

## THE VERNACULAR/LOCAL, THE NATIONAL, AND THE GLOBAL IN FILIPINO STUDIES

**Oscar V. Campomanes**  
**Department of English**  
**Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines**  
**[ocampomanes@ateneo.edu](mailto:ocampomanes@ateneo.edu)**

### Abstract

Originally a concept paper for the Institute of Filipino Studies project in Oakland, California, this essay tracks a paradigmatic shift in area studies on the Philippines and ethnic studies of Filipinos/Filipino Americans toward what the writer calls “Filipino Studies.” Exceeding the national culture area assumptions of Philippine Studies and eschewing the assimilationist tendencies of long-standing notions of Filipino ethnicity, Campomanes bases this claim and project for a paradigmatic turn upon three critical planks: the diasporic dispersal of Filipinos in the age of globalization and late-modernity and how it problematizes unitary or organic concepts of Philippine nation, culture, and identity; the reformulation of Filipino nationalism to account for this global distension of the diverse constituencies that now appeal to a Filipino “national” identity and culture; and an historical etymology of the term “Filipino” to illustrate its power, over the term “Philippine,” to mark important junctures in the history of Filipino subject- and cultural formation and how these junctures might be read as instantiations of the vernacularizing act in Filipino formation. The vernacular or vernacularization, as used in this essay, is a term of mediation by which Filipinoness is evolved, contested, and opened up to new possibilities of reformulation; it is also used to underline the centrality of Filipino agency to the making and remaking of the nation to reflect not only diaspora but also its heteroglot/heterogenous composition.

### Keywords

globality, national identity, Philippine diaspora, Philippine Studies

### About the Author

Oscar V. Campomanes, on extended furlough from full-time teaching, is editor of the internationally-refereed journal *American Studies Asia* (DLSU Press) and currently sits, on a three year term, as Member-Elect of the National Council of the American Studies Association-USA (July 2002-June 2005). His work on US imperialism, Filipino American literature, and Philippine-American cultural relations has appeared in various critical anthologies and academic journals in the Philippines and the United States.

“Filipino Studies” is a term used in this essay to distinguish an emergent field from “Philippine Studies” — the current rubric for study of the Philippines as a national and culture area in international (especially American) academic networks and institutions. The shift from *Philippine* to *Filipino* studies is more than semantic; it is, in fact, paradigmatic, as I hope to suggest here. It is a position and a project that is premised upon the emergence of Filipinos as distinct constituencies and as articulate voices in the recomposition of American or global polities and socioeconomic orders within the last three decades; that is,

as Filipinos, in large numbers, now exceed the borders of the Philippines, as well as those of the United States and other countries where they migrate, work, settle, or create new identities, communities, and cultures.

The converging consensus of various scholars is that the fundamental reliance of the “area studies” and “ethnic studies” frameworks on the nation state and national culture as their demarcating model, unit, and purview for scholarly inquiry had become increasingly problematic and severely inadequate (see Appadurai; Rafael “Writing Outside” and Lowe). This assessment owes its main impetus to a general and dramatic phenomenon that has shaped up between the late 1960s and the 1990s: the onset of “globalization,” and large-scale population and culture transfers across national frontiers as people moved in the millions from and to different parts of the world and continue to do so at unprecedented rates. What now pose great challenges to our accustomed forms of producing academic and practical knowledges are, first, a new global political economy developing around “a footloose and country-free capitalism,” and second, the diasporic formations of population or culture groups responding to, or sometimes evading, its pressures by crossing national boundaries and thus challenging the modern idea of the nation and who count as its constituents (see Heller).

