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BenCab's Appropriation of the Images of Filipinos in Colonial Photographs

MARIA MINELLE J. PAMA

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*Painting Pictures: BenCab's Appropriation of the
Images of Filipinos in Colonial Photographs*

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Abstract

National Artist Benedicto Cabrera or BenCab uses his 1972 *Larawan* series of paintings based on Philippine colonial photographs to subvert colonial ideology found in the original source material. Using photographic techniques like subject selection, framing, zooming, and cropping, BenCab effectively appropriates American photographic texts that were meant to objectify and oppress to create instead in his paintings a critique of the myth of colonialism. In making his paintings look like turn of the century colonial photographs, BenCab rewrites the myth of the colonial project or narrative, turning them into works of resistance and nationalism instead.

Keywords

BenCab, colonial photography, photography, colonialism, post-colonialism, representation, *Larawan*, semiotics

Introduction

National Artist Benedicto Cabrera or BenCab is part of a group of Filipino painters who use historical subject matter as a means to link the present with the past by lending contemporary socio-political meanings to images of the past (Guillermo, “*Sining Biswal*” 336). Although other artists of his generation such as Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi, Imelda Cajipe Endaya, Jaime de Guzman and Brenda Fajardo also dealt with historical subjects and inscribed social commentary in their art, BenCab was the first to depict key aspects of the Philippine colonial experience in his paintings with “a documenting camera eye” (Benesa 2). This “eye” allowed him to connect and combine the mimetic qualities of photography with the abstraction of painting in ways that are uniquely “BenCab.”

BenCab, a name he has used in order to distinguish himself from his brother, Salvador, as well as the other Cabreras in the arts, is an important figure in Philippine art because he has tapped into the Philippine experience and has successfully conveyed the “Filipino”—his psyche, idiosyncrasies, complexes, insecurities, mannerisms, and worldview in his numerous paintings, prints, and sculptures. In particular, his paintings explore diverse facets of life associated with being Filipino in a post-colonial and “third-world” setting like the barong-barong or shanties, images of colonial Filipinos, the Philippine-American war, OCWs, expatriates, slices of life abroad, Igorot and tribal Filipinos, Filipinos in times of crises and natural disasters, lovers, rock stars, beggars and madwomen, Philippine political life, and (commissioned) portraits of Filipinos.

His body of works covers a broad range of aspects of Philippine life even as they also become a vehicle for political and social commentary. Though

he has been said to be less politicized compared to other progressive artists like Egai Fernandez and Pablo Baens Santos, his works tend to appeal to a broader market which includes the middle and upper classes and even foreigners in the Philippines.

While living in London (1969-1985) BenCab opened a stall at Chelsea market selling oriental objects and antiques and at the same time became interested in turn-of-the-century maps and photographs, especially those of the Philippines. He had the idea of making a series of paintings masquerade as photographs by using the method of *tromp l'oeil*¹ to give the viewer the experience of flipping through an old Filipino photo album (Reyes, *Ben Cabrera Etchings* 157). He took some of these colonial photographs and transformed them into acrylic paintings while retaining their photographic feel by making them look faded. He also used photographic techniques like zooming, cropping, and placing corner clips. The average size of the *Larawan* paintings is between 48x36 to 75x55 cm, not very big compared to the sizes of regular paintings of other artists, but the images were made to look like blown up photographs.

In the meantime, the 1970s was a turbulent time in Philippine history when Martial Law was declared and the country was under the Marcos dictatorial regime which was propped up by the US for almost two decades. For many intellectuals and artists, it was also a time to reflect on what it was to be a Filipino and what it was that constituted Filipino art (Gatbonton, et al. 219), a question that had been inherited from the 1950s and 60s (Benesa 17-18). Ofelia Gelvezon Tequi, a Paris-based Filipina printmaker, said that “there are only two options open to the Filipino living abroad, one is that his Filipino-ness becomes evident and the other is he gets eaten up by the dominant culture” (Reyes, *Ben Cabrera Etchings* 13).

BenCab’s famous *Larawan* series, which was drawn from turn-of-the-century books containing photographs of Filipinos, was painted in 1971-1972, just before Martial Law was declared so this particular series was not a response to Martial Law itself but to the country’s colonial experience and post-colonial realities, the Philippine-American War as an earlier version of the Vietnam War, the loss and even extinction of local culture,

and the public's lack of interest in things Filipino (Reyes, *Conversations* 160). He did not just reproduce the photographs; he wanted to interpret these photographs using more painterly techniques (Reyes, *Conversations* 161), showing that the two media can be successfully merged. This is reminiscent of what Susan Sontag has said that when photography was invented it freed up painting for the vocation of modernism which was abstraction because previously a painting's only purpose was to record a likeness (Sontag 94). In this light, indeed, BenCab's artistic purpose was not to mimic but to critique.

BenCab's background as a draftsman as well as his myopia influenced his preference for drawing faces and for creating paintings that are small compared to works of other painters that can be several feet in length and width (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 161). BenCab has told this writer that he loves portraiture (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 161). In fact, eight of the paintings to be discussed in this paper are based on ethnographic photographs or representatives of types but are transformed into portraits. The four portrait photographs of American officers, on the other hand, he transforms into a vehicle for commentary on the colonial experience.

The series of paintings entitled *Larawan* was exhibited in Manila in 1972 shortly after the declaration of Martial Law. The show of paintings based on photographs was so successful that two more *Larawan* shows followed. *Larawan II: The Filipino Abroad* using photographs taken by the painter himself exhibited in 1978 and *Larawan III: The Filipina ca. 1898* again using colonial photographs to capture women in different moods, opened in 1998, in time for the Philippine Centennial celebrations.

BenCab's use of photographs as a subject for his painting started with his *Sabel* series of paintings and prints which took on many incarnations—from realism to abstraction—throughout his career. Sabel was the name of a homeless, presumably mad woman that used to walk around his neighborhood in Bambang and whose image he captured with a telephoto lens (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 75). Even at the beginning of his career in the 1960s BenCab was already using his art for commentaries on Philippine socio-economics with his paintings of barong-barong, street people, and Sabel. The *Sabel* paintings can be viewed in the same vein as

Jaime de Guzman's images of the poor and the *Larawan* paintings can be likened to Brenda Fajardo's 1989 *Tarot Card Series* that portray historical events (Gatbonton, et al. 220, 336).

Many of the colonial photographs in the books that the *Larawan* paintings are based on were taken by American government officials like Dean Worcester who was part of the Second Philippine Commission that set up administration in the country, travel writers like Jose Olivares and Frank Carpenter, anthropologists like Albert Jenks, soldiers, American residents in Manila, and even tourists to serve as mementos of travels, as ethnographic record as well as an inventory of all that was in their newly acquired territory. These books also included photographs of Tagalog and Spanish speaking upper class city dwellers, the peasants in provincial areas and also of non-Christian natives like the Moros in Mindanao or indigenous people like the Igorots of northern Luzon. The photographs would be compiled into enormous multi-volume collections of books with some written text but the photographs took center stage like those in Olivares' *Our Islands and their People as Seen with a Camera and a Pencil* (1899). Other photographs served to illustrate historical, travel, and ethnographic texts like those in Jenk's *The Bontoc Igorot* (1905) and Worcester's *The Philippines Past and Present* (1914). Still, other photographs were compiled by topic, packaged into boxes of 150 photographs and sold to the public as is. These photograph packets, like publisher F. Tennyson Neely's, were even given titles like *Greater America*.

Motivated by colonial ideology like the civilizing mission and superiority of race, these photographs represented the Filipinos as savages who were wild, backwards, and impoverished, or as native upper class oppressors, who, civilized or not, were not capable of governing themselves.

More than half a century after independence from Spain, and inspired by events happening in Vietnam and also by social and nationalist debates since the 1950s, BenCab has appropriated these same pictures of Filipinos and by using photographic techniques, has transformed them into a commentary on the amnesia that has plagued post-colonial societies like the Philippines.

From that perspective, this study examines selected paintings of BenCab from his 1972 *Larawan* series and their source photographs and analyzes

how he uses the techniques and adopt functions of photography to appropriate images of the colonizer and colonized in the source photographs. By doing so, it will: a) explain how colonial ideology and the myth of the colonizing project are inscribed in the photographic images and b) discuss how BenCab re-inscribes the subjects in his paintings in order to erode this myth of colonization. This study also posits that BenCab has successfully used painting as an art form to challenge the colonial myth inscribed in the photographs through his use of mimicry, allegory, and artistic techniques like effacement and space in order to transform what were originally photographs into portraits. This challenge is undertaken through ambivalence and disavowal of colonial authority gleaned from the sometimes contradictory nature of the images and the appropriation of photography's function of enabling memory. Such ideas and techniques have allowed BenCab to resist and subvert the colonial mission and re-imagine the nation as evidenced particularly by the study of the *Larawan* paintings and the colonial photographs upon which they were based.

Strategies of Colonial Ideology and Representation

How BenCab's *Larawan* series is able to resist colonial discourse and re-imagine the nation owes to a complex dynamic of techniques and ideas at work in the paintings. Among the key ideas is colonial ideology which is a set of practices, beliefs, expectations, and value that represents the point of view of a colonizing power which is inscribed in colonial texts. For example, following Edward Said, "Orientalism" expresses that colonial ideology in "discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with political, power intellectual, power cultural, power moral" (*Orientalism* 12). As such, Orientalism is the way western powers ideologically constructed the east not only for themselves but for the people they colonized, making them "Others", and identifying themselves as superior in comparison.

Another idea is ideology which according to Louis Althusser, is the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions and relations

of existence, and this ideology has a material existence. (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 239-242).

A person’s ideological position is the basis for the content of their work in the first place (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* 225) Based on the relationship the individual has with their conditions of existence, the work they created will not only reflect but uphold the ideology they are invested in. In photography for example, the subject and even the framing of a particular shot represent a cultural and ideological way of shaping the world (Clarke 22).

The objective of colonial discourse is to depict the colonized as racially inferior in order to justify conquest of the land and people and to set up systems of administration and education (Bhabha, “The Other Question” 154). It is this depiction of natives that is the act of colonial representation. The colonizers felt it was their “duty” to the natives to set up colonies for the natives’ own “benefit” and for the “prestige” of the imperial country. This is the rhetoric of *la mission civilisatrice* or the civilizing mission (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 108). Since the natives were made to look like they were not capable of representing themselves, the colonizers felt they had to take on the role of representing them. Colonial representation reflects the discourse and ultimately the narrative of which it is a part resulting in the constitution of a colonial narrative—the inevitable unfolding of events corresponding to an already-written “plot” or master narrative. Colonial discourse, which includes photographs and writing, is based on this narrative (Vergara 18)—that the West is superior and the colonized will only benefit and improve by being taken under its wing.

Colonial discourse is enabled by observation—surveillance—which is one of the most powerful strategies of colonization because it implies that there is a spectator gazing at the colonial subject with a superior viewpoint, objectifies and interpellates the subject, and identifies it in relation to the colonial spectator. An important tool of surveillance is of course the camera. To photograph people is to violate them by seeing and knowing them in ways that they can never see and know themselves thereby turning them into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Because of the ambivalent

relationship between colonizer and colonized, this gaze of colonial authority can be reversed on itself and it becomes the colonized subject that does the gazing. This returning of the imperial gaze is one of the essential functions of the appropriation of colonial discourse, technology, and cultural forms by a post-colonial society (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 226-229), all of which will be discussed below.

Ideas engage with artistic techniques. Photography, for example, not only serves the colonizing project by surveying subjects but can also be used as a vehicle for bolstering colonial ideology. After all, a society's system of values and ideology can be reflected in the types of photographs it takes and consumes. Photography is supposedly objective and it captures reality but the act of selecting a particular subject over another, of framing it in one way over another proves that it is not as objective as it is believed to be. Photography, like painting, is an interpretation of the world and reflects the worldview of a particular society. Photographs of colonial subjects were reproduced and printed in books for public consumption in order to further the projects of the colonial cause, but the reproducibility of photographs makes it easy for the images to be used for different purposes and an image's context can change its meaning completely (Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 25).

Besides surveillance, photography is also a tool of documentation and even creation. The documentary aspects deal with representation of people, places, events, or things in an objective, informational manner. But the informational value of a photograph is mediated by the perspective of the person taking the picture (Hall, *Representation* 81-83). Manipulation of the image can happen even before taking a photograph—an example is framing.

Framing is more than the selection of subjects because it means cutting off certain elements in the photograph. A photographer's act of framing a photograph and the way he poses his subjects can direct or limit interpretation of the image, the same way that a caption can. Framing and cropping cuts off the viewer from seeing elements that are potentially crucial to the photograph's meaning. The cut-off portions are regarded as not part of a whole, as unimportant to the composition of the photograph (Vergara 11). Susan Sontag in *On Photography* says that though there is a sense in which the

camera captures reality and not just interprets it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings or drawings are (6-7).

