

THE PHILIPPINES IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN POETRY

Presence and Omission¹

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Abstract

In 1606, Antonio de Morga published *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, appearing to establish a point of contact, which endures in the still-overlooked but undeniably extant relationship of the Philippines with contemporary Mexican Spanish-language poetry. Although minimal, certain Philippine ties have been observed in recent decades in Mexico, the country with the greatest number of Spanish speakers in the world. Unlike Cuba or Puerto Rico, the Philippines has been forgotten by Hispanic culture in a tradition that continues in the twenty-first century. Despite this uprooting from, which might be observed in a first a preliminary study that other researchers may want to undertake (still underexplored and in fact practically non-existent in the critical panorama), such Mexico-Philippines relationships continue settling in the Mexican poetry insomuch as they mark meeting points that explain globalization and the search for identity that also exists in lyricism. In this work, which traces Mexican literature, the presence of the Philippines in Tomás Calvillo Unna's 1995 poetry collection *Filipinas, textos cercanos* (2010) is analyzed using an ecocritical approach to recoveries from pre-Columbian Mexico and colonial New Spain. In addition to investigating which poets have been influenced by the Philippine tradition, this text delves into historical and geographical relationships, especially as the basis of the Manila Galleon trade. The issue of violence, also present in texts examined here, will refer to colonization and to neocolonial practices still rooted in this exchange. This article also discusses issues surrounding the Western canon and the knowledge or ignorance that Hispanophone societies and academia have regarding Philippine Studies.

Keywords

genealogy; identity construction; displacement; diplomatic relations; autobiography

About the Author

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MEXICO AND THE PHILIPPINES

The relationship between both countries recently turned five hundred years old: in 1521, the same year in which Hernán Cortés conquered the capital of the Mexica Empire, Ferdinand Magellan claimed the Philippines for the Spanish crown. The definitive assault of the Philippines for the Spanish conquest occurred with Miguel López de Legazpi, who founded the city of Manila in 1571.

It was Antonio de Morga (1559–1636) who published the chronicle *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609), the first non-religious history of the Philippines. De Morga published his chronicle in Mexico (Gerónimo Balli), since under Spanish dominion the Philippines was ruled from Mexico, then called New Spain. We will use de Morga's work as a jumping-off point for understanding Mexico's role in the colonization of the Philippines and the relations existing between the Philippines and Mexico in (generally Spanish-language) literature since the periods of colonization and independence. These eras occupy a good part of Philippine studies, but the links between Mexico and the Philippines established in recent years have hardly been noticed.

The distance between Spain and the Philippines meant the Captaincy General of the Philippines fell under the administrative jurisdiction of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The year 1571 marked the beginning of an important administrative and cultural exchange² that had its peak with the Manila Galleon, the main trade route that connected both colonies until Mexico won independence in the early nineteenth century.

The Mexican port of Acapulco was of key importance to Spain, as it was far closer to Manila than the Iberian Peninsula was. For several centuries, the Acapulco-Manila commercial route allowed Mexico and the Philippines to share traditions ranging from fashion, gastronomy, and language to beliefs and symbols still present in contemporary Mexican poetry. Mexico's guayabera shirt, for example, is similar to the Philippine barong tagalog, and some of the shawl-like rebozos worn in Mexico are manufactured in the Philippines. The Manila mango is one of the most-consumed types of mangos in Mexico, while tamales and lechón are common in the Philippines. Worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe is widespread in both countries (Rodríguez Lois).³ In the Philippine province of Pampanga, there is a municipality called Mexico where a statue of Mexican independence leader Miguel Hidalgo is kept, while a statue of José Rizal, the Philippine national hero, stands on Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma. Words from Nahuatl, an indigenous language of Mexico, have been adopted and popularized in the Philippines, such as *tianquiztli* (tiangge: open-air market) and *tzapotl* (zapote: fruit of this homonymous American tree,

which we will see later as it also lends its name to a river), as collected by Rafael Bernal (1965).

A Mexican diplomat and novelist, Bernal (1915–1972)⁴ incorporated the Philippines into his work, especially in narrative texts. He is also the author of an investigation, *México en Filipinas: estudio de una transculturación* (1965), which takes the opposite direction of the present research, instead studying the presence of the Philippines in Mexico. Despite globalization and cultural events organized on both sides of the Pacific through institutions like the Instituto Cervantes, the influence of the Philippines on Mexico is minimal.⁵ While the incomprehension and ignorance that Mexican society generally shows towards the Philippines is undeniable, literature can serve as a nexus between the two countries. Taking an anthropological and geopolitical approach, Thomas Calvo and Paulina Machuca edited *México y Filipinas: culturas y memorias sobre el Pacífico* (2016), compiling essays on links that the Manila Galleon made possible and which critics have analyzed in recent years.

Paula C. Park has consolidated the Mexico-Philippines relationship in critical studies with the article “Transpacific Intercoloniality: Rethinking the Globality of Philippine Literature in Spanish” (2019) and conferences including “Mexico, the Philippines, and the Hispanic Pacific” and “The Wake of the Manila Galleon: Mexico’s Transhistorical Presence in the Philippines,” which outline the relationship raised at a general level by other critical references such as Salvador García in *Literatura de viajes: el viejo mundo y el nuevo* (1999).

