” in place of “race” further accentuated the “primitiveness” of the Filipino population. This notion provided the American colonial administration a legitimate reason to continue the occupation and offer tutelage.

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### ***The census of 1918: Filipinization of an Americanized census***

The Census of 1918 was taken after a period of significant changes in the American administration of the Philippines. However, it is known by the date of its publication, 1920. An examination of the Census of 1918 exposes the evolving political climate in the Philippines, particularly how the census and American colonial policies worked hand-in-hand to accommodate changes in the administration as well as the compromised position of ethnology as a key government bureau during the era. Among the development in the administration that had impacted the census enumeration was the racialization of territories through the creation of the so-called “Special Provinces” and the growing number of Filipino personnel in government bureau.

The first development was the official recognition of the Special Provinces as territories with a majority of non-Christian population and in need of an alternative administrative structure. It started with the

Department of Sulu and Mindanao in 1903, followed by the Mountain Province in 1908. The creation of Special Provinces aimed to facilitate the administration of the two most culturally anomalous regions in a mainly Hispanicized Philippines. In line with the Christian/non-Christian dichotomy, the Special Provinces were, in government references, considered areas of substantial technological and cultural backwardness (Executive Order No. 10 1914). To prevent the recurring hostilities and to ensure the smooth operation between Manila and the offices of the Special Provinces, the colonial office abided by a different set of administrative rules. Outside of the Special Provinces, the local governor was elected by the inhabitants. Many of these “normal” provinces were granted autonomy to make political decisions and participate in politics, including being appointed as officials (Rodriguez 2010). The governor-general was responsible for selecting governors of the Special Provinces. The inhabitants of the Special Provinces were not allowed to relocate to other provinces without the approval of the provincial governor (Guingano 1919).

The other key development was the Filipinization of the government civil services, which intensified after the enactment of the Jones Act of 1916 (G. Zaide and S. Zaide 1987). The more official definition of Filipinization was the mitigation of power through the appointment of Filipino public officials into the upper house of the legislative body, concurrently replacing Americans in the Philippine Commission (Wood and Forbes 1922). Furthermore, Filipino participation in other government institutions increased around that time. The Wood-Forbes Commission reported that in 1916, 730 American officials were still in service in the Philippines vis-à-vis 8,725 Filipinos (1922). The *Report of the Philippine Commission 1916* quoted a number of 935 Americans and 7,881 Filipinos working in the civil service by the end of the year (Government Printing Office 1916). In the bicameral legislative house, the number of American representatives in the upper house decreased from four to two, with five Filipinos remaining from 1915 to 1916, while the lower house had a total of 81 Filipino members (1916).

Then governor-general of the Philippines Islands Harrison, formed a committee in August 1914 to conduct a preliminary study with the aim of suggesting appropriate changes in enumeration methods and scheduling for the modification of the Census of 1903. The committee consisted of the Executive Secretary of the Philippines Islands, Charles R. Cameron, along with other American and Filipino officials. The committee strongly suggested revisions in the data obtained from the earlier census (Bureau of Printing 1920b). This resulted in the enumeration of the census on 31 December 1918 (1920c).

The enumeration process involved the establishment of an advisory board consisting of officials for each province. However, exceptions were made for Manila and non-Christian provinces, whereby the advisory board was not made compulsory. The role of the advisory board was to communicate with the governor-general on census matters from their respective provinces and influence the people of the province to cooperate with census officials (1920a). The negotiable status of the advisory board of each non-Christian province points to the direct involvement of the administrators in Manila in matters concerning non-Christian tribes. According to the Act 2352: Regulations Governing Census Organization of 1918, the advisory board was tasked to divide the territories into as many inspection districts as best suited for the province, to assign these districts with inspectors, and to serve as the auxiliary inspectors for these districts (1920a). The description of duties of the advisory board pointed toward an initiative to mitigate regulation and direction from Manila as long as it was a Christian province. It further reinforced this argument with another provision in Act 2352 that read:

...for the purpose of the census, all sub-provinces, except those comprehended in the Mountain Province, will be considered as independent provinces, each with its subprovincial advisory census board. (1920a)

The “independence” referred to here is apparently about the provincial administration. The freedom and flexibility mentioned here was afforded only to territories dominated by Christian populations. In comparison, areas with a considerable number of non-Christian populations were considered too complex for the deliberation of the enumerators and had to be studied and investigated before decisions could be made about how best to enumerate the population, and more importantly, how to classify them. The contemporary understanding of who constituted “non-Christians” presumably rationalized the need for scientific expertise in the enumeration of non-Christian territories. According to Beyer, then Head of the Anthropology Department at the University of the Philippines, the term “non-Christian” is best suited for those “really primitive peoples” and those that live in the interiors (1920c). Beyer’s definition of “non-Christians” can be inferred as a rationale for the requirement for direct experts’ intervention in the enumeration of the non-Christian population.

Direct central administrative intervention was also deemed necessary for the enumeration of the non-Christian population in the Census of 1918 due to the new policy introduced by the Census Bureau to enumerate both divisions of the population individually. Instead of acquiring a rough estimate

of inhabitants per village, as had been the practice in previous censuses, inhabitants of every village had to be accounted for by the enumerators, even in areas of considerable risks and inaccessibility. The following anecdotal evidence provides insight into the process of enumerating non-Christian areas and attests to the degree of participation from Manila in areas mainly populated by non-Christian tribes. In the Cordillera region, enumerators encountered difficulties in obtaining skilled workers to perform the enumeration. The census personnel took the initiative to employ residents from the neighboring provinces that were still within the same region. The census report showed 80 out of 471 census enumerators to be Igorots, some “educated up to high school” (1920b). A similar situation was encountered in Mindanao. The residents of Sulu and Mindanao were mostly unable to converse in Spanish and/or English. Thus, the inspectors had to appoint Christian residents from the province of Zamboanga to perform the enumeration, while Moro chiefs acted as auxiliary enumerators (1920b). These cases imply the role of direct intervention from Manila in the tasks of monitoring and supervising the non-Christian regions. In fact, in provinces where there was no advisory board consisting of local residents, decisions were made directly by Manila. In other words, the locals who were hired to assist in the enumeration process did not have the opportunity to autonomously decide, let alone influence in any significant way, the process and outcome of the enumeration being carried out.

The disparity in the non-Christian enumeration process also highlights the revised classifications in the census. The 1918 Census, just like its predecessor, contained ethnological and non-ethnological sections. Beyer contributed substantially to the census based on his existing works, using surveys that were published as *The Population of the Philippine Islands* in 1917. The survey data coalesced into the second volume of the census for population and mortality as an article on population and ethnology. In the census report, Beyer organized the entire population into three races: Malays, Indonesians, and pygmies:

- i. *Pygmies*: including Negritos, straight-haired Mongols (proto-Malays)
- ii. *Indonesians*: tall, migrated from the Indonesian islands
- iii. *Malays*: shorter, more Mongoloid than the Indonesians. Malays are divided into pagans, including semi-civilized Tingguians, Bontocs, Igorots, and Ifugao; and Mohammedans in seven ethnic groups found in the southern islands of Sulu and Mindanao. (1920c)

This categorization resonates with Beyer’s definition of “ethnographic group” as stated in *The Population of the Philippine Islands*:



Any group of people, living in a more or less continuous geographic area, who have a sufficiently unique economic and social life, language, or physical type to mark them off clearly and distinctly from any other similar group in the Philippines. (Beyer 1917, 37)

In this classification, Beyer included an ethnohistorical element that was not central to Barrow's report in the 1903 Census. The pygmies or the Negritos, considered the original inhabitants, were subsequently pushed to the hinterlands through a series of migration from other parts of the Malay Archipelago. The Malays arrived next, followed by the Indonesians. The Indonesians, who possessed a superior physique and were stronger than both the Malays and the pygmies, became the most sophisticated group in the islands. During the Spanish occupation, many of these groups intermarried or converted to Christianity. The theory of migration espoused that the indigenous group was the most primitive, while the fairer, stronger races came to colonize the islands and subjugated the weaker population (United States Bureau of Census 1905a; Barrows 1901). This has an implication on the need to continue the racial dichotomy of Christian/non-Christian in the census of the Philippines.