This means that photographic messages reflect the values, ideals, and ideology of that culture. Photographic “naturalness” is itself a myth. For countries like the United States and other western European nations, cameras lend themselves to capitalist industrial societies by defining reality in two ways: as a spectacle for the masses and as an object of surveillance for the rulers. Production of images creates a ruling ideology and social change is replaced with merely changing the images (Sontag 178).

Post-colonial Tactics of Resistance

The colonizing culture has many strategies with which to subordinate their subjects but the colonized have their own tactics of resisting that force. According to Tony Bennett, resistance is a practice that comes about in relationships of cultural domination and subordination. It is essentially a defensive relationship to cultural power that is adapted by subordinate social forces whenever a cultural power that is experienced as external and different appears. Resistance develops when a dominating culture imposes itself on the subordinate culture and in some cases aims at eradicating the subordinate culture in order to substitute itself in its place. It is a conservative practice that tries to defend or strategically adapt the subordinate culture in a hostile environment, and the survival of that culture is in peril. The resources of resistance must come from, at least in some measure, a source located outside that dominating culture. In some cases, these resources are derived from the subordinate culture itself, can be a result of the interactions between the dominating and the subordinated culture, or, can be from outside the pattern of interaction between the two (Bennett, *Culture* 171).

If the colonial narrative and the civilizing mission constitute the ideology behind the expansionist actions of the colonizer, then nationalism is the ideology motivating the reactions and subsequent rejection by the colonized. Nationalism itself has no hard and fast definition. Benedict Anderson says that a nation is an “imagined community”, both limited and sovereign. It is limited in terms of its physical borders and its population, free as a sover-

eign state, and it is imagined as deep horizontal comradeship between all its citizens. Related to the idea of nationalism is the idea of a national identity. Anderson believes the way a nation is able to have its citizens fight and die for it lies in its common cultural roots or identities of its members. Cultural or national identity can be approached in at least two ways. The first defines cultural identity as having a shared culture among people that have a common history and ancestry; the second sees cultural identity not only as limited to similarity but also to points of difference. It is a matter of “becoming” and not only of “being.” Anderson also says that “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6-7).

Cultural identity is not limited to history and is not fixed; it undergoes transformations and is subject to the “continuous play of history, culture and power.” Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and the way we position ourselves within narratives of the past (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 112). Identities are not stuck in the past waiting to be discovered, and when found will secure our sense of selves permanently for all time. It’s more like a compass that places us and gives direction. The concept of a national identity is dynamic, evolving with historical circumstances and conditions, restating and redefining the population’s true interests (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary* 96).

In post-colonial societies, the native intellectual realizes that the existence of their nation is not proven based on its culture but in the way its people fight against forces of occupation (Fanon 453). What makes a nation a nation is not the fact that it has a culture, land, borders, and a flag but rather the fact that its people think the idea of a nation is important enough to fight for. The claim to the existence of a national culture in the pre-colonial past serves as a form of comfort and rehabilitation for that nation, implying that there is hope of a future national culture. In terms of positive “psycho-affective equilibrium,” it has a positive effect on the Filipino (Fanon 445).

Assertions of national culture and pre-colonial traditions have played an important role in creating anti-colonial discourse and decolonization. Theories of the hybrid nature of post-colonial culture on the other hand

suggest a different model of resistance by locating resistance in the subversive counter discursive practices implied in colonial ambivalence itself, thereby undermining the very basis on which imperialist and colonialist discourses raise its claim of superiority (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies* 121).

Frantz Fanon describes the way native writers and artists go through a three-step evolution in rejecting the colonial enterprise. In the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His inspiration is European and this is the period of unqualified assimilation. In the second phase, the native is disturbed and decides to remember what he is. Alienated from his people, he is content to recall his life, dredging up past memories from childhood and reinterpreting old legends in the light of foreign aesthetics and concepts of the world. In the third phase or the fighting phase, the native becomes an awakener of the people. At the moment when he is creating cultural work, he does not realize that he is using techniques and language that have been borrowed or appropriated from the colonizer (Fanon 453). The ones who want to bring about liberation among the people and who want to initiate the revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of hybrid identity (Bhabha 38); the same people who advocate a return to the old culture are themselves practicing a mix of the pre- and post-colonial culture.

Hybridity is the idea that cultures are never separate unto themselves nor are they simply a dualistic relation between Self and Other, colonizer and colonized. There is always interdependence and eventually even a mutual development between the two cultures. All cultural systems and statements are constructed in a contradictory and ambivalent space that Bhabha calls the “Third Space of Enunciation.” Cultural identity always emerges from this space, carrying with it the burden and meaning of culture, making the idea of purity of culture weak and indefensible (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 36-38). The third space is unrepresentable and unconscious of itself; it composes the discursive conditions of enunciation that make sure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity. It makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, challenging the sense of historical identity as a homogenizing and unifying force,

authenticated by the past and keeping it alive through a national tradition. This means that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read anew (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 37).

The dominant colonizing discourse works by its power to represent the colonized, validated in its authority; it disavows and discriminates the identities of those it represses. Hybridity is the process of reversing domination through disavowal; it questions the images and presence of colonial authority (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 112-113). Hybridity is *not* a third term that resolves the tension between dominating and dominated cultures (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 113); it is *not* a giving in to or a deliberate taking of the dominant discourse to create a fusion of cultures since it involves the rejection and disavowal of colonial power. Knowledge that was previously marginalized and denied can now enter the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of authority (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 114), allowing the mutual growth and development of both cultures.

Hybridity, an important characteristic of post-colonial culture, allows the present and future to avoid replicating the binary categories of colonizer/colonized of the past and develops new anti-monolithic practices of cultural exchange and growth. At the moment, texts created in post-colonial societies are either in overt and vigorous resistance to aspects of the colonizing culture or they are mutually developing a “dialogic process [between colonizer and colonized] of recovery and re-inscription” (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 183-184). But it must be noted that nothing in hybridity suggests an equal exchange between the two or the denial of the hierarchical nature of imperial processes (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 119).

The colonizer has several strategies at its disposal to make its domination complete, namely—colonial representation, colonial ideology and discourse, surveillance, and the creation of myth. But the colonized subjects have the powerful force of a hybrid culture, characterized by ambivalence and the tactic of appropriation to resist the all-encompassing colonial project.

Appropriation, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, describes the way a colonial society takes aspects of the colo-

nizing culture and uses them to resist political and cultural control, to express their own socio-cultural identities, and to resist subordination. It describes the way the colonized people incorporate parts of colonial culture and discards other aspects for use in their post-colonial counter-discourse. Appropriation is a metaphoric displacing and returning of the imperial gaze (229).

Post-colonial counter-discourse is the identification of the dominant discourse, reading and revealing its underlying assumptions, and then dismantling these assumptions from the position of the imperially subjectified 'local' (Tiffin 98). Creation of post-colonial counter-discourse through the appropriation of a colonial text is an act of symbolic resistance because it subverts and then re-inscribes that text. This act is an effective way of challenging the dominant discourse from the colonized subject's position in the periphery.

Post-colonial counter-discourse does not, however, subvert the dominant with the aim of taking its place but instead, evolves textual strategies by exposing and eroding those of the dominant discourse (Tiffin 96). The role that ambivalence plays in the decolonizing process is by de-centering the authority of the colonizer from its position of power so that authority also becomes hybrid in the colonial society, a sort of attack on the center launched from the periphery, if you will. Both the colonizing and the colonized subjects are implicated in the ambivalence of colonial discourse (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 14).

Ambivalence is a simultaneous attraction and repulsion of both the colonizer and the colonized alike. The colonizer wants to both exploit and nurture the colonized. The colonized is both fascinated with and resents the colonizer's culture. Colonial discourse seeks to produce subjects that will comply with their wishes, and with time come to accept and adopt the colonizer's habits, values, cultural expectations, and viewpoint—what Homi Bhabha calls *mimicry* of the colonizer. Instead, this discourse produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is not far from mockery and it is this ambivalence that breeds the colonial discourse's own destruction (86).

By appropriating the colonizer's methods of representation, mimicking their images but infusing it with ambivalence, the colonized creates a subverted copy that emulates but at the same time can be seen to be mocking the original. In appropriating the colonizer's gaze, the mixture of ambivalence creates a colonial subject that returns that gaze.

The preceding discussion has addressed the colonial and anti-colonial strategies that have been deployed throughout the history of colonization. It is in the light of the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of such strategies that this study examines the photographs of Filipinos which were published in American ethnographic and travel literature at the turn of the century. It tries to show that the photographs and their accompanying captions were motivated by colonial ideology which perpetuated the myth that the Philippines and its people were in need of colonization. It is notable that rather than expressing monolithic colonial messages, the colonial texts seem to carry contradictory meanings as they also seem to be marked by pro-Filipino impulses on the part of the photographers and writers. As such, the paintings of BenCab may be viewed to be suggestive of a veering away from the colonialist impulses of the source photographs toward the building of nationalist energies. With the ambivalence that is characteristic of post-colonial work, the paper shows how the artist BenCab's paintings have appropriated not only photographic techniques and functions of the photography so as to remember the people's past, a technique of memory in the service of memorializing this in order to resist colonial ideology and refunctioning its strategies and techniques so as to participate in the shaping of a post-colonial counter-discourse.

The critical interest of this study comes from a tradition of scholarship in the country and abroad. In the Philippines, among the scholarly works that have informed this study is the master's thesis, "Photographic Images in Early Philippine Ethnography and their Ideological and Political Implications" by Cynthia Neri Zayas which is very similar to or parallels this study in that it focuses on the ethnographic photograph in the collection of the Edward Ayer Collection of Newberry Library, Chicago. Most of the photographs in the collection were taken by Dean Worcester, the photographer of several

of BenCab's source photographs. In fact, one of the photographs, "Pit-a-pit Metamorphosis" by Worcester included in Zayas' study, is also used in this thesis. Zayas' thesis explores how these images present a certain perspective of reality, how the photographs reflect the point of view of the photographer and his culture as captured in the image, thereby lending themselves to ideological use. Zayas does not examine each photograph selected in depth because there are hundreds of them; what she does instead is group the photographs by content, describe the socio-historical situation of the Philippines and the United States in the period 1890-1910 covered in the photograph collection, explain why and how the photographs were taken (bribing the natives, offering food, hiding in bushes, and so forth) and how the photographs were used in various publications like *National Geographic* and *The Philippine Journal of Science*, and examines the ideological and political implications of the collection.

This critical tradition in scholarship owes to the tradition of protest in Philippine visual arts as may be illustrated by another source of inspiration, *Image to Meaning* (2001) by Alice Guillermo. Her book is a series of art reviews using semiotics to examine the works of influential Philippine painters like Jose Joya, Cesar Legaspi, Onib Olmedo, Macario Vitalis, and Ang Kiukok and to find their meaning. One essay in particular, "The Shaping of Protest Art", traces the historic development of protest art in the country. The first movement was the period leading up to the Philippine Revolution in 1896 with the novels of Jose Rizal and the poetry of Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto. The second movement was during the American colonial period when artistic expression of protest mainly took place in the theater, with seditious or ironic zarzuelas, and in the graphic arts with editorial cartoons. The third movement happened after the Second World War with the rise of labor unions and the struggle for rights of workers. Social realism in the visual arts was born and paintings now had the role of representing social consciousness. Lastly, there was protest art opposed to the Marcos dictatorship and advocating national consciousness. Some artists of influence at this time were Danilo Dalena, Jaime de Guzman, Onib Olmedo, Ang Kiukok, and BenCab. The beginning of protest art was associated with jour-

nalism and its tackling of current national issues. Philippine protest art takes on many forms like satirizing public figures in political cartoons, painting references to the nineteenth century especially the propaganda movement and the Philippine Revolution instead of contemporary subjects, and using the allegorical approach to disguise their protest or revolutionary messages. Some of the issues tackled were that of nationalism and national identity, anti-colonial struggle, cronyism, and the influence of the United States in politics, conflict, poverty, and anxiety. Guillermo then applies semiotics to the works of these painters to read for content of protest or dissent. This book is similar to what this paper is doing with BenCab's paintings but they differ in that this paper will not only use semiotics but also post-colonial theory like Homi Bhabha's mimicry and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's appropriation to examine how BenCab used colonial and counter-colonial discourse in the text, be they explicitly stated or simply implied.