Armando Azúa (2011) reviewed Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, comparing two recent Spanish-language editions of the book, one published with the collaboration of Patricio Hidalgo Nuchera in Madrid (Polifemo, 1997) and the other introduced by Francisca Perujo in Mexico City (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007). The latter edition is “la primera edición mexicana desde la original de 1609” (“the first Mexican edition since the 1609 original”; Azúa 221).⁶ Almost four centuries later, this work reappeared in the former capital of New Spain, according to Azúa, with a possible objective of “buscar jóvenes investigadores que se interesen en el tema, mientras que la de Hidalgo nos llega desde una España donde los estudios filipinistas ya se han consolidado y la recuperación de textos originales resulta de mayor utilidad” (“searching for young researchers who are interested in the subject, while Hidalgo’s comes to us from a Spain where Philippine studies have already been consolidated and the recovery of original texts is more useful”; 229).

These recent rereadings of Antonio de Morga’s work show the current interest of ecocritical perspectives in the culture of New Spain. The vindication of history

and the defense of nature are the two approaches that define the importance of the Philippines in Mexico, one of the centers of Hispanic literature.

Jorge Mojarro (2018) coordinated an excellent monograph on the subject in the *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. Writing on the Mexico-Philippines intercultural context, Mojarro noted that “La literatura hispanofilipina cabe ser entendida, además, como una prolífica y olvidada extensión de la literatura hispanoamericana, con la que comparte infinitud de rasgos” (“Hispanic-Philippine literature can also be understood as a prolific and forgotten extension of Spanish-American literature, with which it shares an infinite number of traits”; 10). This observation is the closest to the lines that we follow in this work, since the articles in Mojarro’s monograph reach only the twentieth century; hence, we insist on the applicability of his observation to Hispanic-Philippine literature in the twenty-first century.

One year later, Mojarro (2019) edited a special edition of the journal *Unitas* dedicated to this topic, in which he demonstrated recent relations between the Philippines and other Spanish-speaking countries, as we will see with the case of Calvillo: “Another important topic was the very fact that Philippine authors were in contact with and read other authors in Spanish both from Spain and Latin America, thus making this literature a central piece in the globalized network of literatures in the Spanish language” (3).

Regarding the relationship between Manila and Acapulco, the collection edited by Tomás Javier Calvillo Unna, *En torno al galeón Manila-Acapulco* (2019) stands out. In it, Calvillo Unna maintains:

Los territorios de Nueva España y Filipinas fueron el origen de un rico intercambio comercial que expresó una de las más relevantes experiencias de la modernidad económica, nombrada hoy como ‘globalización.’ (7)

The territories of New Spain and the Philippines were the origin of a rich commercial exchange that expressed one of the most relevant experiences of economic modernity, known today as ‘globalization.’

Finally, as an example of such globalization, “The Philippines, Spain, and Globalization, Sixteenth Century to the Present: An International Conference” was held in 2020 at the Ateneo de Manila University. Held virtually, it strengthened the Mexico-Philippines links demonstrated in the research Abisai Pérez presented during the conference; in the line of John Blanco, Pérez presented his work “Comparing the Development of Colonial Law on Indigenous Peoples in Sixteenth-Century Mexico and the Philippines,” a basis for the identity configuration that is

followed by the Mexican lyric in examples such as those we will see with Tomás Calvillo, Roberto López Moreno, Fernando Fernández, Elsa Cross, and Isabel Zapata.⁷

FILIPINAS, TEXTOS CERCANOS

The work of Tomás Calvillo Unna (b. Mexico City, 1955) is essential for understanding the presence of the Philippines in Mexican poetry. In addition to being the author of the poetry collection *Filipinas, textos cercanos* (2010), Calvillo has carried out the “The forgotten story of a relationship: Mexico and the Philippines” project, which he co-founded, at the Colegio de San Luis. One of the results of this undertaking was the International Hispanic Literature Colloquium, held in 2015 in San Luis Potosí.

Filipinas, textos cercanos opens with a portrait of Calvillo, Mexico’s then-ambassador to the Republic of the Philippines, who stands out for works such as *Poesía 1979–1993*. A prologue by the Mexican poet Javier Sicilia endorses the book with judgments like the following:

Desde *El ombligo del agua* (1981) hasta *El fondo de las cosas* (2006), asistimos a una exploración espiritual que, nacida de las experiencias más diversas, abre resquicios en medio del tiempo para que podamos contemplar el lugar en el que todo reposa y adquiere sentido. Con *Filipinas, textos cercanos*, escrito en el archipiélago de las 7107 islas, Calvillo continúa esa exploración.

From *El ombligo del agua* (1981) to *El fondo de las cosas* (2006), we attend a spiritual exploration which, born from the most diverse experiences, opens gaps in the middle of time so that we can contemplate the place where everything settles and acquires meaning. With *Filipinas, textos cercanos*, written in the archipelago of the 7107 islands, Calvillo continues that exploration.

Calvillo wrote the book in the Philippines during his time as ambassador, later publishing it in Mexico through the Government of the State of Tabasco. References to the Philippines follow one another as a background for the poetic subject that, in the first person, generally shows human beings, identity, societal change, and certain parallels between Mexico and the Philippines that we will describe below.

Filipinas, textos cercanos is dedicated to Rosario Castellanos, one of the most famous and world-renowned Mexican poets, whose work is characterized, among other elements, by its inclusion of pre-Columbian recoveries. Calvillo’s book is composed of 179 short poems with titles that follow an alphabetical order, as if he

had traced a dictionary in order to name Philippine reality through Mexican eyes. This taxonomic technique was similarly utilized in that same year through the vowels, metalanguage, and gender perspective presented by Karen Villeda (b. Tlaxcala, 1985) in her book *Tesaurus* (2010).