At the very moments, however, that modern nations and states are being reconfigured by these general developments, old and recalcitrant forms of nationalism and state power are consequently reasserting themselves. Old borders are being reconstructed and inter-ethnic strife is now being reanimated in various regions (either in the form of fratricidal conflict or heightened social tensions) from the Balkans and Western Europe to the United States, and from Rwanda and the Indian subcontinent to the former Soviet republics. But the same situations that breed this spectrum of prevalent and global problems are also generating relatively more hopeful symptoms like *multiculturalism*, *binationality*, *polyethnicity*, and *cultural hybridity* in the redefinition of certain national polities such as those of the United States and of Europe or in the formation of more mobile communities such as those of diasporic Filipinos and of “overseas” Indians and Chinese. In short, where national formation is rendered problematic by transnational population movements and massive capital or cultural flows across the globe, the enduring nationalist or colonialist concept of “assimilation” no longer suffices to serve as an aspiration and to account for the new forms of global interdependence, exclusionism, national belonging, and cultural community now taking shape in a variety of contexts and expressions.

## GLOBALITY AND THE “FILIPINO”

The global reach of modern nationalism and “historical capitalism” is certainly far from recent and has a much longer history than my contemporizing brief above suggests (Wallerstein; Hobsbawm *The Age; Nations*). With the Columbian age of “Exploration and Discovery,” the European Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, certain forms of powerful globality were already in genesis and at work. The contemporaneous colonialisms and eventual consolidation of modern world-systems by a few powerful European nation-states stimulated formative transfers and traffic in peoples, cultures, knowledges, and commodities in international encounters. These forms of globality, glossed by European ideologies of universalism and humanism, were forcefully set in place as the age of empires peaked, and then redivided the world, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Hobsbawm *The Age*). They installed Western Europe and the United States at the center or terminus of world history and reconstellated “others” and their now peripheral habitats as the renewed objects of territorial conquest and of a great movement of requisite colonial bureaucracies, missionaries, mythologies, and dominant knowledges (Kiernan; Said). But the scale and scope of recent globality, no doubt still powerfully inflected by the previously interpenetrating and now antithetical planetary compasses of nationalism and capitalism and mediated by the enduring legacies of expansive colonialism, strike many observers as singular, radical, and more far-reaching or fraught with still unimagined futures than modern precedents.

In the face of recent global migration and immigration patterns, many scholars and writers have announced the onset of a “postnational” and “post-modern” epoch in a world effectively collapsed to the most local levels by phenomenal 20th-century breakthroughs in information, communication, and transportation technologies, and by the effects or demands of late capital’s new regimes of denationalized or “flexible” accumulation and investments (see Harvey). The dissolution of modern and competing socialist and communist systems in a post-Cold War era (as evidenced in the breakdown of the Soviet state and its Eastern European satellites), and the massive disenchantment since the 1970s with the failure of “Third World” or anti-colonial movements to overhaul perduring colonial structures and to create independent and socially egalitarian nations, have contributed to the predominant view of capitalism’s “triumph” and self-renewal and, thus, to a prevailing sense of an epochal break from the national and the modern. Other scholars like Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm (*Nations*), however, have called attention to equivalent renewals of nationalisms and late (neo) colonialisms at the very same moments that these organizing and residual systems are supposed to have loosened their grip on

humankind. The “new immigrations” may have blurred the national question in peaking after (and partly due to) post-World War II decolonization, even as they were driven by “economic and cultural inequalities, wholesale labor recruitments, and legal arrangements set up on the basis of former Empires” but they have also posed it more acutely than ever in the very Western metropolises now tremendously stressed by the need “to account for the new composition of their collective make-up” (Brennan).

It is difficult to dispute the truth-claims of these contending but actually complementing positions; precisely, it is upon the sense of possibility and the worlds of analysis and critique which they open up that one can predicate the idea of “Filipino Studies.” Indeed, the Philippines, both historical and contemporary, and the peoples and cultures associated with them, were themselves substantially formed by global colonial conquests, capitalist modernity, migrations, and anti-colonial nationalisms, and thus constitute a set of productive nodes through which the economies, histories, politics, and cultures of globality might be investigated and creatively localized.