As may be gleaned from the discussion, the tradition of "protest" in the visual arts is evident in the 12 paintings of BenCab from his 1972 *Larawan* series and their 15 source photographs, making a total of 27 images. The paintings to be discussed are: "A Typical Mestiza," "Portrait of a True Blooded Filipino," "Gentle Savages," "Ang Tao," "Portrait of a Servant Girl," "A Governadorcillo," "A Pose After Victory," "The New Masters," "Surveying the New Territory," "Brown Brothers' Burden," "Pit-a-Pit's Metamorphosis," and "Types of True Filipinos Waiting to be called Americans."

In his *Larawan* series, the paintings masquerade as photographs and give the viewers the experience of looking through an old album (Reyes 157). The paintings from the *Larawan* series re-function both photography and painting so as to become a repository used as tools for the country's social, political, and national memory.

Naturalizing the Colonial Project

When the United States colonized the Philippines, the dominant ideology of the US was freedom and democracy with mission to bring these ideals to other nations that were deemed to be less enlightened. This "mission" was believed to be the true expression of the American national spirit meant to

improve the state of the world, to show that men were capable of governing themselves, and that democracy was a natural form of government that allowed happiness for all. It was a language of dedication to the enduring values of American civilization that made itself most heard in times of emergency, disaster, and suffering (Merk 261-262).

Manifest Destiny was a more forceful, arrogant form of that “mission.” It was an American movement, an ideology, and a vehicle for propaganda; it was imperialism under a new name. Manifest Destiny started in the 1840s with the United States wanting to expand their territory to Texas, Oregon, and Mexico in the West Coast to what is now California. Fifty years later they took that expansion a lot farther west to the Pacific Islands, Hawaii, and ultimately the Philippines: “[Manifest Destiny] meant expansion, prearranged by Heaven, over an area not clearly defined. In some minds it meant expansion over the region to the Pacific; in others, over the North American continent; in others, over the hemisphere It was less acquisitive, more an opportunity for neighboring peoples to reach self-realization” (Merk 24).

Expansionism is usually associated with an ideology. The ideology behind Arab expansionism was Islam; for the Spanish it was Catholicism; for the French it was revolutionary liberalism; for the Russians and Chinese it was their visions of Marxist Communism; and lastly for the Americans, their motive behind expansionism was to spread republicanism, democracy, freedom of religion, Anglo-Saxonism (Merk, “Preface” xvi-xvii), and redemption for the people whose land they wanted to take. American history is driven by continuous expansion that left behind a long string of non-white victims, the Native American whose land they took and then the Africans whom they imported to work their plantations. In fact, “[t]he driving force behind the expansion across the continent and out into the Pacific was, and still is, capitalist greed. Its rationalization was, and still is, the racist creed” (Miller 2).

Coinciding historically with the start of Manifest Destiny in the mid-nineteenth century was the publication of Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection when the Western world was introduced to ideas of species alteration. Either the superior races could be contaminated by mixing with the inferior or pure races could be engineered by processes of selec-

tion and intervention. Both cases secured the assumption of the hierarchy of races. Social Darwinism, as the ideas came to be known, were completely consistent with colonial practices at the time, particularly the debasement and idealization of colonial subjects (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 201).

The purpose of race theory was to raise the European race over all others (Said, *Orientalism* 232). It is an integral part of colonial discourse because it portrays the colonized race as inferior to that of the colonizer thereby justifying the imperial enterprise. Imperial ideology works by excluding and marginalizing the colonized peoples. Racism and colonialism are both driven by the need to draw distinctions between “civilized” and “primitive” peoples and the need to construct a hierarchy of human types. Despite its supposed scientific grounding and application, race had the simplest, most effective model for detecting variations among groups—skin color. Color became the means of distinguishing one race from another and of expecting behaviors associated with their particular race (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 198-200).

The ideas of race theory and evolution, or at least references to them, are a recurring theme in all colonial texts, including the photographs discussed in this section. There are photographs with captions that refer to tribal Filipinos as being animal-like, for example, and then there is also the constant praise that the colonizers heap on the Spanish mestizo class for being beautiful and intelligent because they are a mix of Filipino and Caucasian blood.

Upholding hierarchies of race and ideology of Manifest Destiny was the motivation behind the way the photographs to be discussed in this section was taken. The photographs had to fulfill certain preconceptions and images that Americans had of Filipinos and the Philippines. Before 1898, few people in the United States even knew where the Philippine Islands were. They only knew Manila as the place where Manila cigars and Manila rope come from. The reading public had some knowledge of Hawaii, Micronesia, and Polynesia first through the books and photographs of missionaries and later of travel writers. But “[t]he Philippines, however, remained outside of the Kodak Zone” (Millet 1).

F.D. Millet, an English journalist, joined General Merritt on his voyage to Manila where they would eventually participate in taking Manila from the Spanish. He writes that the mystery surrounding this reported paradise was very attractive to adventurous spirits. There was a scramble all over the United States to join in the “crusade” when the “expedition of the occupation and conquest” was decided by the White House (Millet 2). Without even knowing very much about the place they were going to, the thought of another group of tropical islands in the Pacific about to become part of the US territory gripped the collective imagination.

There was irresistible fascination in this long voyage across the Pacific to the palm-draped islands where naked savages still live in primitive barbarism; to those pleasant lands of constant summer where the fabulous wealth of minerals and rare products of soil have so long tempted enterprising traders to venture their lives on the change of profitable barter or possible booty. The glamour of ancient Spanish power still lingered in this distant archipelago and there still remained, scarcely touched by the leveling forces of modern civilization or transformed by the lapse of time, the picturesque life of the tropical East as described by the sturdy explorers of Queen Elizabeth’s days. Such a picturesque life has furnished material for libraries of fiction to unsettle the minds of generations of schoolboys with dreams of Malay pirates and all the melodrama of an adventurous life on the high seas. It was certainly no mean experience to take part in the first foreign expedition of the great Republic, to witness the very beginning of the inevitable expansion following an unbroken period of consistent isolation. It was to be a history-making event, the first act in the great international drama to be played on the broad stage where the great powers of the world are in active competition for supremacy (Millet 2).

Besides giving readers back home an idea of where the islands were and what they had to offer, the photographs also had the tough job of “selling” imperialism back in America where many citizens believed that imperialism was against all values that their country stood for. In fact, there was even the formation of the Anti-Imperialist League in which Mark Twain was a member. He wrote many scathing articles against the Philippine-American

War and the role of the United States in taking over another country without its consent. The Anti-Imperialists, just like the Expansionists, were motivated by ideas of mission and race. Whereas the Expansionists felt it was their civilizing mission to develop inferior races by colonizing their land, the Anti-Imperialists felt that imperialism went against all the values of freedom and democracy that America stood for and they didn't want to bring Asians and others of inferior race into the American system (Miller 15).

Together with the rise of expansionism and race theory was the intervention and advent of photography. By the turn of the century, cameras were more portable and easier to use, allowing travelers a way of acquiring and immortalizing all their encounters abroad. Photography's documentary function becomes indisputable evidence that events really transpired and it substantiates the existence of people or places captured. Photography, like expansionism, is acquisition. In its simplest form, photographs provide surrogate possession of a person or object. As a form of consumption photography allows its viewers or consumers access to events and experiences which may or may not be theirs. The third form of acquisition is through image-making and image-duplication where something is acquired as information rather than experience (Sontag 155-156). It is in these three ways that the Americans acquired the Philippines as well. Photography provided a means for the United States to symbolically possess the islands; travel photography allowed the general public to consume images of their country's new territories; and ethnographic photographs allowed Filipinos to be studied more thoroughly so the colonial administrators could discern a more effective way of governing their new charges.

Each of these colonial photographs is a sign to be interpreted as evidence of Philippine inferiority and therefore American superiority. That sign then becomes a signifier on the second level that participates in a colonial myth. The images in this section will be divided into three groups: 1) non-Christian Filipinos; 2) Christianized Filipinos; and 3) images of the Americans. The sign of each photograph contributes to a singular myth—that the Philippine Islands are in need of liberation and development and that they will benefit from American intervention.

Capturing Primitiveness

After acquiring the Philippines in 1898, groups of anthropologists, academics, and travel writers came to the Philippines to survey the islands, its resources, and inhabitants. Their photographs and writings became travel books for the consumption of the American public. In fact, the selling point of these books was not the written content but the photographs. Photographs of the Filipino people objectified them and turned them into things that could be possessed. The Philippines, in effect, was also symbolically possessed through the purchase of these images (Vergara 28) and colonial photographs were like trophies of that conquest (Rafael 77). The photographic sources of BenCab's painting come from these books, most of which are travel writing, some published letters, and a few ethnographic studies.

Travel books like that of F.D. Millet's, Jose Olivares's *Our Islands and their People as Seen with a Camera and a Pencil* and Dean Worcester's *The Philippines Past and Present* and *The Philippine Islands and their People* all construct a hierarchy of the inhabitants of the Philippines based on their physical description, presumed level of intelligence, and level of civilization compared to the West. Non-Christian tribes occupy the lower end of the hierarchy with the indigenous Negritos at the bottom, the Malay-descended Igorots above them, and the Muslim Moros who are thought to have attained the highest level of civilization possible without the aid of European influences. The better regarded *indios* or Filipino natives are on the upper end of the hierarchy. They are "civilized", Christianized, and are further subdivided into groups like Tagalog, Ilocanos, Visayans, Bicolanos, and so on with the Tagalog-speaking group being the most dominant. The Spanish and Chinese mestizos are at the top of the hierarchy since they consist of the groups that control colonial society economically and politically. There are of course anecdotes about the contact that these writers have had with the Filipinos and photographs to illustrate the point. Photographs in these books often assume that a subject is representative of their group. In fact, the captions that accompany these photographs are often just a descriptive phrase such as, "A typical ____." These captions homogenize the subjects and render them anonymous.

An example of this is the captioned photograph “A Typical Negrito” from Worcester’s *The Philippines Past and Present* (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present*). Since this picture was taken from up close, not much of the background is captured except for a bit of thatched grass and what could be a roof or a house in this Negrito’s village. But thatched grass which is considered a crude material and a man’s self-nakedness are both seen as signs of primitiveness; the man’s dark skin and kinky black hair are meant to remind viewers of the former African slaves so looked down on in American society. This Negrito looks right into the camera lens with a serious expression on his face, as if to confront it. According to Sontag, full face and frontal photographs imply that the subject’s image on the film is with his consent and cooperation since he knows that the camera is there (Sontag 38). In the essay of Barthes about political photographs, he states that the frontal pose expresses “penetration, gravity, frankness” (“Photography and Electoral Appeal” 92).

Worcester describes the Negrito as belonging to a distinct race from the rest of the Filipinos; in terms of intelligence he regards them as “close to the bottom of the human series” (*Philippines Past and Present* 532). Frank Carpenter in his book *Through the Philippines and Hawaii* agrees that Negritos are the lowest in the scale of the pagan tribes (94). In Worcester, we read that:

[t]he Negritos are savages of low mentality and most of them lead a nomadic of semi-nomadic life. They constantly get the worst of it in the struggle for existence... owing to their stupidity and their extreme timidity it is comparatively easy to hold them in slavery, and they are probably thus victimized more than are the people of any other tribe. They are constantly warring with each other in the more remote of the mountain regions which they inhabit. It would be going too far to say that their moral sense has been blunted. It is probably nearer the truth to say that they never had any. It is therefore a simple matter for Filipino slave dealers to arrange with Negritos for the purchase of their fellow tribesmen... They are more ready than are the people of any other Philippine tribe to sell their children or other dependent relatives and do this not infrequently when pressed by hunger, a condition apt to arise because of their utter improvidence. (*Philippine Islands and their People* 707)

Not only Carpenter but Olivares, too, in his book agrees that the Negritos have a low intellect and adds that even though they have been raised from infancy with a “civilized” family, the result was not satisfactory and they can’t be trusted to do anything that requires their use of judgment (609). In the written texts, the Negritos are ridiculed not only for their intellectual capacity but also for their looks. They are described as “wooly headed” by Worcester and in fact their name “Negrito” means “little black” in Spanish. Frank Carpenter very forwardly says he does not like their looks, their skinny legs, and full stomachs, or what they call “banana belly” in Puerto Rico.

John Garvan, an Irish-American anthropologist, studied the Negritos for nearly ten years in the early twentieth century and his findings are contrary to the opinion of the travel writers. They are indeed dark-skinned compared to the regular Filipino and they do have curly hair but they are a different people from the pygmies of Africa altogether. They are also indeed a nomadic people that build sparse shelters in the forests but this is so because they are hunter-gatherers and must follow their food source. Garvan denies that they are limited in intelligence and are incapable of concentration. It’s just that the Negrito is not interested in things that do not pertain to his own existence in the forest world and in his own community (191-192).