Using different sensations of sound, aroma, or gaze, Calvillo builds images from an ecocritical point of view. In doing so, he reflects on human identity and the concept of the homeland approached by Higashi (2017). Given its symbiosis with sports such as wrestling, *Filipinas, textos cercanos* recalls the poetry of Daniel Téllez (b. Mexico City, 1972), particularly Téllez's collection *Arena mestiza* (2018). *Filipinas, textos cercanos* includes additional points of contact with other Mexican poets, to whom Calvillo indirectly alludes by repeatedly discussing the concept of "generations" (401–403). The collection presents different traces that coincide in time, such as the pre-Hispanic worldview that concludes "El árbol de la vida": "el sueño ámbar de los mayas / me alcanza en este lado del mar" [the amber dream of the Mayans / reaches me on this side of the sea] (95). We understand the sea not through the romantic symbolism of wild space but as a nexus between cultures, as balance and shared natural space. The balance of the sea can be seen on the cover of the book, illustrated with an oil painting by Calvillo entitled *La mesa del mar*.

Calvillo reflects on historical language from poetic language; that is, he fixes the passage of time in the text using the relationship of Mexico and the Philippines as the backdrop. How do we name that which surrounds us? That seems to be the question which closes "Filosofía V," in clear reference to Foucault ([1966] 1999): "y nos quedamos ahí encerrados / en las diversas lenguas que bautizan el espectáculo / desde el nacimiento hasta la muerte // no se puede imaginar siquiera / estar detrás de las palabras / y las cosas" ("and we stay there locked / in the various languages that baptize the spectacle / from birth until death // you can't even imagine / being behind words / and things"; 160). The reality described owes its diversity to language. Lexical nuances, as we will see with the Spanish verbs *ser* and *estar* in the context of inhabiting, enrich multiple languages with terms that originate in the languages of both Mexico and the Philippines.

This idea (about the verb *to be* and its Spanish equivalents) is articulated in the contrast between Mexico and the Philippines, according to the experience of its own author in the twenty-first century. In the hybrid of literary genres that we will see with Zapata, Calvillo's confessional tone sometimes takes the style of a diary. As a personal chronicle, in the manner of Fernando Fernández, Calvillo recalls the story through the words of another character: "todo esto me relata Agustín / mi amigo antropólogo / al regalarme una hermosa pintura / en hilo de la Guadalupe" ("all this is told to me by Agustín / my anthropologist friend / when he gives me a beautiful painting / in Guadalupe thread"; 114).

Likewise, using first person plural, the lyrical subject collects childhood testimony according to the religious representation that will later motivate Fernández. The poem “Historias 2” begins, “Estuvimos de niños rezando / ante una imagen muy bella / nos decía que era la Virgen / la madre de Dios” (“We were as children praying / before a very beautiful image / he told us that it was the Virgin / the mother of God”; 178). It ends: “hoy sé que no está / aunque la vea” (“today I know she is not there / even if I see her”; 178). The remission to the past in Mexico, connects with the present in the Philippines through the shared divine image and, with the passage of time, the unbelief of the lyrical subject. In the sense of “el principio de acción para el presente” (“principle of action for the present” Todorov; 11), tradition is desecrated in the pursuit of hedonism. In this vein, the beginning of the poem “La luz” is exemplary: “Te escribí porque / el semblante de la Virgen de Guadalupe / y la sonrisa de la Gioconda se asemejan” (“I wrote to you because / the countenance of the Virgin of Guadalupe / and the smile of the Mona Lisa are alike”; 218).

Using a colloquial tone in the style of José Emilio Pacheco (1939–2014) or Maricela Guerrero (b. Mexico City, 1977), Calvillo tells a story: “el poema es la tarde en Manila / y los hermanos riéndose en el agua” (“the poem is the afternoon in Manila / and the brothers laughing in the water”; 131) and “vagamos en el ciberespacio entre / Metro Manila Narita Acapulco / San Luis México Singapur” (“we roam in cyberspace between / Metro Manila Narita Acapulco / San Luis Mexico Singapore”; 144). The commercial relationships that the Manila Galleon once sustained are presented by the juxtaposition of names of cities that retain references to the route’s port enclaves. Intrahistory shows the feeling of community that Luis Vicente de Aguinaga (2016) analyzes around the generalization of subjectivity. The confessional level of the first person contains a voice that extends for generation after generation, such as in the poem titled “Historia”: “pienso que son fragmentos / de alguna estrella interna / consumida // son sus destellos / el eco de un universo / íntimo” (“I think they are fragments / of some internal star / consumed // they are its flashes / the echo of an intimate / universe”; 173). The celestial matter, dead but visible (recalling the previously cited passage on the Virgin), refers to a past world that later is associated with plant species such as the flamboyant tree. The intimate intrahistory of Calvillo’s subject inductively draws intercultural contact between the Philippines and Mexico.

Autobiography immediately becomes intertwined with the generalized post-Conquest violence focused on by critics of colonization. This theme stands out in recent Mexican poetry, as does the theme of the digital advances that allow virtual communication (between both countries, as the lyrical self narrates) but diminish the historical dialogue of a liquid society, to use Bauman’s term ([1999] 2003), violated by the distant and increasingly artificial relationship of the human being

with nature: “en las pantallas líquidas / retocamos los paisajes: // . . . tomamos nuestros huesos de tierra y plástico / y nos envolvemos en fuego” (“on liquid screens / we retouch the landscapes: // . . . we take our bones of earth and plastic / and we wrap ourselves in fire”; 292).