What is now known as the Philippines was first colonized by Spain for nearly four centuries (1565-1895) after the Columbian push for the ‘Indies’ and global Christianization in the 16th century, and then by the United States as a modern and secularizing power for a decisive forty years (1902-1941, including an ambiguous status as a US neocolony from 1946 to the early 1990s). The very naming of Philippines and abstractive ideas of the “Filipino,” both locally and historically, were themselves the direct legacies of these Western imperial spreads across world territories. In what follows, I suggest something of the ambience as well as the semantic and paradigmatic flux of the term *Filipino* during its emergence in the late 19th-century; by doing so, I hope to show how it remains richly indicative of important historical moments or transculturations in the formation of the Philippines and its colonially, and now transnationally, displaced peoples and cultures.

After this Malay archipelago was “discovered” by the Portuguese navigator and explorer Ferdinand Magellan for the Spanish Crown in 1521, the subsequent Ruy Lopez de Villabos expedition in 1542 claimed and named two central islands as *Filipinas* for then Prince (later to be King) Felipe II of the Hapsburgs. As more expeditionary and proselytizing expansion absorbed the other islands in due course, the enlarged domain was called *Las Islas Filipinas*, and then simply resignified as *Filipinas* toward the end of the Spanish colonial period. Following the 1896-98 Philippine Revolution against Spain which they vanquished, American colonists anglicized and popularized the Hispanic name as *Philippine Islands, USA.*, and after determining the extraterritorial colonial status of the archipelago within the union, modernized it as the *Philippines*, in close approximation of

the shifting nominative acts of their Spanish predecessors (see Scott, and also Anderson).

But the modern term *Filipino* itself has had a far more “checkered career” than *Filipinas* or *Philippines* and for this reason, among others, sketches the more dynamic nominative and symbolic grid for Filipino Studies. Late 19th-century Philippine expatriate Enlightenment intellectuals (*ilustrados*) like Jose Rizal are credited with nationalizing the term to identify the “natives” of the *Filipinas Libre* that they envisioned beyond the Spanish period, and with the growth of anti-colonial nationalism, began to “project the term anachronistically into past centuries” and ancestors (Scott Guerrero 1977 [1963]). It bears remembering, however, that Spanish colonial modernity by the 19th century first limited the term (*Españoles filipinos*) to Spaniards born in the colony or *insulares* to distinguish them from the Iberian colonists or *peninsulares* who were instead contrastively privileged as *Españoles europeos* by such chroniclers as Sinibaldo de Mas.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, all island inhabitants were customarily named *indios* throughout the Spanish period after Columbus’ “well-known error” of assuming he had reached the Indies or the Orient in encountering the Caribbean islands and their peoples (Scott 6-7).

Although Spanish (and then American) colonial ethnography and bureaucratic knowledge tried to fix it as a nominative or classifying concept, *Filipino* was to subsidize as well as mark both a range of elastic senses and a congeries of major currents or contending forces in Philippine (and now global) histories. Like any term of identity with delimiting and encompassing powers, it was to prove constitutionally unstable and subject to contending appropriations. Its potency in naming and differentiating Philippine formations, peoples, and cultures is evidenced in shifting forms of usage by various colonialist or nationalist users and in the array of contending meanings it has absorbed in modern history and continues to authorize in the present.

Although the term was not conventionalized in its first delimited sense until the 19th century as already noted, the early Spanish *conquista* was to provide the initial occasions for destabilizing *Filipino* and those eventually generated as its multiple and frequently conflicting valences. Examining Spanish colonial-archival sources across several centuries, the historian William Henry Scott determined that *Filipinos* (and its other variant, *Philipinos*, which American writers and colonial ethnographers were to popularize from 1898 onward) was also actually used to distinguish Philippine *indios* from the *indios* of the Americas, as instanced in *crónicas* and ethnographies by Chirino in 1604, de San Antonio in 1738, Antolin in 1789, and lately, de Mas in 1843. More curiously, Scott notes that the term was not infrequently used by some of these writers to refer to Philippine natives in the context of their pre-Hispanic lifeways and cultures or in terms of some imagined time *before* their

active and actual rechristening as *indios* in Spanish nominative practice (6-7). This practical sense of a descriptive and creative precedence of *Filipino* over *indio* in the evolving colonial lexicon and imagination guarantees both an incipient Spanish modern retroactivity to this term (that parallels later ‘anachronistic’ uses by ‘Filipinos’ like Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados*) and some emergent meanings that subsidize the theoretical claims for “Filipino Studies.”