Similarly ridiculed by the Americans but not as badly looked down on as the Negritos are the Mangyan tribe. The sub-caption of the photograph “A Mangyan House” (Olivares) describes these nomadic people as “wandering in the woods like animals.” However, Frank Carpenter describes some of the developments that the Mangyans have made. Native to the island of Mindoro, Mangyans indicate numbers higher than three by tying knots in a strip of rattan and some can count up to twenty using their fingers and toes. In certain places, they go around almost naked in g-strings and in other places, their women wear cloth skirts and even jackets. The only weapon they all have in common is the bow and arrow. Carpenter also adds that he has been told that the Mangyans have an alphabet—letters written from left to right on banana leaves or bamboo joints. A musical tribe, they sing with the accompaniment of stringed instruments and bamboo flutes. News is sent from one village to another by the pounding of tree trunks (255). What

can be seen here is a contradiction between the texts of these books and the photographs because these tribes are said to be literate yet they are represented in photographs and captions as being primitive.

There is a pattern in Orientalist texts which always focuses on images of naked or semi-naked women to show how uncivilized these people are compared to the West. The caption directs the attention of the viewer to the lean-to, an indigenous form of architecture, made of thatched grass on one side and propped up by wooden sticks on the other. This thatched structure is supposed to be their house made from crude materials and is seen to be inadequate as a shelter since it will not shield them from the elements. The thatched roof structures in both photographs which are supposed to be their houses are supposed to show the American viewers of the photographs the conditions in which these tribal people live thereby justifying colonial occupation. The topless squatting women and the g-string clad boy displaying his spear, seen as a primitive hunting tool, further validate the western conception that these people are uncivilized savages. The images of these tribes serve as an “other” for the colonizers to identify themselves against and to reaffirm their belief that they are the superior race and it is their mission as well as their burden to bring development to these people.

Ethnological photographs, then, had a kind of totemic significance. They served as supplements to a national identity in the United States that was suddenly expansive, and hence, coming under pressure throughout the late nineteenth century, but especially after 1898. Photographs of native bodies provided visual referents to the expansion of an imperial body politic in at least two ways. First, they signaled a frontier to be crossed and conquered, and second, they posed a limit to what could be assimilated into the nation. Put differently, these photographs of tribes, whether assumed to be savage or halfway civilized, functioned as fetishes of US nationhood. They were invested with the ability to incite phantasms of manifest destiny (Rafael 81). The purpose of these photographs was not just to illustrate and account for the different types of people in the archipelago but to point out how distinct and separate they were from people in the West. They are proof that these islands are every bit as wild and as exotic as they were imagined to be.

Higher on the hierarchy of Philippine tribes are the Igorots of Northern Luzon. Olivares describes them as “a fine looking race” and “one of the most interesting in the islands” but at the same time, “indolent to the greatest degree.” Spread over the northern half of Luzon, these farming people cultivate rice, sugar cane, and sweet potato. They wear their hair long at the back, allowing it to grow sometimes past the shoulders, while in front they cut it short to cover the forehead like a fringe. Their skin is a dark copper tinge and they have flat noses, high cheekbones, thick lips. Their broad shoulders and limbs imply great strength but they are not all that graceful (613). Much is written in these travel books about the Igorots because they had the infamous distinction of being the tribe that practiced headhunting, a ritual that was halted by the American administration.

German couple Norbert and Perta Kohnen, writing several decades later in the 1980s, say that during the Spanish colonial period, headhunting was cited as a measure of the Igorot’s primitiveness. In fact, headhunting was not a custom born out of savagery but of a strong sense of justice and responsibility toward nature and their fellow men. The most important motives of headhunting were a design to wreak vengeance and to require a violent death in a tribe as an offering of sacrifice to preserve fertility (of crops, human beings, and animals) and a desire to win prestige (44).

Crucial to the colonial texts are “before-and-after” pictures to serve as photographic proof that the civilizing mission is working and progress has been made. These pictures are mainly infrastructure projects like bridges, roads, water pumps, buildings, and schools but there are not so many people. The only before-and-after photographs this writer came across that featured the changes that occurred in people were two photographs of Igorots. One is a diptych entitled “Metamorphosis of a Bontoc Igorot” depicting the changes of an Igorot boy with the help of an American education, and the other is a triptych entitled “Educational Value of the Constabulary” showing an Igorot man undergoing changes through his years of service in the Philippine Constabulary run by the American military. It was important to the photographers, writers, and publishers of these books that the transformations of Igorots be documented so as to illustrate that a radical change can take place

with even the most violent of tribes, that they can be educated and developed, and that the colonial narrative is successfully being plotted.

The diptych captioned “The Metamorphosis of a Bontoc Igorot” are of the same Igorot boy-turned-physician named Pit-a-Pit (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present*). The first image shows Pit-a-Pit as a smiling, long haired, bare-foot, g-string-clad boy. In the next image, taken nine years after the first, the grinning boy is gone and is replaced by a serious looking, well-groomed young man in a white suit. He stands in what seems to be a well-maintained garden rather than a barren field. The changes from loin cloth to white suit, long hair to short, bare feet to polished shoes, and carefree smile to pensive expression all connote a dispensing of the wild, the primitive, and an embracing of civilization and therefore colonization. Even the white suit can be read as a sign of educational and social ascension, of enlightenment, purification, or perhaps the “whiteness” of his present world view.

These two photographs of Pit-a-Pit were not chosen by Worcester because of his unique personal narrative but because the photographs relay and uphold the legitimacy of the colonial narrative. Use of before-and-after photographs is a frequent occurrence in colonial texts where the subjects may appear in different guises but always with the same narrative—the colonial narrative. The effect that before-and-after photographs like “Metamorphosis of a Bontoc Igorot” and “Educational Value of the Constabulary” have is an example of what Victor Burgin calls “the third effect.” The third effect can be accomplished by “bringing together two physically distinct prints [from two separate negatives], or by juxtaposing two distinct elements within a single frame” (Burgin 44). Each photograph may have its own individual meaning but to intentionally place them together gives the viewer a completely different meaning and they have more impact together than without the other one present. The two images need each other to get their intended point across. These two photographs are the frontispiece of Dean Worcester’s *The Philippines Past and Present*. Benito Vergara in his concluding chapter in *Displaying Filipinos* tells us the story of Pit-a-Pit. He was born in Bontoc, where he met Rev. Clapp, who was taken by this “brown-skinned, long-haired, smiling, bubbling, interrogating, primitive human material”

(Clapp qtd. in Vergara 155). Clapp became Pit-a-Pit's godfather; it was Clapp that changed Pit-a-Pit's name to Hilary Pit-a-Pit Clapp. Hilary attended Easter School in Baguio, Trinity School in Ontario, Canada, and then Manila High School and Junior University to study medicine. Pit-a-Pit became a resident physician at the Bontoc Hospital and then a District Health Officer of Mountain Province. By 1933, he was a representative to the Philippine Legislature and in 1942 he became the governor of Mountain Province, the first person from the Cordillera region to do so. Branded a Japanese collaborator, he was murdered by guerillas in 1945, and ripped from historical context, Pit-a-Pit is transformed into an icon for the civilizing process, a poster boy for the colonial enterprise" (qtd. in Vergara 154-156).

Filipinos are portrayed as backward and in need of the civilizing process brought by colonial development but at the same time the colonized could not be so uncivilized and degenerate that they are incapable of improvement (Vergara 106). Photographs such as those of the Mangyan, Negrito, and Igorots serve as a contrast to the more civilized Christians of the Archipelago.

Denigrating the Civilized

Though there is much interest in the non-Christian tribes that inhabit northern Luzon and parts of Mindanao, these books also indicate that these tribal people are in the minority. One book ratios the number of Christian Filipinos to non-Christian at ten to one (Mayo 9) and another book gives the ratio of twenty to one (Carpenter 92). There is even discussion about what constitutes the term "Filipino." They point out that the Igorots and the Moros, for example, resent being herded under the term "Filipino" (Mayo 9). The Christianized Filipinos in turn resent the fact that many people in the United States form their impressions of the Philippines and its citizens from displays like the Igorot village at the St. Louis Exposition 1904 and the two Igorots who were sent as representatives of inhabitants of Luzon to the 1888 Barcelona World Exposition. In an effort to stop this misrepresentation from spreading further, some Filipinos went to the "extreme" of trying to prevent the publication of photos of non-Christian tribes (Carpenter 91).

Worcester says that there are eight tribes of civilized natives that can collectively be called “Filipino.” They are the Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Bicolos, Pangasinans, Pampangans, Visayans, Cagayans, and Zambalans (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 933). Though these groups are all willing to be called “Filipino”, he stresses that this great mass does not constitute a “people” in the sense that the word is used in the United States. They are not like the American people or the British people for example, because there are so many differences that separate them. One barrier is a common language. There are so many languages spoken throughout the archipelago and Spanish isn’t widely used enough to be considered common. The second barrier is the dislike or even prejudice of each other, a part of which was handed down from when they were tribally distinct and actively hostile; “in part resulting from the marked tendency of the Tagalogs and Ilocanos to impose their will upon the others.” Due to these differences, the Filipinos cannot be reached as a whole nation and don’t respond as a whole nation (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 936-938).

Regionalism, this prejudicial mindset that groups from one region had towards another that Worcester complains about is in fact a result of Spanish and American colonialism. For three hundred years the Spanish regularly recruited manpower from one region to suppress revolts and uprising in another, thereby separating Filipinos from one another through the classic colonial policy of “divide and conquer” (Espiritu 31).

For example, there was an intense racial hatred between Christianized Filipinos and the southern tribes that are Muslim that preceded the arrival of the Americans. The presence of ethnic and regionalistic animosity among groups was used as an argument in favor of retaining the islands under American control, as many believe that the population would relapse into barbarism through endless tribal wars if they were permitted to govern themselves. Olivares argues that this danger, however, is more imaginary than real “for the Tagalogs are the dominating race and they have proved their capacity not only to govern themselves but the other tribes as well” (564).

Among the native inhabitants, the Tagalogs are regarded as the most advanced and civilized by the American writers. As inhabitants of central Luzon which is their domain and the seat of their government, they have successfully established colonies throughout the islands. They are described as progressive, enterprising, and determined to gain their independence (Olivares 564).

Fashioning the Mimic Man

Dean Worcester's travel companion for his journey in *The Philippine Islands and their People* was a Tagalog named Mateo Francisco and his photograph is included in the book (Worcester, *Philippine Islands and their People*). He writes of his companion:

Mateo certainly was a full blooded 'indio' and his skin was rather black but these were details of which we had long since ceased to think. His thirteen years in America had served to make him a living demonstration of the capability for improvement possessed by the average native. I regarded him as a fair type of his kind... As a man he was intelligent, quiet, sober, industrious, honest, true as steel, and absolutely fearless. We thought of him as companion, not servant, and trusted him implicitly. (220-221)

Mateo Francisco's photo is a three-fourths portrait of only his face and he does not look at the camera but instead looks forward at something outside the frame. This connotes vision of the future and ascension like in portrait paintings. His white shirt buttoned up at the top, his hair neatly combed, parted and pomaded down, and his tidy fashionable mustache slightly curled at the side suggest a civilized Filipino, someone who emulates the Western style of clothing and grooming.

The objective of Worcester for including this photo of Mateo in the book is not only to show the reader what his companion who is mentioned several times in the book looks like, but also to show that many Tagalogs were like him, willing to be educated and capable of being improved by the United States.

Mateo Francisco would be considered the ideal type of subject that colonizers try to create through their discourse because he shares their values, speaks their language, and has been educated in their schools, thereby making a perfect mimic of the colonizers. “Colonial mimicry is the colonizing power’s desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 86).

Mimic men, as defined by Thomas Macaulay in “Minute on Indian Education”, are a class of native men whose function was to serve as interpreters and vessels of communication between the English colonial administrators and the millions of Indians they govern. As products of the colonizers’ educational system, they come out with English taste, opinions, morals, intellect, and world view (430).

Benedict Anderson adds that these mimic men, though they were of native blood, were estranged from their own people, regarded as social and moral pariahs among the rest of their compatriots, and fell victim to the professional glass ceiling put there by their colonial employers, never able to reach the top positions (92).

This class of interpreters was meant to facilitate the colonial process. The result though is never a simple reproduction of those traits; they are a blurred copy of the colonizer which can be quite threatening because of the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. Mimicry is never far from mockery and these colonials are always potentially insurgent (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 140-141). Mateo Francisco was indeed the translator for Worcester’s group travelling around the Philippines and perhaps the American in the group did find Francisco’s skills, knowledge, and exposure to Western culture threatening so they felt the need to point out his differences from them like his black skin and his funny English.