The rereading of de Morga’s work now occurs in the context of a false *mestizaje* that combines earth, the bony essence of nature and plastic, the human product most harmful to the earth. Plastic unites with water in contrast to the fire that envelops the human being in an allegory of the four natural elements completed by air, the most abstract of the four classical elements. In this ecocritical line, against the industrial and technological engineering established by the Conquest, the Mexican poet Maricela Guerrero enters with her book *Fricciones* (2016).

Ontologically, in the Heideggerian sense, Calvillo distinguishes the meanings of the verb *ser* (to exist) and *estar* (to occupy a place), which still presents many problems with unique forms in English (*to be*) or Tagalog (*maging*). The two forms in Spanish (and in Portuguese, the only two languages in which this distinction exists) stand out in a verse that is separated from the rest with the poem “Perdida”: “estar y ser” (298). Vicente Quirarte, the poet of his generation, finds himself facing the same dilemma in “un cuaderno forrado de papel manila” (“a notebook lined with manila paper”; 278), where he writes of “La obligación de estar. Acaso ser. / El milagro de ser. Acaso estar” (“The obligation of being. Perhaps to be. / The miracle of being. Perhaps to be”; Quirarte *apud* Ballester 129). The poet *is* in the Philippines without renouncing that he *is* Mexican; something that has nothing to do with the acculturation process after the Conquest.

The poem “Filipinas” (150–151) concludes the first of its two parts as follows, with smell as the common thread, in the Proustian manner:

“Manila conserva aún
ese perfume milenario
—sortija en cada esquina
jazmín que enamora
anhelante de sueños
en la piel de los amantes”

Manila still preserves
that millennial perfume
—soil in each corner
jasmine that falls in love
yearning for dreams
in the skin of lovers.

Among the plants that Mexico brought to the Philippines is the flamboyant tree,⁸ to which Cross will refer. Calvillo places the tree in popular Filipino neighborhoods in favor of urban livability: “alzamos la voz / que resuena entre las estalactitas / de la memoria; / en los cuartos del barangay / recitamos y cantamos / los salmos de las ciudades, / de la orquídea y los flamboyantes” (“we raise our voices / which resound among the stalactites / of memory; / in the barangay rooms / we recite and sing / the psalms of the cities, / of the orchid and the flamboyants”; 236). In the poem “La edad en Filipinas” (207) he extols Philippine food and climate— that is, Eastern customs —in contrast to aging Western routine.

Although free verse prevails, the language and rhythm of the street sometimes combine octosyllables with assonance rhymes typical of the oral tradition. A poem like “Cosas del alma” (with the banality of the first nucleus, “Things,” and the depth of the second, “Soul”) defines the heart (in the poem that precedes this, called “Cordón umbilical”: navel of the moon, in the etymological sense of the Nahuatl word “Mexico”): “otro cuerpo de luz / que no vemos / pero ahí está / como huella digital / de la eternidad” (“another body of light / that we do not see / but there it is / like a fingerprint / of eternity”; 55). Alluding again to that screen on which we design the landscape, the present, with a virtual approach to history.

The poems in this book usually forgo punctuation marks; instead, stichomythia marks the rhythm of possible translations into English or Tagalog. This freedom in reading offers a line of research that could compare the rhythm of the different Mexican poems on the Philippine theme and poetry in Tagalog, as well as other languages of the archipelago, according to the work of Bienvenido Lumbera (1986).

Finally, in the poem “Somos nosotros mismos,” (348–349) Calvillo recognizes the mistakes of the past and Mexico’s historical responsibility in the Philippines, also besieged by Spain:

“Somos nosotros mismos
nadie más, los extranjeros,
no los antepasados

nosotros incendiamos el paraíso,
el inmenso agujero
en medio de la selva
fue nuestra obra

mancillamos la bondad,

dimos la espalda a quien nos ama

falsificamos a un alto costo
nuestros rostros

mareados de sí mismos,
ausentes ya para todo propósito,
deambulamos entre borrosos ayer
desgarrados de presente

creímos saber el juego de los dioses,
nombrarlos a nuestro antojo
sin darnos cuenta del abismo
que convocamos
ocultamos la violencia
con buenos modales y sutileza,
con educación y leyes

década tras década
acarreamos baldes de sangre
adelantando la muerte

nos volvimos doctos
en ahondar el sufrimiento

lo esparcimos
por todos los rincones de la tierra

guerras elocuentes y estériles
son el idioma nuestro

algunos interrogan ¿quiénes somos?

hace tiempo que estamos despojados
de nuestros nombres
e impedidos de responder
en este destierro de amnesia y violencia”

We are ourselves
nobody else, foreigners,
not the ancestors

we set paradise on fire,
the huge hole
in the middle of the jungle
it was our work

we defiled goodness,
we turned our backs on those who love us

we counterfeit at a high cost
our faces

dizzy with themselves,
already absent for all purposes,
we wander between blurry yesterdays
torn from present

we thought we knew the game of the gods,
naming them at will
without realizing the abyss
that we convened
we hid the violence
with good manners and subtlety,
with education and laws

decade after decade
we carried buckets of blood
anticipating death

we became learned
in deepening the suffering

we spread it
through all corners of the earth

eloquent and sterile wars
they are our language

some ask who are we?

we have been stripped for a long time
of our names
and prevented from responding

in this banishment of amnesia and violence].