### (INDIO/ILUSTRADO) FILIPINO AND THE VERNACULAR

The virtue of *Filipino* for the reorientations we desire for new studies, of course, is that it designates human subjects and “native” agents who could and can partly elude the totalizing reach, the “essentializing claims and regulatory compulsions” (Rafael) of colonial- and nation-state bureaucracies and dominant knowledges. Short of anthropomorphizing or metaphorizing it, *Filipinas* or *Philippines* only tends, primarily but not exclusively, to designate a physical and bounded (although frequently contested) territory and thereby an inert object of colonial conquest, nationalist desire, and expropriative templates (hence its relative representability in colonial and capitalist cartographs, for example, and its ideality in nationalist symbolic idioms). By contrast, the sweep of the colonial or capitalist machine as a program of conquest, as a technology of domination, and as a structure of expropriation “could never fully contain the lived experiences—the shrugs and silences, the resistance and refraction of its [human] subjects” (Dirks 29).<sup>2</sup> Thus, in engraving a frontispiece portrait of Philip V for Pedro Murillo Velarde’s 1743 *Cursus Juris Canonici*, the native artist Francisco Suarez could identify himself as *Indio filipino* and refunction the names differently from already shifting colonial usage; and in a radical inaugural act in 1887 that mythically signalled the emergence of anti-colonial Philippine nationalism and capped emboldening 19th-century native appropriations of a colonial identity term, Rizal would address the Madrid community of exiles thus: “Creoles, mestizos and Malays, we simply call ourselves Filipinos” (Scott 6-7).<sup>3</sup>

These historical exempla of *agency*, among many others, imply a critical principle that ought to be encouraged in envisioned Filipino Studies projects: the examination and accounting of the constitution of modern subjects and subjectivities (local, colonial, nationalist, or transnational) over against the obsessive and conventional objectivity or objectivation that structures precedent knowledges and received or enduring analytic protocols. Following Vicente Rafael, one may call this historical phenomenon (and critical approach) “vernacularization” or “localization.” As Rafael points out, vernacularization

and localization consist in “the particular ways by which the boundaries that differentiate the inside from the outside of native societies” and that are stressed by colonial conquest, capitalist modernity, and foreign influences “are historically drawn, expanded, contracted, or obscured” in and beyond *subjective* acts (*Contracting* 15-16). Native locality and the vernacular — as evidenced in their partial and changeable subjectivities — thus also circumscribe the dominance and partiality of colonial knowledges and Western intellectual production, and the inequities or hierarchies historically characterizing or structuring all colonial and neo/postcolonial power relations. <sup>4</sup>

To “localize” or “vernacularize” and to attend to forms of ‘native agency’ or a tactically conceptual sense of the “inside” then is to study the history and cultures of native society and Filipino alterities beyond and against the grain of colonial categories. This is not so much to unilaterally privilege the native or the local/vernacular in new studies but to recognize its intrication with the “outside” and global, and even with the national. It is also to struggle toward a far more dialogic picture of local reception and refractions of colonial and external institutions or impositions (including imperial and anti-colonial nationalisms and their competing claims upon “indigene”) as well as their reciprocal transformations. It is thus, finally, to help foster reciprocity in knowledge production and circulation between the West and the Rest, whose trajectory, until recently, has been monologic in favor and in the service of Euro-American globalisms (see Said, and Chakrabarty).<sup>5</sup>

Something of the terminological flux of *Filipino* itself, even in its 19th-century incarnations, would indicate conflicting and active appropriations in which the vernacular or local figures as both constitutive and constitutionally in excess of even anti-colonial nationalism. This is to say that the vernacular or local is resignifiable to encompass heterogeneous historical, cultural, and political formations of the indigene or ‘inside’ in dialogue with colonial or global power/knowledge and nationalist aspirations. The late 19th-century formation and emergence of *ilustrados* in relation to the rise of modern Philippine nationalisms, to post-Enlightenment discourses, and to Spain as the colonial motherland exemplify, in ways that remain little-explored, this research problematic or set of topical questions. To track their vernacularization of colonial terms/ categories like *Filipino* and of available Spanish liberalism is to get a sense of the promise of looking at “Filipino vernaculars” in new studies.