If the Tagalogs are considered the most advanced tribe of the archipelago, then the Visayans are considered the dominating group in the southern islands of the Philippines, standing next to the Tagalogs in terms of civilization and intelligence (Olivares 683). Worcester states that the “actual differences between a Tagalog and a Visayan are not so great” (*Philippines*

Past and Present 936) but Olivares argues that the Tagalogs have made more progress in civilization and good manners than the Visayans maybe in part due to their proximity to the capital where “Western influence and comely breeding are more easily spread” (749). Compared to his northern neighbor, the Visayan’s manners are uncouth, brusque, and unpolished. They are arrogant, ostentatious and their hospitality is cold compared to the Tagalog’s, their motives tainted with avarice or the prospect of personal gain (750).

Representing the Visayans as well as upper class Filipino society is the man in the photo, “A Gobernadorcillo—Siquijor” (Worcester, *Philippine Islands and their People*). His position in society is inferred from his clothing, polished shoes, ring, pocket watch, and the dandy-like air with which he wears his bowler hat and holds his cane. He stands straight, looking formal, relaxed, but not smiling as if he has had his picture taken before and knows what to do. He is not uncomfortable like some other photographic subjects. In fact, having one’s portrait-photograph taken at a studio was a very bourgeois activity here in the Philippines at the turn of the century just as it was in other parts of the world (Rafael 92).

This photograph is accompanied by Worcester’s text on what a *gobernadorcillo* is. Addressed as “*capitan*”, he is always a native or mestizo, is the town’s local representative of the governor of the province, and gets instructions and sends reports regularly to this governor. He is tasked with settling local issues except those with legal aspects, aids the guardia civil in capturing criminals, assists the parish friar in promoting church interests, but, as his most important duty, sees that the taxes of his town are collected to turn over to the province administrator. The office of the *gobernadorcillo* is supposed to be filled by election every two years but it is usually the town’s wealthy men that are chosen for that position (*Philippine Islands and their People* 132).

His clothing and accessories imply that he has a leisurely lifestyle compared to the lower classes and the suit that the *gobernadorcillo* wears connotes his position in the community: “[t]ailored clothing preserve the physical identity and therefore the natural authority of those wearing them” (Berger, “The Suit and the Photograph” 276). The suit developed as a professional ruling-class costume, the first to idealize purely sedentary power, the

power of administrators and professionals that sat behind desks, limiting its wearer from too much movement because action would ruffle and spoil the material (Berger, "The Suit and the Photograph" 277). Men of the lower class wore pants and shirts of lightweight material that allowed them to do all their backbreaking work in, protected from the sun but was cool at the same time. Olivares comments that Filipino men loved to dress up: "[o]ne of his delights is to make a show of authority, and if he is not able to do so legitimately he is likely to use the clothes and insignia of officials or dignitaries" (564).

These *gobernadorcillos* are another example of Thomas Macaulay's mimic man. Like Mateo Francisco, they act as translators between the Spaniard governor of the province and their town. They most probably received a colonial education and were therefore perceived to be threatening because they knew a lot about native culture as well as the colonizer's way of doing things. Again, this is a threatening concept to Worcester, so he finds a way to discredit them by relating a story of how a *gobernadorcillo* in Bais, Negros (the man in BenCab's painting, "A gobernadorcillo and his wife", also in the 1972 *Larawan* series) firmly believed in the protective supernatural power of anting-anting or amulets (*Philippine Islands and their People* 272-273).

Worcester's belittling of the *gobernadorcillo's* belief in what Westerners consider to be mere superstitions further illustrates the ambivalence of the colonial project. They consider people like Mateo Francisco and the *gobernadorcillo* to be ideal subjects because of the high level of their civilization. By placing pictures of them in books to show the reading audience that there are such subjects willing to be educated and civilized makes selling the idea to a somewhat hesitant American public easier. But despite their attainments in enlightenment and civilization, they are still considered as Others by the Americans, "almost the same but not quite/not white" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 89). They cannot be seen as equals hence, their disparagement in the written text.

Distinguishing Class

With all these distinctions between tribes, the books' text and photographs constantly remind the readers that within these tribes they are further subdivided into classes of people. For the most part, the people are poor and ignorant with only a small group of upper class leaders whose lives they depend on: "[s]ocial distinction is so much a part of ... life that we find even these poor people divided into castes and classes, each associating with its own kind and entirely distinct from each other" (Olivares 604).

An Englishwoman named Mrs. Dauncey observed that in the Philippines, there is no marked social distinction based on color as in many of the other countries around the world. If one were to look at physical characteristics alone, there is no telling what class they come from unless they were wearing jewelry or fine clothing (62). Olivares further supports this impression with the story of Sra. Aguinaldo, the wife of revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo and therefore the First Lady of the Islands. When she was placed under house arrest by the American military government, some American ladies visited her and it was learned from these ladies that Sra. Aguinaldo wore diamond earrings; "[o]therwise she greatly resembles the 10,000 Filipino women whom one may see on the streets of Manila" (Olivares 599).

The photo "Filipino servants" comes from the book, *An Englishwoman in the Philippines*, which is composed of a series of letters written by Mrs. Dauncey describing everyday life in the Philippines to friends and family back in England (Dauncey). There is no indication as to whether these servants worked in the house of the writer. It is possible that it's just a random photo of servants placed there as an illustrative example. The frontal photo is a group of natives, formally posed, some of whom seem to be family members since there are two children included in the shot. Being servants and therefore on a lower socio-economic strata, the two men standing on each side of the photo are wearing slippers instead of the polished shoes which are worn by the *gobernadorcillo* and by Pit-a-Pit, for example. The man standing second to the left looks like he is trying to hide his bare feet behind the chair, bare feet being a sign of his servitude. The whole group wears the traditional

barongs and dresses of simple material except for the little girl in the hat, short dress, tights, and shoes. Her wearing such a dress illustrates the willingness to accept the pervasiveness of the American way of life even among the lower classes.

The servant girl at the right wears her hair loose on both sides, displaying it. Worcester mentions that Filipino women are “inordinately proud” of their hair and some women even let their hair grow up to their heels (Worcester, *Philippine Islands and their People* 33). According to John Berger, long hair is also associated with passion and sexuality (*Ways of Seeing* 55) and it is possible that the photographer posed the girl and her hair in such a way as to make her an exotic sexual object for the American male spectators.

Mrs. Dauncey says that the way one procures a servant in the Philippines is the same way one procures a house. People tell other people and the news flies about in servant land (26). J.E. Stevens, a former resident of Manila, discloses that even though it was only he and his wife living in their house, they felt they had to have seven servants “so that a certain few shall be awake when wanted” (55), implying their laziness. He also describes native servants in general as great fabricators and excuse-makers. Servants, every now and then, want an advance on their salary because a relative had just died or gotten married and they would like to make a contribution to the family. The writer advises his readers and other foreigners living in the Philippines to keep a record of all the relatives in the families of their servants, who has gotten married, who has died, who has given birth, and so forth “so that you may check up any tendency on their part to kill off their fathers and mothers more than twice or three times during the year for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.” Stevens gives a funny example of one of his house boys who had the cheek to ask for a loan of \$12 to arrange for the mass and burial of a relative that Stevens had once before assisted to bury (199-200).

Many of the writers observe that Philippine society is highly stratified, subdivided into smaller subclasses within the larger more general categories of upper and lower classes. Katherine Mayo and Frank Carpenter contradict this observation by saying society is divided into only two classes: the commoners and the elites, often referred to as “the tao and the caciques.”

Throughout Mayo's book, she tells stories she hears in her travels through different Philippine towns, refers to everyone in the story as *tao*, but the only one she gives a name to are the *caciques*, if any are involved. Mayo describes the life of these *tao* as difficult because they are always oppressed and taken advantage of by landowners, government officials, and anyone else higher than them in socially (12).

The photo entitled "The Tao" (Mayo) captures the image of an unnamed Filipino peasant everyman. The old man's full body profile is taken in such a way so as to indicate that the photo is for surveillance and was probably taken for ethnographic or physiognomic study. He stands barefoot against a bare white wall, probably a studio, thus removing him from his environmental context. His cropped hair, rumpled white "breathable" shirt to protect him from the sun, his trousers folded because of his work in the soil, bare feet and sprawled toes from not wearing shoes and from walking for years in the fields, his attentive but slouched posture, the way he holds his hat in deference to the photographer and by extension to the audience that looks at this photo—all point to the fact that he is one of the countless impoverished farmers and peasants in the country.

Carpenter in his book observed that in the farming districts in the province, the landholdings are small. They are an average of about six acres and a large portion is worked by their owners. He opines that the reason these farmers are poor is because their methods are extremely backward; the seeds are not good varieties; and they are unwilling to change the ways handed down to them from their forefathers. Another reason the farmer is poor is because he loves to gamble, is not inclined to thrift, and often does not think of saving for tomorrow. Because of this the farmer is often the victim of the local shark who is often the rich man of the village (the *cacique*) who encourages people to borrow money from him under such conditions that hold the farmer and his family under debt slavery for many years, even from one generation to the next (Carpenter 134). Mayo says their congenital passion for gambling is enough to keep them in debt, as practically every *barrio* has a *cockpit* (Mayo 12). This low opinion does not only apply to the farmers who till their own land but to *hacienda* employees as well. When Worcester

visited with a Negros hacienda owner, he said that these landowners have a hard time maintaining good workers even after having worked for the same employer for so long because in the Philippines, nature provides so much that people have little trouble obtaining food, shelter, and clothing. What more do these people require? These people don't see the logic of working so long to acquire money only to be robbed of it later on (*Philippine Islands and their People* 262). We can infer from the tone of these writers that they believe the poor bring poverty unto themselves with their unwillingness to embrace technology and their penchant for gambling.

Aside from establishing the poverty and backwardness of the large majority of Filipinos, there is the constant need to establish the racial inferiority of the natives, whether they reside in the mountains practicing their pagan beliefs or are Christianized and live in farms and cities. Racial distinction and superiority is a major thread in the narrative of colonial photographs after all.

The photo "Types of True Filipinos Waiting to be Called Americans," (Stevens) is a medium shot of a group of Filipino peasants, most likely from a fishing community, squatting on the sand. It is included in the book of J.E. Stevens, a man against the American colonization of the Philippines. His placing this photograph in his book was perhaps in line with the Anti-Imperialist League's xenophobic argument of not wanting to bring undesirable races into the American system (Miller 15).

Squatting on the ground was seen as a gesture unusual for Americans and so, many images of the Filipinos in this position were reproduced in photographs. The posing of subjects in this squatting position or the use of condescending captions tried to link Filipinos with subhuman or animal behavior. The caption of a photo of a group of Filipino prisoners of war, for example, states that "[w]hen at rest these people... squat like animals, this... being one of the indications of their low state of civilization. The whole nation is not worth the life of one American soldier" (Olivares 608). Another caption to a photo of squatting children describes them as being in their "natural position." Here, the caption does not just reinforce a "truth" in the image, but actually creates it. Following the lead of popular ethnological

thought, the photographs contribute to the colonial narrative's placing of Filipino subjects in their inferior standing (Vergara 102-104).

On the opposite strata of society to the frequently exploited *tao* are the mestizos, the mixed-race Filipinos whose parents intermarried with either Spanish or Chinese blood somewhere in his ancestry. This statement is qualified by adding that the social status of these men is largely due to the fact that they had educational advantages because of the wealth of their fathers, something that was beyond the reach of other Filipinos. What can be attributed to racial superiority and what can be attributed to education, Worcester cannot say for sure. The children of the common people who are now enjoying educational opportunities provided by the Americans will have to grow up first and enter public life before they can show what they are capable of (*Philippines Past and Present* 938-939).

Jose de Olivares describes the difference between Spanish and Chinese mestizos by saying that “[t]he mestizos or half breeds constitute a large percentage of the native population. Those of Spanish fathers however constitute a distinct class from those who have Chinese fathers. The former are usually more intelligent and enterprising than the natives and many of them are to be found leading merchants and professional men of Manila and other cities of the archipelago” (570). Spanish mestizos are said to be accepted and well regarded by all whereas the Chinese mestizos are regarded with mistrust. The upper class natives despise them as cordially as they hate the Spaniards (604).

The photograph of an unnamed “Typical Spanish Mestiza” (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present*) is taken from a closer proximity than the other photographs typifying class. Her image takes up the whole frame, giving her importance and implying her superiority; it is a close up of her head and torso so all the details of her facial features and delicate clothing are clearly visible. Her bangles, ring, and necklace are cues to indicate her family's well-to-do status and her holding a parasol reflects the upper class Filipino aversion to the sun.