In an act of what would now be referred to as ecocriticism, the poem re-signifies “foreigners” and “ancestors” in light of spiritual conquest and iniquity. The lyrical self in this poem, as a case representative of *Filipinas, textos cercanos*, shortens the distance between Mexico and the Philippines as well as between the Philippines and Spain due to the cultural and ideological subjection of the Philippines which continues in Mexico. The thesis defended in the previous text (the foreigner’s impact on the occupied territory and the foreigner’s cultural denial and forgetting of the past) at the same time serves to vindicate a Filipino criticism that delves into the contemporary. Starting from this thesis, from the present, it is possible to approach history and the past; not to wander “entre borrosos ayeres / desgarrados de presente” (“between blurry yesterdays / torn from present”). The idea of a “capital de un idioma sin centros” (“capital of a language without centers”; García *apud* Campos 328 and 387) that the current director of the Instituto Cervantes defended at the time of the publication of *Filipinas, textos cercanos* is synthesized at a historical level in Calvillo’s poem: “guerras elocuentes y estériles / son el idioma nuestro” (“eloquent and sterile wars / are our language”); thus defending the wealth of the various languages that form part of the Philippines (this variety could also be implicitly understood in the native languages of Mexico). Omission and injustice feed on “amnesia and violence.”

Calvillo, who has a master’s degree in History from the Ibero-American University, builds “Somos nosotros mismos” from remembrance. Distance from his family becomes nostalgia in favor of the civic dimension that we study in Vicente Quirarte. In this sense, the two Mexican poets share a poetics between “heaven and earth” (Calvillo 189), elements repeatedly referred to in order to locate the Philippines on the map beyond physical or political boundaries. The deictic technique establishes a physical genealogy which is abstracted into consciousness. As a poet who is also a painter, Calvillo goes from image to language, claiming territory and roots. His poem “La biología de la imagen” begins with a synchronicity of times: “Acaba de llover en el ayer / es el olor de la tierra mojada” (“It’s just rained in the yesterday / it’s the smell of wet earth”; 197). The latter metaphor is echoed by the bilingual (Tu’un Savi/Spanish) Mexican poet Nadia López García (b. Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, 1992) in *Ñuú vixo / Tierra mojada* (2018).

If we continue this metaphor, poetry can bear fruit against the void of silence: “se administra la muerte y el dolor / pasa de un país a otro / es mercado negocio ganancia // los desplazados se asfixian / en la historia” (“death and pain are administered / it passes from one country to another / it is market business profit // the displaced suffocate / in history”; 334). The hegemonic practices of neocolonialism overlap;

Higashi (2015) sees these practices appear in the fields of poetry as chrematistic, clientelist relationships, which Calvillo also alludes to in the examples analyzed here.

Three years after the publication of *Filipinas, textos cercanos* (2010) in Mexico, a selection from the book (55 poems, instead of the original 179) was edited in Quezon City by the University of the Philippines Press: *Filipinas, textos cercanos: poemas* (2013). The new edition, bilingual thanks to the work of Tomás Calvillo Amore (Calvillo Unna's son) and with a preface by Elvis Gracia, translated by Marlon J. Sales, also allows for a better dissemination among the Philippine reading public. Josué Hernández and Ma. Luisa P. Young reviewed the book in *Perspectives in the Arts and Humanities Asia* (2015). In the feelings of nation and refuge in the face of inclement weather on the island of Luzón in the poem "Desplazado" (71–73), they recognize that "encontramos igualmente una mirada hacia fuera, de poeta conectado a su tiempo, interpelada por una profunda preocupación social frente a los desastres naturales, tan frecuentes en Filipinas, las enormes desigualdades arraigadas en la sociedad filipina o el nuevo pulso de su tiempo marcado por la realidad virtual" ("We also find an outward gaze, of a poet connected to his time, challenged by a deep social concern in the face of natural disasters, so frequent in the Philippines, the enormous inequalities rooted in Philippine society or the new pulse of his time marked by virtual reality"; Hernández and Young 115).

In *Filipinas, textos cercanos: poemas*, Mexico has at its fingertips a book of poetry in which to warn, from the twenty-first century, of a set of sensations and inquiries beyond shared history.

Analysis of the poems leads us to the conclusion that Calvillo Unna is a paradigmatic example of the presence of the Philippines in Mexico for several reasons: in addition to his knowledge of both cultures as a diplomat, his work displays the influence of the contemporary Mexican poetic tradition, the value of symbols, precise images from short poems, and a syntax that brings the two countries closer together by describing the Asian scene from the American point of view and, conversely, the recognition of the Mexican from his Philippine experience.

In the fourth centenary of the work of Antonio de Morga, Mexico is experiencing a wave of increased interest in Philippine studies, from the Center for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) to the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla or the Colegio de San Luis, where the research project "The Forgotten Story of a Relationship: Mexico and the Philippines" is taking place, coordinated by a key figure in the study we are proposing: professor, researcher, and poet Tomás Calvillo himself.

After delving into Calvillo's work, this section highlights the nexus between the Philippines and Mexico. In addition to de Morga's works, the themes shared by the authors cited here explain Calvillo's essayistic and poetic work. Despite the importance that the Philippines lost in Mexico in the last century, work like this allow us to follow the proximity between the two nations.