Another feature was the use of a color-based categorization scheme in the non-ethnological components of the report. Color-based categorization appeared in the census under the header "Race" in the second volume of the report. Under the section on "Race", 98 percent of the population belonged to the "brown" race, while 0.4 percent were half-castes or mestizos (Barrows 1901). Another example is illustrated in a table entitled "Proportion of Various Races". The table was constructed to depict the percentage of each color-based groups in the years 1903 and 1918. The population was divided into five groups: brown, yellow, half-breed, white, and negro (Bureau of Printing 1920c). The census committees used different categorizations than the one made by Beyer (1920c). Dividing the population to "Malay", "Indonesian", and "pygmies" is relatively more straightforward than Barrows' racial categories. The same can be said for the classification using religious group—certainly not referring to the existing and well-circulated dichotomy of Christian/non-Christian—but that too, was not apparent in the volume on population. Despite these revisions, the administration retained the use of color to distinguish among racial categories.

The 1918 Census stood at a critical point in the Philippines' road to independence, nationalism, and cooperation with the United States. The era of Filipinization was a license to utilize the census to cater to nationalistic needs. The 1918 Census revealed that, despite the onset of prominent

Filipino participation in the administration of the census, there were elements of continuity and amplification of racial identification from the previous census. This was most apparent in the creation of the Special Provinces and the corresponding advisory board in areas dominated by Christian populations. The advisory board attested to the relative independence bestowed upon the more “civilized” population. Meanwhile, direct intervention from Manila in terms of governance and provision of ethnological expertise was deemed necessary for the enumeration of the non-Christian, more “primitive” population. The pages dedicated to ethnology had considerably lessened in the 1918 Census, in parallel with the changing role of the BNCT and the limited participation of anthropologists in the administration. The distinct feature of the racial classification in the 1918 Census was the emphasis Beyer placed on the ethnohistory of the Filipinos and how this can be interpreted as change from the census of 1903, which heavily engaged in identifying “ethnic” or “tribal” groups for both Christians and non-Christians. Eventually, even the ethnohistorical classification in the census of 1918 was diluted to an overtly homogenizing and consolidating schematization in the 1939 Census.

### ***The census of 1939: Nation-building and the record of national wealth***

After the Census of 1918, the Philippines underwent gradual but vital political changes that eventually paved the way for greater autonomy. The most significant achievement came with the establishment of the transitional government, known as the Commonwealth Government in 1935 (Agoncillo 1974; G. Zaide and S. Zaide 1987). On November 12 1936, the first National Assembly of the Philippines called for a census to be taken in order to equip the government with updated social and economic information on the Philippines and for “reconstruction and reorientation of the Philippines” (*Population Index* 1942). Then secretary to the President, Jose B. Vargas, wrote that the census was intended to

...furnish the Commonwealth and its citizens with an accurate survey and detailed account of not only the number, location, increase, and characteristics of the people, but also of their social, cultural, and economic characteristics.  
(Bureau of Printing 1939, 8)

Subsequent analyses of the 1939 Census would look into the main categories that were created to distinguish racial or ethnic groups in the Philippines in accordance with the nationalistic agenda and main challenges faced by the newly devolved government during enumeration. The enumeration took

place on 1 January 1939, employing 35,000 personnel who were mainly Filipinos and recorded some 16 million people in the Philippines (Millegan 1942).