Olivares states that these ladies of Spanish fathers move in the best circles of society by virtue of the status enjoyed by Spaniards at the time. He also provides a physical description of them by saying that—

Among the mestizo girls of Spanish fathers there are many who possess a wonderful beauty. They are lithe and graceful in form and figure, with soft olive complexions, scarlet lips and teeth white as pearls; long waving jet black hair, and dark languishing eyes that grow with the subdued passions of the tropics. Many of these girls have been highly educated in the convents, and possess a culture and refinement equal to the best American and European society. (570)

On the other hand, the native Filipina is not given as idealistic and poetic a description as the mestiza woman—

The glance of a Filipino woman will not thrill you. Her eyes are not large but they are black and beady and unreadable...her nose is flat and thick skinned. The nose of the Filipino woman is for breathing purposes only and it is the most ugly of her uncomely features. Her brow is insignificant and hair grows low upon it. Her lips and teeth are of a hue best expressed by bronze-vermilion [due to betel nut chewing]. Her hair is dead black. The lackluster effect is probably caused by continued exposure to the sun. Frequently it falls down to her waist and is never braided... Her virtues will not be forgotten but as a race she is the most thoroughly and largely pock-marked creature imaginable. (590-591)

The above description was provided by Leonard Comfort, an American soldier, in one of his letters home. This commentary ran for quite a few pages in the book and only at the end of the racist tirade does the writer intervene to explain that Comfort was describing the laboring class of Filipino women. Olivares however does not give his own description or opinion of native Filipino women and what he thinks of them but instead depends on the commentary of others.

This photograph and others of mestizas just like it in books like Olivares's serve the purpose of not only objectifying these women as subjects of a male gaze, but also to illustrate the opinion that because they are a mixture of

Caucasian with native blood, it makes them a level above the natives because they are considered an improvement of the species. Juan Araneta, a very intelligent Visayan, in Worcester's opinion, put the matter bluntly to the writer by saying that white blood was the only hope for his people, and that if he had his way he would put to jail every American soldier who did not leave at least three children behind him (*Philippines Past and Present* 939-940).

This writer would like to point out that in nearly all the photos of Filipinos discussed in this paper—the Negrito, the Mangyan, even the Gobernadorcillo—the subjects are scowling, except for young Pit-a-Pit and the Mestiza girl. Vergara says that the captions and photographs of these people had the effect of “empirically visualizing attributed character traits” (95). The connection between Malay features and the scowl wouldn't have been drawn instinctively by the reader just as a lack of pleasant faces indicates that Filipinos are vindictive and treacherous had the caption not addressed it: “The picture confirms the scowl” (Vergara 95).

The scowls on the faces of these Filipinos, however, may also be interpreted as a means of resistance to and a denial of the colonial surveyors access to themselves. Sontag says that “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed (4). The subjects of these photos may feel that they are already being objectified and their images appropriated for uses unbeknownst to them so their refusal to smile is a refusal to reveal themselves. By not smiling, not cheerfully obliging the presence of the camera or willing to give the camera anything else of themselves, they turn a “mask” to the camera so that it is not their soul that is captured but the mask (Mojares 43).

All of these photos produce the following signs: 1) the primitiveness of some natives in the Philippines; 2) the extent of poverty among the majority of the population and the social inequality present wherein the upper class minority takes advantage of the poorer majority; 3) the positive effects of colonial administration; 4) the natives are not only capable of education and civilization but also some are Westernized in taste and opinion so a number of them are sympathetic to the American mission; and lastly, 5) that the mixing of Caucasian blood with the Filipino indeed creates a superior race to that of the natives. All these signs then become multiple signifiers for one

and the same myth—that the Philippine Islands need American protection and intervention

Epitomizing American Military Power

In December 1898, President McKinley delivered his Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation, a week and a half after the signing of the Treaty of Paris passing the Philippines from Spain to the United States. He stated that,

It should be the earnest and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by assuring them in every possible way that full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of a free people, and by providing to them that the mission of the US is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule. (Miller, Epigraph).

In January 1899, one month after this proclamation, McKinley formed the First Philippine Commission whose task it was to learn all they could about the Philippines and its inhabitants, the social and political state, and take an inventory of what the country needed in terms of public improvements. On their arrival in the Islands, the Commission proclaimed to the people that the aim and objective of the American government was for the well-being, prosperity, and happiness of the Filipinos so that they may elevate and advance themselves to a position among the civilized peoples of the world by means of establishing an enlightened system of government that will allow the largest measure of self-rule but still in keeping with the “obligations” of colonization of the United States (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 977). Rule Number One in their “regulative principles” is: “[t]he supremacy of the United States must and will be enforced throughout every part of the archipelago, and those who resist it can accomplish no other end than their own ruin” (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 979).

In McKinley’s instructions to the Second Philippine Commission, they had the task of facilitating the handover of military administration in the Philippines to that of civilian administrators. He reminds the Commission

that the government they are establishing is not designed for “our own satisfaction, or for the expression of our theoretical views, but for the happiness, peace and prosperity of the people of the Philippine Islands, and the measures adopted should be made to conform to their customs, their habits and even their prejudices, to the fullest extent consistent with ... [a] just and effective government” (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 985). The Commission was told to bear in mind that the Filipinos should be made to understand that there are principles of the American governmental system, like individual freedom, democracy, and rule of law, which they have been denied. There are established principles and rules of government that must be maintained for the sake of their own liberty and happiness “however much they may conflict with the customs or laws of procedure with which they are familiar” (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 985).

In effect, the rights and customs of the Filipinos are to be observed as long as they don’t conflict with the agenda of the Americans. Mrs. Dauncey drolly explains the situation in a letter:

A most appropriate and characteristic scheme out here is to educate the Filipino for all he is worth, so that he may, in the course of time, be fit to govern himself according to American methods; but at the same time they have ready plenty of soldiers to knock him on the head if he shows any signs of wanting his liberty before Americans think he is fit for it. A quaint scheme, and one full of the go-ahead originality of America. (12)

The photographs of Americans included in the travel literature are not nameless and faceless representatives of types of people, unlike those taken of the Filipinos. They are portrait photographs of named individuals—mainly generals, writers, and administrators. These photos are placed in their own category separate from that of the Filipinos because in a colonial society, the colonizer is often regarded as a class unto themselves, higher than that of the upper class native.

The photograph captioned, “In his travels Mr. Carpenter used every imaginable conveyance, and in penetrating the mountain wilds of Luzon rode for miles in a chair supported on the shoulders half-naked tribesmen”

(Carpenter) is an Orientalist image because it depicts the author first as a superior to the Ifugao tribesmen and second as an adventurer traveling through a wild land of natives and rough terrain that is very distant from civilization. Mr. Carpenter wears a white suit and white hat, with white being the color signifying purity, goodness, enlightenment, and civilization, in contrast to the dark skin of his half-naked companions. He holds a black umbrella to shield him from the sun whose rays are strong and hotter in the tropics compared to cooler, more temperate weather in the West. Two Filipino soldiers, probably of the Philippine Constabulary which was established by the American military, look on. They recruited native men, trained them, and used them as forces to maintain order, especially in the provinces. When examined, a dual message can be inferred from this photograph.

First, the photo embodies all Western ideas of mystery and romance involved in travel to the East: the naked tribesmen, the roughness of road and sea, and the great adventure involved in seeing an uncivilized land. Carpenter relates how rough and narrow the roads were in his travels through Mountain Province but with the Americans, horse trails were developed and roads were widened. “[w]onders have been worked by showing these people that it is their welfare only that we desire” (Chamberlain 163). In his travels through the rice terraces of Ifugao, he describes how some roads were too rough for automobiles so he rode ponies into the forest instead. When the trails up the mountain were too difficult for the ponies, he rode on a chair “borne on the heads of four Ifugaos.” Sometimes his seat would be tilted at an angle of 45 degrees as the bearers toiled up the rough roads (Chamberlain 150). Second, the native constabulary officers represent one of the developments that the Americans brought with them: peace and order. The fact that they deliberately included natives in their troops instead of keeping them out the way that the Spaniards had done could be seen as native acceptance and desire to participate in the American agenda.

The next four photos are of American generals who participated in suppressing what they called the Philippine Insurgency. The first photo, captioned “The marvelous skill shown by the American Commanders in the campaign against the Philippine insurgents brings into prominence those

sterling generals, Merritt and Otis, who appear in the above illustration” (Neely, *America Takes Over*) is a group photograph of American officers in uniform from different branches of the military. They stand side by side in a casual manner in front of Malacañang, the home of the Spanish Governor General at the time. This photo signals to the world that the Americans have taken over the islands, and by standing in the garden of the Spanish Governor General’s residence, they are symbolically claiming it for the United States.

All these photographs of generals and other high ranking officers of the armed forces had a political purpose: to sell the idea of the Philippine occupation to Americans that believed in America as a democracy and a republic, not America as an empire. The portrait photos of these officers can be looked at the same way as campaign photos of politicians. In this sense, “photography constitutes here a veritable blackmail by means of moral values: country, army, family, honor, reckless heroism” (Barthes, *Mythologies* 92-93).

Our Islands and their People as Seen with a Camera and a Pencil, for example, includes photographs of American officers like General Funston and Admiral Dewey in more relaxed poses. They are even smiling, but the officers are always depicted within their context—behind a desk or seated on the deck of a ship, and they are always formally clad in their dress white uniforms. According to Roland Barthes, “the portrait photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens I am the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art (*Camera Lucida* 13).

No candid shots of high ranking officers are ever included in these books, only those of the privates and others of low rank. We can see from the presence of all the posed photos and the absence of candid ones that the American photographers and officers were both cooperating in helping the American military put its best foot forward photographically. They were conscious of the fact that these would be seen nationwide to further the nation’s expansionist ambitions.

The photograph of Gen. Henry Lawton was taken by Dean Worcester, a good friend of Lawton's and his personal bias shapes the way Lawton's image was captured. This photo is included in Worcester's *The Philippines Past and Present* where no other photos of American generals appear. He implies in his book that Lawton was a far better strategist and field officer than Generals Otis and MacArthur, the two Military Governor Generals. He instilled strength and energy into his officers and men, whose danger and privations he shared, thereby making everyone loyal to him and stand by him in times of need. In fact, "[i]f there was fighting to be done he promptly and thoroughly whipped everything in sight. He punished looting and disorder with a heavy hand, treated prisoners and non-combatants with the utmost kindness and won the good will of all Filipinos with whom he came in contact (320).

In his photo (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present*), Lawton is posed mounted on his horse. Worcester stands on the ground placing his subject at a higher angle than the lens, looking up at him, as if to signify his high regard for the general. Lawton is dressed in his khaki field uniform with helmet and behind him are foot soldiers and another mounted officer. Placing Lawton at the front of this group of soldiers connotes his strong abilities as a leader of his troops in the field.

Leon Wolff states in his book *Little Brown Brother* that until his assignment in the Philippines, Lawton was McKinley's most ardent advocate of benevolent assimilation, but he began to change his views and spoke out in such a manner that it aroused uneasiness in some quarters:

Taking into account the disadvantages they have to fight against in arms, equipment and military discipline—without artillery, short of ammunition, powder inferior, shells reloaded until they are defective... they are the bravest men I have ever seen.... What we want is to stop this accursed war.... These men are indomitable...such men have the right to be heard. All they want is a little justice." (290)

While waiting for Gov. Gen. Otis's approval of a plan for a major campaign in southern Luzon, Lawton died in a minor skirmish with Gen.

Lucerio Geronimo and some Filipino riflemen outside Manila in December 1899 (Miller 98). Lawton wrote in a letter before his death:

This is a beautiful country, and the people in my opinion, are not half as bad as they are sometimes pictured. Centuries of bad government and bad treatment have made them suspicious and it will be some time before we can persuade them that we are not here for the purpose of robbing them and making them slaves. As soon as they are assured of our good will and intentions, and we are enabled to show them by example that we mean only for their good and welfare, I think we will find the Filipinos will be good citizens. (Olivares 754)

Because Lawton was said to have had better relations with the Filipinos than many of the other American officers did, it seems that he felt the American national spirit of Mission. He empathized with the cause of the Filipinos and felt that they had a right to save themselves under a democracy. The other ranking officers on the other hand welcomed Manifest Destiny—MacArthur being one of them.

Gen. Arthur MacArthur participated in the mock battle with the Spanish for the possession of Manila Bay in 1898. He was made Governor General after Gen. Ellwell Otis resigned his position. A few months later the position of Governor General of the Philippines was given to civilian Hon. William H. Taft, as appointed by President McKinley. When he assumed his office, it was noted that one of the new commander's virtue was that he was a realist who, unlike his predecessor Otis, refused to delude himself about the course of the war in the Philippines. Once MacArthur felt it was time to change tack, he began to listen seriously to the advice that Otis had so long rejected: that harsher methods be employed against the Filipino insurgents, similar to those used against the Indians in the American West" (Miller 160-162). He decreed that from then on, captured Filipino guerillas would no longer be treated as soldiers but as criminals and murderers. This was because of resentment among the American troops that Filipino soldiers were killing Americans but their actions went unpunished and remained at large" (Miller 162-163).