FURTHER REFERENCES IN RECENT MEXICAN POETRY

Allusions to the Philippines in postmodernist Mexican poetry are minimal. Rocío Ortuño Casanova (2014) and Juan Hernández Hortigüela (2015) have extracted numerous works that demonstrate that such references are usually associated with the subject of death,⁹ linked to religion and to the image—on both sides of the Pacific—of the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹⁰ To further illustrate the connections of such worldviews and symbols from contemporary poetry, we will examine the work of López Moreno, Fernández, Cross, and Zapata.¹¹

Roberto López Moreno (b. Huixtla, Chiapas, 1942) refers to the Philippines in his poem "Por este lado del mundo" (193–200), published in his collection *Meteoro* (2014). The following is an excerpt from the lengthy poem:

Por los océanos pacíficos
encadenado rumor
que fue embarcado en Manila
la espuma amarga bebió
y la hizo tecla y palmera,
y la hizo sangre y tambor,
y la vistió viento nuevo
bajo novedoso sol
y desembarcó en las costas
de banano y de sudor.
Aquí te supe mi negra,
piel de zapote y danzón.
Aquí te supe marimba
del más encarnado son,
y fuimos el negro y rojo
latido de esta región
y fuimos el rojo y negro
tiquitac del corazón (196–197).

The masterful use of octosyllables which we intuited in Calvillo flows naturally in the sound that López Moreno achieves through the assonance rhyme (in the alternate verses) that marks the end of each of the stanzas: the leitmotif “tick-tack of the heart.” From Mexico, he recognizes in the Philippines a common feeling in the symbol of the heart and the color red. The oral tradition that López Moreno updates also permeates the contemporary Hispanic-Philippine poetry that we can see in Donoso and Gallo (2011). The colors of the Mexican fruit that gave the Zapote River in the Philippines its name provoke a symbiosis “under the novel sun” that leaves through the Philippines and hides in Mexico.

Particularly notable is the case of Fernando Fernández (b. Mexico City, 1964), who included in the poem “Señor don san José” in his 2018 ecollection *Oscuro escarabajo*. We reproduce it here in full:

Señor don san José:

 cuando te pones
 el sombrero que cuelga a tus espaldas,
 sombrero de viajante o de romero
 con que te imaginó el artista
 en esta fina talla
 filipina del siglo xvii (llamada
 Trinidad Terrestre

o Sagrada Familia
 de Viaje, según leo en la ficha
 en el escaparate del museo);
 señor don san José,

 cuando te pones
 el sombrero que cuelga a tus espaldas
 alguna iluminada

 mañana en Palestina,
 una de esas mañanas
 de un azul evangélico
 o como sea posible imaginarlas
 a la luz de Manila

 –porque de allí viniste,
 señor don san José, en la nao de Acapulco,
 en que cruzaste el mar ardiente
 bajo un sol de justicia,

 o casi siempre,
 y después,
 ya por tierra, de Cádiz o Sevilla,
 en un verano tórrido

Ni día ni noche

El ojo turquesa
 en tornasol
el suave nácar que lo engasta
 resplandecen al fondo

Vivos helechos
alzan sus curvas amorosas
acogiendo en lo fresco
 los visos nómadas
del sol que se abraza a lo oscuro

Ni noche ni día

Al acercarse
el ojo se abre
 hacia un confín sin límites

Llegan o se alzan
 vuelos migratorios
¿Y uno llega
 o se va
al tocar esta tierra
 con pies de gacela
 con manos de tigre? (Cross 37–38)

Sharing Calvillo's lack of punctuation and Fernández's displacement, Cross influences the contrast and the roaming of the sun to which López Moreno also alluded. This time, "los visos nómadas / del sol que se abraza a lo oscuro." The oriental philosophy that the author transfers into this Nepantla being-in-the-middle coincides with the interpretation that Hernández and Young extract from the Philippine edition of Calvillo's poems: "la oposición cósmica clásica entre el sol y la luna, entre constructos temporales como memoria y olvido, y entre las dicotomías sociales éxito y fracaso" ("the classic cosmic opposition between the sun and the moon, between temporal constructs like memory and forgetfulness, and between the social dichotomies of success and failure"; Hernández and Young 15). Although this poem's ending does not present poems set directly in the Philippines, the reconstruction of the pre-Columbian and colonial world through Nepantla (or Manila, among other Philippine locations) recreates the feeling of *ser* and *estar*

in a no man's land, now a *wet* one (in the sense we saw in Nadia López): the last lines of *Nepantla* read “más allá del flamboyán / en lo que no se sabe ni se ve” (65). Again, with the image seen but absent, nature (through flora; and also fauna with Cross) uses language to make us see that knowing implies seeing oneself (reflected in another culture) as a game of *ser* and *estar*: of the presence and omission, now, of the Philippines in Mexico.

In the same year, Isabel Zapata (b. Mexico City, 1984), writing on the chrematistic interest provided by galleons such as the Manila ships, addressed Mexican-Philippine commercial exchanges through animals, from the ecocritical perspective that we noticed in *Filipinas, textos cercanos*. Zapata uses this technique in *Una ballena es un país* (2019). For example, the poem “La creación del rinoceronte,” using the essayistic tone typical of Zapata’s work, begins with Durer’s famous engraving from the early sixteenth century and a brief note that recounts the event that gives rise to a numbered series of short prose poems that humorously contrasts encyclopedic quotes, printed in italics, with Zapata’s own words, printed in roman type:

El primero de mayo de 1513, el poderoso rey de Portugal, Manuel de Lisboa, trajo este animal vivo desde la India llamado rinoceronte. Ésta es una representación fiel del mismo. Es del tamaño de un elefante, pero tiene las piernas más cortas y es casi invulnerable. Tiene un cuerno fuerte y puntiagudo sobre el hocico, que afila en las rocas. Es del color de una tortuga manchada y está recubierto de escamas. El elefante tiene miedo al rinoceronte porque cuando se encuentran, el rinoceronte carga con la cabeza entre las patas delanteras del elefante y desgarrar su estómago, sin que pueda defenderse. El rinoceronte es rápido, impetuoso y astuto. Está tan bien armado que el elefante no puede dañarle (31–32)

2.