The 1939 Census differed from the preceding ones in terms of its operation. For one, the Census Bureau reported several challenges and limitations. The most prominent challenge was limited expertise. Specifically, the Commonwealth had limited access to American resources and expertise which aided the enumeration of the previous two censuses. There was also a 21-year gap since the last census was completed. This meant that there was almost no one in the administration with first-hand experience in enumerating the population (Bureau of Printing 1939). Furthermore, the Census Bureau was indirectly burdened by the repercussions of the American education policy that augmented the degree of inequality between groups of Filipinos (Bureau of Printing 1939; Constantino, 1976). The term “universal education”, referring to the English-language Americanized education that was implemented during the advent of American occupation, had yet to reach all Filipinos equally. English and Tagalog were not spoken by everyone, and many tribes and groups were still only familiar with their own dialects. This situation prevented enumerators from gathering details from every single individual, as most enumerators were Tagalog and English speakers. Moreover, the fact that many Filipinos had not yet received the education and training required to become a permanent staff for the census was recognized as a factor that prevented the bureau from collecting a cohesive collection of data (Bureau of Printing 1939). Therefore, the racial categorization that appeared in the 1939 Census did not represent the complexity and nuances of many social and economic phenomena that occurred within each group.

The Commonwealth government took the liberty of revising several categorizations of the population applied in the previous censuses. The classification presented in Table 4 anchors the racial classifications of the population in the 1939 Census.

**Table 4**  
**Classification of the racial groups in the Philippines**  
**as found in the census of 1939**

Color	Percentage
Brown	98.5
Yellow	0.9
White	0.1
Negrato	0.2
Mixed	0.3
American Negro } Race not reported }	< 0.1

Source: Bureau of Printing 1939.

As depicted in Table 4, the color-categorizing system was carried through from the 1903 Census to the 1939 Census. Nonetheless, there were few exciting details in the latter that set these categories apart from the previous censuses in terms of its description of races in the Philippines. First, the term “Negrito” was used in place of “Negro”. In the previous censuses, “Negrito” referred to the specific tribal groups identified by a set of ethnological criteria, such as skin color, small built, and mostly nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. The term “Negrito” is ethnological parlance, an umbrella terminology with pluralistic associations to a variation of groups, rather than a single tribe (Padilla 2013). The term was often substituted for “Black” in 1903 and “Aeta”, “pigmy”, or “Negro” in 1918. In the 1939 Census, the use of the term “Negrito” overshadowed the vagueness and universalism found in the previous censuses and replaced it with a term that was more exclusive to the Philippines.

Second, the report in the *Population Index* also described the Filipinos as being “homogenous”—a term that was not likely used in early anthropological and administrative works on the islands (*Population Index* 1942). The homogeneity alluded to the “Malayan origin”, which in turn, denoted the “Brown” group comprising 98.5 percent of the population (Bureau of Printing 1939). This clarification instantly placed Malays as the only dominant race in the Philippines, thus serving as a unifying identity for Filipinos. This approach was not taken by Barrows and Beyer in earlier censuses. Hence, the 1939 Census dismissed the classification used in previous censuses as well as ignored the division of race, ethnicity, religion, tribal association and/or dialects that comprised the 98.5 percent. The choice to classify the overall population as being “Malayan” was potentially a conscious statement of national unity. Overall, the 1939 Census had shown preference of color and generalization in enumeration to a greater degree than the 1903 and 1918 versions.

The Census of 1939 was a relatively independent enterprise that tested the devolved Philippine government’s capabilities and resources. It was also significantly used to amend colonially constructed categories established in the previous censuses. It is incorrect to assume that the 1939 Census dissolved all “racial” or “tribal” categories found in the ethnological reports written by Barrows and Beyer in the previous decades. However, ethnology was remarkably used to amalgamate overlapping categories by focusing on similarities infused with national sentiments. By focusing on “Malay” as a homogenous Filipino identity, the tribal nuances that demarcated the different groups of Filipinos—the bedrock of BNCT research up until 1916—was gradually (if not entirely) replaced. The decline of ethnology as a classification tool in the 1939 Census can also be attributed to the limited

resources and expertise faced by the Commonwealth government, along with the prospect of war that had severely impeded the survival of a comprehensive collection of the census volumes. Only four volumes safely made it out of the Philippines before the Japanese invasion in December 1941, and they were all edited, proofread and stored in the United States (Millegan 1942).