By this point the Benevolent Assimilation policy of McKinley had all but been disregarded and America's true colors had shown through. The allegory of Benevolent Assimilation masks the violence of conquest by portraying colonial rule as a gift "civilized people" can give to those less enlightened and still caught in barbarity and disorder. But instead of being grateful and returning their love, Filipino "insurgents" were intent instead on waging war and being unreasonable. By demanding recognition of their new independence from Spain and attacking American forces, Filipinos were seen as misinterpreting the pure and selfless aims of the American government—" [a] certain kind of violence underwrote the allegory of benevolent assimilation. The measured use of force was deemed consistent with the tutelary aims of colonization: making native inhabitants desire what colonial authority desired for them" (Rafael 21).

The portrait photograph of General Arthur MacArthur (Wolff) is almost a full body profile. His dress uniform with tassels, sash, and medals of honor denote that he is a highly decorated soldier with a very superior rank and has been commended for his skills several times by his superiors. The fact that he is a stout, older man with spectacles gives him a scrutinizing air, denoting his many years of experience. By having his gloved hand rest on the hilt of his sword, perhaps the photographer wanted to suggest that MacArthur was a decisive man of action. Unlike the photographs of Lawton and the group photo of Merritt and Otis where the men look relaxed and address the camera, this portrait with the subject's formal attire looks almost ceremonial. The shot was also taken at a low angle, making MacArthur look powerful and imposing.

Gen. Frederick Funston's portrait (Wolff) is similar to MacArthur's though it is a cross between a profile and a three-quarter face portrait. His dark uniform with one star on his shoulder patch and a military pin on his collar, signify his rank of Brigadier General. He stands straight in the military "at ease" position looking fit, strong, brave, and proud—every bit the war hero people wanted him to be. Barthes explains that a three-quarter face photograph "suggests the tyranny of an ideal: the gaze is lost nobly in the future, it does not confront, it soars, and fertilizes some other domain,

which is chastely left undefined. Almost all three-quarter face photos are ascensional, the face is lifted towards a supernatural light which draws it up and elevates it to the realm of a higher humanity” (*Mythologies*, 92-93).

General Funston is credited with the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo and was promoted to the position of Brigadier General of the US Army. In February 1901, the hiding place of Aguinaldo was discovered to be in Palanan, Isabela. A message from Aguinaldo to his cousin was intercepted and no doubt by “water curing” the courier, the man agreed to guide the Americans to the insurgent camp. Funston forged a message saying he received the request and was sending replacements. A note was added that the relief force had surprised and captured a detachment of Americans. They pretended to be five American prisoners captured by members of an insurgent command, which were actually disguised Macabebes. Eight miles from their rendezvous point with Aguinaldo’s camp, they ran out of food and water. A messenger was sent to inform Aguinaldo of their position and to beg for food. Aguinaldo replied by dispatching rice and a letter to the officer in command that they were to treat the Americans well. Upon reaching the insurgent headquarters, the Macabebes surrounded the camp and shot down Aguinaldo’s bodyguard. Aguinaldo accepted his capture with resignation. He was downcast at his capture and asserted that *by no other means* would he have been taken alive (Wildman qtd. in Twain, “A Defence of General Funston” 124-126).

The American military needed to capture Aguinaldo alive because they needed him to announce to the rest of the *insurrectos* around the country to lay down their arms and end the war. Though Funston was hailed as a hero for capturing Aguinaldo and bringing the insurgency to an end, there was some criticism as to his methods of getting what he wanted:

By the custom of war, all these things are innocent, none of them is blame-worthy, all of them are justifiable; none of them is new, all of them have been done before, although not by a Brigadier General. But there is one detail which is new, absolutely new. It has never been resorted to before in any age of the world, in any country, among any people, savage or civilized. It was the one meant by Aguinaldo when he said that “by no other means” would he have been taken alive. When a man is exhausted by hunger to the point where he is “too weak to move,” he has a right to make supplication

to his enemy to save his failing life; but if he takes so much as one taste of that food—which is holy, by the precept of all ages and nations—*he is barred from lifting his hand against that enemy for that time.* It was left to a Brigadier General of Volunteers in the American Army to put shame upon a custom which even the degraded Spanish friars had respected. *We promoted him for it.* (Twain, “A Defence of General Funston” 127; emphasis by Twain)

Mark Twain criticizes Funston for behaving in a manner unbecoming of an officer but upon his arrival back in the United States, Funston was hailed as a hero. He did a publicity tour across the country, giving speeches and holding press conferences where he openly attacked public figures, especially Governor General William H. Taft and his “misguided policy” of treating the Filipinos as “little brown brothers.”

Mrs. Dauncey comments in her book that this policy of treating Filipinos as little brown brothers of the Americans is deeply puzzling because they are deeply segregated in their own country saying, “I think the Filipino will find that he gets as much out of the Philippines for the Filipinos’ as is contained in ‘little brown brother’. Gradually too he will find that to be a little brown brother here will be the same as big black brother in the US” (12).

Taft angered the military by discussing politics with the Filipinos and by characterizing them as “our little brown brother” who needed to be uplifted through kindness and gentle understanding. It is not that Taft considered Filipinos capable of governing themselves. He believed chaos would follow self-government and that even the educated Filipinos were substandard in terms of being able to run a democracy (Miller 166-167). Taft and the rest of the American government expressed their belief that Filipinos were in need of tutelage in the ways of education and development, independence, and democracy. This was the altruistic excuse for two less benevolent reasons for the United States to hold on to the Philippines: first was the strategic location of the Philippines and second was the projected windfall of commercial benefits.

The Philippines gives America the only harbors available in Asia because other Southeast Asian nations were colonized by European countries. Harbors are necessary for an effective navy and merchant marine if

the United States wants to maintain its presence in the region. Because of its strategic location, the Philippines had to be protected from the rapacity of its neighbors like Japan and China. The Islands' natural resources like sugar, tobacco, hemp, and rubber, if properly developed would mean it could supply the US with all its needs and they would have to rely on foreign rubber monopolies no longer (Mayo 8).

Since myths can have several signifiers, all these photographs of generals participated in the myth of American expansion and colonization. All these American men are dressed in their military uniforms or white suits, whether standing or sitting, and are made to look more dignified and powerful than the slouching, squatting, barefoot natives. These photos of uniformed officers signify American military strength and the mission of the United States which is to uplift the Philippines and protect them from any other power eager to exploit their weak position. As we can see from the written text, the generals had their own weaknesses and flaws and were far less heroic than their photographs made them out to be.

The photographs of the savage—backwards, unenlightened Filipinos in contrast to the progressive, distinguished, and civilized Americans—served as photographic justification for President McKinley's call for the “Benevolent Assimilation” of the Philippines.

Eroding the Myth

The ruling ideology behind the colonial photographs of the preceding chapter was that of Manifest Destiny and the colonizing mission. There has since been an ideological shift from that era to the early 1970s when BenCab did these *Larawan* paintings—from American colonization to Philippine nationalism. There was a surge in interest in the search for a Philippine national culture and identity in the resistance and struggle for Philippine independence from the United States. Prior to this, regionalistic pride and prejudice divided Filipinos into separate regional and language groups.

Debates about what was Filipino in Philippine culture and art started in the 1950s and the trend continued on up until the turbulent 1970s. Some defined it in terms of ethnicity, language, or culture. Others thought national

identity lay in the pre-colonial period and stressed the need to return to “roots” and indigenous values. Some emphasized the “Spanish colonial heritage” as an essential part of its definition. But national identity does not simply rest in a particular historical age like the pre-colonial period, the Spanish colonial period, or the nineteenth century Propaganda Movement and its resulting revolution (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 96).

In the 1970s, culture in general took on colonial characteristics due to the importation of US cultural forms: English language literature, art, and music which propagated American values. Even after the granting of formal independence from the United States in 1946, US control and intervention in the country’s politics and economics were still the norm. A large part was due to the public educational system’s dissemination of the superiority of America and the American way of life. The Philippine government promoted the myth of “special relations” with the United States, allowing them to maintain large scale military bases in Clark and Subic; the main task of even the Philippine Armed Forces was to safeguard the American politico-economic systems in the country (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 8). Feudalism in the provinces’ big haciendas was an uninterrupted practice from the Spanish colonial period up to the present day, it was only the land-owners that changed—from Spanish hacendados to multi-national corporations and members of the Philippine comprador class.

But even with all these imported cultural influences from abroad, bolstered by foreign controlled politics and economics, a rich Filipino indigenous and folk culture and art such as weaving, woodcarving, basketwork, pottery, and music survived in spite of neglect and marginalization for several decades among indigenous communities and even lowland peasants and fisher folk (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 10). Painting, however, is not an indigenous tradition and was brought in with the Spanish religious missionaries, therefore it is also an imported cultural practice.

In the 1970s, art in general was highly politicized, fueled by the birth of militant leftist groups in the 1960s like Kabataang Makabayan and the Communist Party of the Philippines. These groups supported the political concept of “national democracy” whose orientation was anti-imperialist and

pro-people. They described Philippine society as semi-feudal/semi-colonial and called for a people's revolution against the country's three evils: feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucrat capitalism (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 13).

Artists and intellectuals, especially writers and painters were at the forefront of this anti-colonial struggle. They used material drawn from the nineteenth century as inspiration for their paintings. There was of course BenCab who used colonial photographs, Orlando Castillo used figures from the Katipunan Movement, and Renato Habulan used the image of Jose Rizal's character Sisa who was driven to insanity due to colonial oppression and the death of her sons (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 98-99). Besides drawing from the past as a means of illustrating negative colonial conditions, artists also liked to use the figures of Uncle Sam, the American flag, and the landed classes in their paintings to portray American participation with the complicity of the Filipino landowners in the oppression of the lower classes, peasants, and farm workers (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 100). Artists in the 1970s very often also depicted the indigenous peoples in their paintings (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 152) to illustrate the richness of their traditional culture and art, and how it is being lost or if they are lucky simply relegated to the margins due to the introduction of imported culture and ideology. Through their work, these artists advocated a rediscovery of local cultural traditions and the preservation of our cultural roots.

Leo Benesa in a statement in his essay, "What is Philippine About Philippine Art?", agrees with Fanon's point about how advocates of change are bearers of hybridity when he says: "A great deal of the confusion in cultural identity stems from the fact that Philippine art belongs to the western tradition in its use of paint and canvas and other materials, as well as in such influences as impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, cubism, pop, minimalism and so on" (18), again bearing in mind that the hybrid nature of culture does not necessarily mean an equal exchange between the two cultures. BenCab's art though does not advocate a return to the old culture, but he does suggest a thorough examination of the past as a means

of self-understanding. He wants Filipinos to remember their past and not forget it so that they can move forward and not have to question who they are (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 160).

On the one hand hybridity is the disavowal, the refusal to recognize colonial authority, thereby allowing formerly denied or marginalized knowledge and practices to enter the realm of the dominant discourse. Appropriation on the other hand is the deliberate use of elements of the dominant culture so that the colonized may resist or undermine its power. Appropriation and mimicry of aspects of imperial culture implies a predetermination on the part of the colonized, whereas the hybrid nature of culture is unconscious.

Using Memory as a Mode of Resistance

BenCab's *Larawan* paintings are an appropriation of the dominant culture's photographic medium, the Western genre of portraiture, and the Filipino subjects of American photographers as a means of expressing his anti-colonial position. In the same way that the American world view was captured using their camera lenses, BenCab's post-colonial world view is captured using his paintings as a substitute for a lens.

Photographs were a tool of the dominant culture and they are never innocent. Depending on what image is captured and how, it usually serves the ruling ideology of the time. One of the limitations of this medium is that photographs cannot preserve meaning and cannot narrate as they can be ripped from their original context and can lend themselves to be used for something somewhere else (Berger, "Uses of Photography" 288). Painting on the other hand is capable of narration as it can compress space and time into the space of the canvas or paper. The power of a painting rests on its internal references. It never directly refers to the natural world outside the limits of the painted surface. Instead it deals in equivalents (Berger, "Understanding a Photograph" 217). This means that painting can translate the world into its own language.