(...)

Quizá la piel rocosa se debe a la dermatitis que el rinoceronte sufría tras cuatro meses de viaje entre India y Portugal o a la armadura que llevaba puesta cuando el Rey Manuel I lo puso a pelear con un elefante para comprobar que eran grandes enemigos.

Dicen que se miraron a los ojos un momento antes de darse la media vuelta (33).

In the prelude to Spanish rule in the Philippines, in this allegory that might serve as a lens for relations between Mexico and the Philippines from Spain, we might ask ourselves several questions: who would be the rhino? Who would be the elephant?

Who hurts whom? The rhinoceros—whose 700,000-year-old remains were recently found in the Philippines along with hunting instruments made by hominids—stars in this ecological poem. The framing (in the manner of the hat in Fernández’s “Señor don san José”) gives rise to a complaint about the colonial transfer of species (animals in this case, although we have already seen the phenomenon in plants such as the flamboyant tree). In addition to its criticism of colonialism, the social commitment of Zapata’s poetry is evident in the poem in *Una ballena es un país* titled “Diccionario para George, el solitario” (75–80): from the beginning, it alludes to the “Archipiélago de Colón” to design a dictionary that represents reality, which as we know is the purpose of such a lexicographical sample. With *Una ballena es un país*, Zapata continues the alphabet conferred by Calvillo and Villeda (or by Zapata herself in 2018 with *Las noches son así*).

This ecocritical resource—naming reality through approaching flora and fauna from the cultural traditions of Mexican and Filipino identity—is highly interesting. To offer ecocritical, cosmological cross-readings of the various works mentioned, departing from the colonial and global relationship between Mexico and the Philippines, would be a very contemporary interpretation of these texts. The present research departs from existing (post)colonial readings without dismissing colonial history.

An ecocritical perspective is present both in Calvillo and in contemporary poets. The vindication of colonial and postcolonial history through shared images defines the identity of Mexico and the Philippines. Starting from socially significant plant elements gives nature the leading role. Instead of focusing on characters or abstract political relationships, these texts focus on the concrete: tiles of a mosaic in which we see the Philippines in Mexico. The clarity of the structure of Calvillo’s texts, unlike other, less unitary later examples, allows us to translate the passages from *Filipinas, textos cercanos* reproduced here.

The meeting points between the different poetics, analyzed in the light of the Filipino imaginary, demonstrate poetry’s orality, links with the plastic arts, coexistence with the genre of essay, and the search for a language with which to name the presence that the Philippines and its history still have in recent Mexican poetry.

Over the last few years, several dialogues have been generated around poetry, Mexico, and the Philippines. Particularly notable in these developments is the inclusion of Hispanophone Filipino writers in Spanish-language publications, such as the appearances of the poet Marjorie Evasco (Maribojoc, 1953) in the Mexican magazine *La Otra* (2011) and Sasha Pimentel (Manila, 1982), professor at the University of El Paso, Texas, at the 2018 Mexico City Poetry Festival.

Although Mexico is the vertex of the triangle with Spain and the Philippines after the Conquest, we cannot forget the importance of the United States for future work. Thus, one can speak of a rejection of neoliberalism by Mexican poetry as opposition to the American colonialism studied by Rocío Ortuño (2019).

CONCLUSION

The explosion of Philippine studies a few years ago seems to coincide with the “post-national” and “post-modern” era that Campomanes (7) points out in the pioneering issue of the journal *Kritika Kultura* (2003) dedicated to him. From here, some academic relationships remain present in the work of younger poets, especially in the work of poets with university training or institutional ties that favor intercultural dialogue.

The presence of a Philippine worldview in important Mexican poets as Roberto López Moreno, Elsa Cross, Tomás Calvillo, Fernando Fernández, and Isabel Zapata shows the continuing influence of the Asian country in Mexico. At the same time, contemporary Mexican poetry is also marked by an explicit omission of references to the Philippines (beyond topics related to gastronomy or the Virgin of Guadalupe) and a poetic and social absence of the country, a phenomenon that can be extended to the rest of the world’s Hispanophone countries.

Contemporaneity allows us to study the Philippine subject in the present, as interests Tomás Calvillo. In this way, from the present time (and the texts analyzed are proof of this) it is possible to understand the importance of the Philippines in Hispanic literature. If we do so specifically from poetry, it is because in the twenty-first century, Mexico undoubtedly represents both innovation and the inheritance of a tradition which Octavio Paz, another poet-ambassador, associated with the idea of rupture. In Calvillo, the thesis of Paz’s *Poesía en movimiento* (1966) is paradoxically found in the poem titled “Inmovilidad” (Immobility) (185). We understand that what has been published in the last fifty years in Mexico consolidates an approach for Philippine studies in favor of intercultural dialogue.

Accordingly, what is omitted in the work of young poets is the canonical theme of religion (in the form of odes to the Virgin, for instance), which is substituted by the presence of historical colonial ties that are manifested in hybrid identities, neocolonial histories, and in-between positions (on *estar* and *ser*) in addition to attention to ecological concerns.

In this way, Calvillo's work establishes both a poetic and a critical line regarding pre-Columbian and New Spanish recovery from the ecocritical postulate.