## Conclusion

The colonial regime was transfixed on multiple motives: maintain a sense of order and systemization of society and assert dominance while earning trust as they attempt to comb out the knots of complex identities that must have seemed perplexing to the foreign eyes and logic. For this reason, ethnological studies were considered vital initiatives of the colonial administration. These initiatives, however, entailed that observations be made with a degree of neutrality, adhering to the principles of science while considering the context of the observed people and places. In the American-occupied Philippines, the anthropological components of the administration and the censuses performed the tasks of balancing out administrative demand for systemization and absorbing heterogeneous population information in the most scientifically acceptable manner as possible. Where the BNCT opted to churn out a robust collection of publications focusing on the specificities of non-Christian/“wild tribe” category of the population, the censuses took this observation into account and transformed the entirety of the population into classifications and categories in schedules. Elements of culture and language as well as overlapping historical, political, social, and religious experiences were “flattened out” to decisive, uncompromising boxes and slots for tribe names, schooling, dialect spoken, and so on. Additionally, where the BNCT lacked detailed numbers and statistics, the censuses attempted to fill the void by employing an army of enumerators and inspectors to acquire statistical data.

The BNCT and the Census Bureau’s collaboration produced a categorical scheme that reflected distinct priorities and goals. First, the BNCT categories incorporated linguistic and cultural considerations. In 1903, Barrows provided a long list of tribal groups found in the Philippines, which he amalgamated from the BNCT’s past surveys. He compared his list with the ones made by Jesuit priests and Blumentritt in the previous century and proposed a simplified version that still adhered to ethnological criteria. In 1918, Beyer further revised the categorical schemes by omitting the list previously placed in the 1903 Census. Instead, he grouped Filipinos into Indonesians, Pygmies,

and Malays based on the migration theory discussed by Blumentritt and by German scholars who had worked in the Philippines (1920a). This was not considered a replacement for the Christian/non-Christian dichotomy, but a complementary detail. In the 1939 Census, these categories ceased to prevail as the ethnological sections focused on the Malay roots of the Filipino people.

Meanwhile, the census authorities preferred color-based categories to classify the population. From the census of 1903 to 1939, classifying the racial groups into “brown”, “white”, “black”, and “yellow” was the most common practice. These categories did not appear in the ethnological section of the censuses’ reports, but under the section on “color” or “race”. More nuanced categories appeared in 1918 and 1939, specifically “mestizo” or “half-breed”. The existence of these categorical schemes did not entirely explain or complement the other, but they worked well to disseminate knowledge about the Philippines.

More importantly, each census applied a categorical scheme, which reflected the trend of anthropological research at the time. This is especially true for the Censuses of 1903 and 1918, which were in many ways, Americanized. The era of Filipinization that occurred during the enumeration of the 1918 Census did not limit the enthusiasm and detail Beyer invested in the ethnological report. Meanwhile, the 1939 Census was more focused on unifying the Filipinos; the report indicated that the Census was careful not to include nomenclatures that can potentially highlight and produce demarcating points between Filipinos, especially at such a critical point of history just before independence. Overall, the nuances and simplification of racial classifications in each census were parallel with state goals and equally loyal to scientific trends (Vergara 1995). The census cannot be regarded as a scientific document, though in many aspects, it would be incorrect to dismiss the notion entirely.

The census, as a body of data and as a process of interaction, formed concluding and complementing elements to the narrative of racial classification in the Philippines. As a published material, it provided a substantial and simplified version of racial categorization, in which ethnographic nuances were seconded in the name of clarity. As a process, the personnel selection, the procurement of data and the scheduling of the censuses were all technologies of categorization, quantification, and designation of identities. Censuses separate identity from biography and create social types that are a reflection and implication of political and historical situations (Simon, Piché, and Gagnon 2016). The population structure was agreed upon by both the Americans and Filipino—this sense of “acceptability” of the structure meant that the censuses were symbolic

of the power relation between the imperial power and the colonial subjects. The colonial actors envisaged a realm in which they were experts, and in control, of both the population and the data that represented the population. Can colonial bodies then become what the texts directed them to be?

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