The *ilustrado* propagandists, nationalists, and 1896/98 revolutionary leaders are now severely criticized and hastily dismissed (in many cases, in unremitting and wholesale fashion) by modern Philippine historians and a few active revisionist American Filipinologists for their purportedly self-serving politics and class aspirations. But “it was

among the achievements of Rizal and the revolutionaries of his generation to imagine, gradually, a new historical person: the Filipino" (Anderson 107), and thus to institute, no matter how problematically, an alternative vernacular matrix around which various elite and mass movements could converge to attempt both an overhaul of the colonial social order and a widespread articulation of Filipino *national* identity over against class, social, and ethnoracial differences.

In the first phase of the *ilustrado* "Propaganda Movement," sometimes inadequately labelled the "Reform Movement," *Filipinization* actually meant *Hispanization*, and therefore did not intend the separation of the Philippines from Spain but its full political and cultural assimilation into the Spanish colonial body politic and its institutions. But this agenda was no less radical than the eventual call for Revolution and independence for its success (unlikely, in any case, given the obduracy of quasi-medieval political structures even in the peninsula) would have already in effect destroyed the "inequality" which was the very principle of Spanish colonial power and privilege. The radicalism of the *ilustrado* Propagandists lay in their deft reinterpretations or *vernacularization* of post-Enlightenment narratives of secular culture, progress, and modern rationality and thus their express attempts to adapt this altered continental thought or analysis to the peculiar conditions and needs of the colony and its inhabitants (Majul 1957). Directed against the "dark and superstitious" reign of the friars and religious orders over all arenas of Philippine society and politics, this Philippine enlightenment rested on notions of nonage and cultural education that envisioned and desired the formation of Filipinos as ethical subject-citizens who exercised freedom and universally recognized political and civil rights and enjoyed reciprocal recognition as their Spanish "betters." Precisely, the most subversive of the *ilustrado* demands, no matter how quixotic and patriarchal sounding from the perspective of the present, was the improvement or secularization of the colonial educational system to make the ideals of cultural hispanization (Filipinization) and Enlightenment available to the rest of the population as the basis for the formation of this new and imagined order even within (and precisely in spite of) the Spanish imperial context (de la Rosa 128). Even as relentless and anxious a critic of the *ilustrados* as the nationalist writer Renato Constantino concedes that the *ilustrados*, "limited as they were by their class position," appropriated colonial terms to certain powerful effects and in ways that eventually spelt the collapse of the theocratic and frailocratic architecture of Spanish rule: they prepared the philosophical grounds for subsequent Revolution and made it imaginable (11).

Like *Filipino*, however, the notion of the vernacular or local resists singular and essentializing reference as quite a few Philippine studies scholars and critics (especially



those laboring in vernacular studies and local-regional historiography in the Philippines) effectively show in a contending but relatively untheorized plurality of achieved and still-developing investigations.<sup>6</sup> In relation to the *ilustrado Filipino* case, I have merely cited an instantiation of the constitution of an emergent sense of *Filipino* through a particular set of vernacularizing acts. It might be hard to think of the vernacular as describing the self-fashioning of a privileged and problematic group like the *clase ilustrada*. But if we remember that, in spite of their cosmopolitanism, they still remained marginalized by “Mother Spain” and the European tradition to which they anxiously related, their own attempts to reinterpret the “global and universal” through Philippine conditions clearly constituted a *vernacularization* that did nothing less than herald an epochal change in 19th-century Philippine culture and politics.