References to the Philippines in contemporary Mexican poetry are scarce, but they confer a series of reasons that allow us to understand in Spanish-language literature, including that from the Philippines, the construction of an identity after colonial or neocolonial practices in which the US is also immersed; the defense of nature from an ecocritical perspective; and the reconfiguration of contemporaneity based on memory, history, and various personal or family remembrances that ultimately make up a social feeling, according to the aforementioned Luis Vicente de Aguinaga. Despite the ever more remote colonial history of Mexico and the Philippines, writing about the Philippines is still close at hand.

Notes

1. Part of this work is linked to a project of the Ministry of Education of the Government of Spain entitled “Construction / reconstruction of the pre-Columbian and colonial world in the writing of women in Mexico (19th and 21st centuries)” (PGC2018-096926-B-100), directed by Carmen Alemany Bay and Beatriz Aracil Varón at the University of Alicante; although, as we will see, the number of female poets is still less than that of the male poets from Mexico who treat the Philippines in their works. The English version of this text has been made possible with the editing assistance of Noah Mazer.
2. The diplomatic exchange was also consolidated by governors such as Rodrigo de Vivero, who in the second decade of the seventeenth century strengthened ties between the Spanish monarchy and Japan from Mexico (Jacquelard online).
3. We cannot forget the religious representation known as the Black Nazarene (Calvillo 125) or the Black Christ, which is venerated in Quiapo (Manila).
4. According to Blanco, “Rafael Bernal’s *México en Filipinas* represents the first book-length study of transplanted cultural traditions or transculturations (language, food, tools, musical instruments, and so on) across the Pacific during the colonial period. More recent evaluations of his thesis appear in Nicanor Tiongson, ‘Mexican Philippine Folkloric Traditions’; D. M. V. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint*; Serge Gruzinski, *Las cuatro partes del mundo*; the aforementioned Bernal’s own *El Gran Océano*; and the recent anthology of essays edited by Thomas Calvo and Paulina Machuca (*México y Filipinas*)” (32).
5. The current director of the Instituto Cervantes, the Spanish poet Luis García Montero, advocates pan-Hispanic poetry (Campos), so that Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines could be understood as a group that encompasses a common language, at least until a few years ago, the Spanish.
6. All translations of quotations are ours, except in the poems extracted from *Filipinas, textos cercanos*, whose original verses we reproduce in full.
7. This literature review can be expanded by bringing specific examples from Mojarro’s edited volumes and other works that recently connect the Philippines and Mexico such as Paula Park, John Blanco, and Salvador García. Among the Filipino writers in the Spanish language, Theodoro M. Kalaw (1884–1940), Jesús Balmori (1887–1948), Antonio M. Abad (1894–1970), Adelina Gurrea (1896–1971) or Enrique K. Laygo (1897–1932) stand out.
8. Another of the trees to which Calvillo refers in “Internista”—“Te gusta volver / a esa calle de frondosas jacarandas / para saludar a quien se ha ido” (“You like to go back / to that street of leafy jacarandas / to greet those who have left”; 191)—gives its name to a peculiar town in Mexico (with five inhabitants as of 2000), Jacaranda (the Philippines), in the State of Coahuila de Zaragoza.
9. Some associations are part of Frazer’s anthropological study: “Una repugnancia parecida a mencionar los nombres de los muertos se refiere de pueblos tan distantes unos de otros como los . . . los tinguianos de las Filipinas y los habitantes de las islas de Nicobar, de Borneo, de Madagascar y de Tasmania” (“A reluctance similar to mentioning the

names of the dead refers to peoples as distant from each other as the Tinguians . . . of the Philippines and the inhabitants of the islands of Nicobar, Borneo, Madagascar and Tasmania”; 299).

10. Regarding the Virgin of Guadalupe, shared by Mexico and the Philippines, we can refer to the work of María Cristina Barrón Soto (2019) as part of the aforementioned book coordinated by Calvillo.
11. Because is possible that such references to contemporary Mexican poetry are unknown to the Filipino public, here is a brief profile that introduces the authors. Roberto López Moreno represents experimental poetry from the internal structure of the poem; that is, his text is related to music or the visual arts in the movement he calls poemuralism. On the other hand, Elsa Cross won the Aguascalientes Award, the most important in Mexico, in 1992, for the concreteness that she achieves on abstract themes that her extensive oriental influence awakens. Fernando Fernández, in addition to being an editor, enthusiastically attends to Mexican identity in texts that, in the manner of Calvillo, cross different historical planes. Finally, Isabel Zapata represents in recent years the ecocriticism that we studied with Diana del Ángel (forthcoming). Zapata, as an essayist, poet, editor, and translator, vindicates the present habitability through the past, in the manner of other contemporary references such as Maricela Guerrero or Mónica Nepote (b. Guadalajara, Jalisco, 1970).
12. Fernando Fernández (2019) commented on his blog about the Philippine carving (located in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid) that inspired the poem “Señor don san José,” specifically the hat that rests on his back. Faced with this question, the poet wonders “qué ocurriría con el halo de santidad que cubre la cabeza de San José en el caso de que el padre de Jesús tuviera necesidad de ponerse el sombrero que colgaba a su espalda, cosa que tarde o temprano tendría que suceder, sobre todo a la vista del gran viaje para el cual había sido creado” (“what would happen to the halo of sanctity that covers the head of Saint Joseph in the event that the father of Jesus had to put on the hat that hung behind his back, something that sooner or later would have to happen, especially in view of the great journey for which it had been created?”).

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