At the most basic level for Filipinos everywhere, the vernacular or local itself, as critical concept, subdivides and multiplies with the fragmentation of the historical and present-day Philippines into well over eighty ethnolinguistic groups and an infinite number of speech communities disorganized otherwise by various and competing social modalities, including those formed by recent global migration patterns. That these formations manifest varying degrees of encounter with and absorption into global/colonialist/nationalist discourses and power structures is a commonplace whose implications for the established Philippine Studies and Filipino American studies formations are manifold and yet remain severely circumscribed within these fields’ “national borders” and area-studies/ethnic studies assumptions. Conceivably, the interplays of displaced local formations with flexible metropolitan contexts, if properly recognized as objects of inquiry in dialectical fashion, could provide the most productive orientations yet for emergent Filipino Studies.

## NOTES

- 1 A 1921 *diccionario* by the Spanish writer W .E. Retana still exclusively defined *Filipino/Filipina* as an “*adjetivo, dicese del hijo o de la hija de peninsulares nacido o nacida en Filipinas, y en general de todo el alli nacido que trae origen español por ambas lineas.*” The church historian Fr. Rolando de la Rosa observes that, effectively, “the same word-coining process which gave the term *Americanos* to *creoles* born in Latin America bestowed the name *Filipinos* to *creoles* born in the Philippines” (de la Rosa 125, 137).
- 2 Rafael attempts in a provocative essay to redefine—or metaphorize—the historical and postcontemporary “Philippines” as both “a sovereign nation in the global imaginary” and “a series of relations anchored to crisis and contingency.” While the territoriality of the Philippines might have been “a function of administrative exigencies on the part of both colonial and national state bureaucracies it has never been a stable entity” and its “reality” had not been and could not be contained by such historically “artificial boundaries.” (“Writing Outside” xvi-xvii).
- 3 Or, as Graciano Lopez Jaena (1856-1896) would exclaim in an 1889 toast to three exile ‘native’ artists who garnered top prizes for their categories at the Universal Exposition of Paris, “This time everyone born in those distant regions of Malaysia can be proud and say openly: I am a Filipino (*civis philipinus sum*).... The old opprobious stigma of their incapacity is now erased” (230).
- 4 The energy for this principle comes from the early and post-1970s theoretical gains on agency for historically minoritized and marginalized “subaltern” subjects as produced in Philippine vernacular critique and nationalist historiography; US Women’s Studies, Ethnic American Studies and new social historiography; and, recently South Asian Subaltern Studies scholarship. Although now considerably refined, notions of “subaltern agency” and their conditions of possibility in criticism and scholarship, in reading and exegetical practices, and as ontology, remain the object of debate or dispute especially in “poststructuralist and postcolonialist literary criticism” and the now popular field of “Cultural Studies.”
- 5 As Rafael observes, “Christianization of the subject populace” and “Hispanization of native cultures” as conventional categories for the study of the Spanish colonial Philippines unproblematically privilege colonial perspectives and colonial-language sources and creates some practical effects that “unwittingly [rehearse] the Spanish logic behind conversion and conquest.” External forces are seen as the primary motors of native history, and perspectives and sources available in the vernacular are shortcircuited and denied “a measure of veracity” accorded to the colonizer’s (*Contracting* 4-7).

- 6 Stimulated by the resurgence of Philippine cultural and political nationalism against continuing US neocolonial sway over the Philippines and Southeast Asia and in the context of multiple 'Third World' decolonization and national liberation movements in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, this renaissance of Philippine studies scholarship especially as undertaken by Filipino scholars and critics in literary and 'cultural' studies finds an uneven codification in the multivolume *Encyclopedia of Philippine Culture* published by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (1994). Iletto ("The Unfinished Revolution") is the best 'localizing' account of the highly precipitant context of the 1950s and 60s. The inaugural and pivotal work of the nationalist historians Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino and the critical historiography of Reynaldo Iletto (*Pasyon and Revolution*) enabled and marked important junctures in this immensely productive period of 'local' Philippine studies scholarship and critique.

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