The target audience for the photographs in travel and ethnographic books was the American public that had to be convinced of their government's position in colonizing the Philippine Islands. The target audience

of BenCab's paintings is the Filipino people that had to suffer through the trauma of that double colonizing experience. The writers of *Art Philippines* opine that nostalgia is part of the appeal of BenCab's works but the revolutionary spirit is still at the forefront in BenCab's search for the Filipino identity. His *Larawan* paintings and prints "have acted as a retrieval system for pictures, images and icons of the Filipino from the dustbin of history" (Gatbonton, et al. 366). Saving colonial images from history's dustbin and having a longing for the past is not the only goal for this artist's work though. Frantz Fanon describes this tendency of many post-colonial intellectuals to want to create a national identity by looking to the past only to reuse and rehash old ideas:

In an underdeveloped country during the period of struggle traditions are fundamentally unstable and shot through by centrifugal tendencies. This is why the intellectual often runs the risk of being out of date. The peoples who have carried on the struggle are more and more impervious to demagoguery.... In the sphere of plastic arts, for the example, the native artist who wishes at whatever cost to create a national work of art shuts himself up in a stereotyped reproduction of details. These artists who have nevertheless thoroughly studied modern techniques and who have taken part in the main trends of contemporary painting and architecture, turn their backs on foreign culture, deny it, and set out to look for a true national culture, setting great store on what they consider to be the constant principles of national art. But these people forget that forms of thought and what it feeds on, together with modern techniques of information, language and dress have dialectically reorganized people's intelligences and that the constant principles which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing extremely radical changes. The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the castoffs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all. But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize the truths of a nation are in the first place in its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge. (454-455)

In the search for a Filipino national art, a natural reflex would be to pursue the past but the risk of this is to become a victim of nostalgia. A

reversion to the native pre-colonial culture is like a knee-jerk reaction to the colonizing process. Some critics can argue that BenCab's ideas are out of date because they think he is trying to find answers to the future by turning to the past, which is very cliché and has been done enough times before. Others may accuse him of simply peddling nostalgia. These images are in fact his "seething pot" which the learning of the future emerges from. These turn of the century images show Filipinos that many things have not changed since colonialism began. The past that BenCab illustrates in *Larawan* is not of indigenous Filipino cultural artifacts, behavior, or beliefs. He is using the images of people in the past as tools for the preservation of memory and as metaphors for conditions that can be resisted today. Even Fanon suggests that as a counter-discursive measure to colonialism the native intellectual should use the past with the intention of opening up the future, "as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (460).

When BenCab conceived of the *Larawan* series, he wanted the viewers of his paintings to approximate the experience of leafing through an old photo album. He also wanted to express his unhappiness at the complacency of Filipinos, after 300 years of colonization under the Spanish they just accepted American conquest as a matter of course (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 157). Traces of this past servility and this negative attitude that Filipinos have towards each other, this ever-present colonial mentality, are still very much alive in Philippine society today. "There is a resignation to one's fate. I wanted...to show that we must rid ourselves of this attitude of subservience" (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 157-158). The conditions of the Filipinos portrayed in the *tromp l'oeil* paintings are that of poverty, social inequality, and subservience to foreigners, all elements of that which was and is" (Berger, "Uses of Photography" 293)—and it is reality, for most of us in present day Philippines.

BenCab's *Larawan* paintings may be considered protest or resistance art because they illustrate and comment on social realities, even though resistance art does not necessarily suggest ways to remedy a situation (Lazzari and Scheiser 374). His work is done in resistance to the Filipino attitude of complacency and ignorance, even carelessness about their past. He makes his

paintings take on the appearance of photographs so they act as records of a memory that was forgotten. Nick Joaquin writes in the exhibit catalogue of the *Larawan* exhibit: “If he [BenCab] chills us with these pictures of Filipinos sitting, crouching, squatting, huddling together impassively, it may be to burn us with the thought that Filipinos must no longer sit, crouch, squat and huddle together so passively” (Joaquin).

The fact that BenCab’s paintings mimic colonial photography, that he appropriated the images and some captions of the photographs implies an anti-colonial objective on his part—he is using photographic language, the language that had once subjected the Filipino, as a means to question and ultimately reject colonial discourse. By making his paintings masquerade as photographs, he is re-functioning them. He wants them to take on the dual functions and practices of both photography and painting. If taking a picture is to appropriate what is photographed (Sontag 4) then the act of painting becomes a metaphorical appropriation (Berger, “Past Seen from a Possible Future” 241) of that same photograph.

According to historical accounts, photography usurped painting’s role of providing images that accurately transcribe reality. With photography taking over the role of “realistic picturing,” painting was free to pursue its modernist vocation—abstraction (Sontag 94). What BenCab has done is to take back or re-appropriate the old function of painting which was to transcribe reality, but this time it is a reality once removed since a camera has already intervened.

John Berger proposes that there is an alternative to photography as it is being practiced today. According to him, during the second half of the twentieth century, the judgment of history has been abandoned by all except the underprivileged and dispossessed. The industrialized, “developed” first world, afraid of the past and blind to the future, turns everything—nature, history, politics, sports, sex, and so forth—into spectacle, and the implement with which to do this is the camera. With the camera we can live in an eternal present and memory ceases to be necessary or desirable. “With the loss of memory the continuities of meaning and judgment are also lost to us. The camera relieves us of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and

it surveys for us. Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget” (Berger, “Uses of Photography” 290).

The task of an alternative photography is to integrate photography into social and political memory instead of using it as a substitute for memory which instead encourages its atrophy (Berger, “Uses of Photography” 292). This alternative use of photography aims to construct a context for each photograph, to create its own place in an ongoing text of other photographs, images, and words.

Normally photographs are used in a unilinear way—to illustrate an argument, demonstrate an idea, or have a photograph repeat what is being expressed in words. Memory, however, is not unilinear but works radially with any number of associations all leading to the same event (Berger, “Uses of Photography” 292), like the spokes of a wheel all leading to the same point in the center. Generally, the better the photograph is, the better the context that can be created. To put a photograph back into the context of social experience and social memory, we must respect the laws of memory. We have to situate the printed photograph so that it acquires elements of the conclusiveness of that which was and is (Berger, “Uses of Photography” 293). The context replaces the photograph not in its own original time, at the turn of the century in this paper’s case, but in narrated time. Narrated time becomes historic time when it is assumed by social memory and social action. A radial system should be constructed around the photograph so that it can be viewed in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, every day, and historic (Berger, “Uses of Photography” 293).

This alternative use of photography has been appropriated by BenCab’s paintings since they assume the look, feel, and language of photography. He accomplishes this task of mimicking photographs by painting the images using sepia pigments and giving them a faded, and streaked look by rubbing the wet surface of the acrylic paintings with a wet rag (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 160). He also used the photographic techniques of zooming, framing, and cropping, and he added corner clips to the borders and edges of several paintings to complete the look of an old photo album.

It was important that the paintings be rendered in sepia and given the faded chipped effect so that the artist recreates the effects of the passage of time. The source photographs themselves are fine in black and white and in pristine condition because the condition of the books they are in will give the viewer an idea of its age. The faded and chipped effect can instead be seen on the worn pages and flaking edges. These paintings on the other hand have to give the viewer the sense that these photographs are old and have been preserved in an album placed in a closet or chest where moisture would get to it. Had the images been painted in color and given a smooth clear surface, the turn of the century photograph element would have been lost or improperly expressed by the artist.

The photo album approximated in *Larawan* serves as a personal, political, historic, and everyday record of BenCab's imagined Philippine community. Just as the photographs taken by the Americans were all signifiers for the same myth which is the justification of colonial conquest, all these paintings masquerading as photographs work like radials around the same memory, that of the country's colonial experience.

Photographs should be taken in order not to forget, just as BenCab does not want Filipinos to forget what happened to them only some 70 years before he created his paintings. Filipinos can use the paintings as a tool to understand issues that face us in the present and will face in the future; at the same time they fulfill the artist's aesthetic sensibilities of mimicking photographs.

Positioning the Filipino through Portraiture

While the Philippine Revolution of 1898 was an anti-colonial and anti-bourgeois revolution, the contemporary struggle of Philippine society is based on two interacting contradictions: the anti-imperialist struggle and the class struggle (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 97). The *Larawan* paintings certainly participate in the two related struggles and further tackled issues of ethnic definitions in the Philippines—social class and the consequences of colonialism.

The source photographs of these paintings were representations of types in the Philippines. By crossing the medium barrier, they are transformed into portraits of individuals and their role in society, but these works also have a social function. As mentioned above, these “painting photographs” are supposed to be integrated into social and political memory and in these, the artist is trying to comment on the lack of unity of the population when it comes to defining who the Filipino is and on the deep social stratification of Philippine society.

According to John Berger, the function of a portrait painting in its heyday was not just to record a likeness but also to guarantee and idealize the chosen role of the sitter. It wasn't to present the sitter as an individual person but as an individual aristocrat, monarch, bishop, or landowner. The role was emphasized by the pose, gesture, clothes, and background. These elements in the image were meant to be read as the accepted attributes of a given social type. “Portraitists painted individual men and women whose character and expression were regarded in the exclusive light of an ordained social role.” The satisfaction one got out of having their portrait painted was that of being personally recognized and confirmed in one's position (Berger, “The Changing View of Man” 100). Some artists painted “intimate portraits” of their friends, but in these portraits the social role of the sitter is reduced to that of being painted by such an artist. The sitter in this case became subservient to the painter. It is not his personality or social role that impresses the viewer but the artist's vision (Berger, “The Changing View of Man” 101).

With the advent of photography in the mid-1800s, portraiture's original function of placing the sitter in a chosen social role became accessible to more people. Even the photographs taken by the Americans of Filipino working class and peasant types placed them in their social role—a representative of this or that type of farmer, laborer, vendor, or servant. Filipinos used photography in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century in the same way much of the world did—to have their own portraits taken. Portrait photography was mainly an activity of the middle class and others who aspired to be such in the same way that portrait painting was popular with that class the century before. The Filipino bourgeoisie regarded themselves

as the “vanguard of nationhood” and never doubted that it was their ability and their privilege to speak for the rest of the nation (Rafael 100).

In making his paintings masquerade as photographs, BenCab tries to democratize his images, making them look like they are more accessible to people the way photographs were made more accessible to people. But at the same time, they retain the exclusive quality of painting—that there is an original created by an artist, an artist who saw fit to paint some subjects and not others, to include some objects in the work and not others.

By painting portraits of what were originally nameless peasants, servants, and *gobernaldors*, BenCab continues the tradition of setting the subject’s social role; but this very act of painting a portrait confers importance on them that they did not have before. He gives the Filipinos in these images access to not only the bourgeois activity of portraiture but confers on them the sense of self-confidence and self-importance implicit in having a portrait made. The artist removes the subjects from the anonymity of the type photograph and by making them look like old photographs, uses them to remind the Philippines of how it was and how it still is. He uses the nation’s collective memories of their oppressed, impoverished state to comment on social inequality, wealth, and privilege. In portrait history, it was the sitter who was in the position of power and the artist was in the obsequious position. Now, BenCab places himself as the intermediary between his photographic subjects and the Filipino audience.

By painting the different strata of Philippine society, BenCab is using his subjects to serve his own purposes of expressing his concern for the state of the Philippines and articulate what it is in his point of view to be a Filipino in the late twentieth century. According to an interview with this writer, BenCab said that he likes portraiture. This is most likely due to his background as a draftsman early on in his career. So in creating portrait-painting photographs of turn-of-the-century Filipinos, he not only serves the national memory but his own personal preferences in the genre as well.



FIG. 1. *Portrait of a True Blooded Filipino, 1972.*

Constructing National Pride

With all the debate in the 1970s about what constituted Filipino national culture and Filipino national art, BenCab goes one step further by first defining what, or rather who was a Filipino. The artist's answer comes in the form of the painting "Portrait of a True Blooded Filipino" (see fig. 1). Whereas the source photograph of Mateo Francisco was meant to show

American viewers that the Tagalogs, the dominant group in the Philippines, were willing to be educated and improved by the United States, BenCab here expresses his opinion that the true Filipino people are the natives whom the Spanish called *indios*. BenCab explains in an interview with Cid Reyes that he gave his painting this title because “To me the true blooded Filipino is typified by the *indio*, and the *indio* is the real Filipino” (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 160). This *indio* is the Christianized lowlander with straight hair and almond-shaped eyes perhaps due to an intermingling of Chinese blood that so many Filipinos seem to have. In defining the true blooded Filipino as an *indio*, it can be said that BenCab is excluding members of minority tribes throughout the archipelago. But perhaps in anticipated defense against that allegation, BenCab adds in the statement to Cid Reyes about the *indio* being the real Filipino that, “[i]n a painting called “The Gentle Savages’ I portrayed not the indio but our aborigines who were supposedly the first and original Filipinos (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 160).

The pose of this Filipino’s portrait is the three-quarter gaze. He does not look at the viewer and therefore does not confront but instead looks forward and upward, perhaps to the future, imagining its infinite possibilities. Susan Sontag says that three-quarter portraits are common among photographs of public figures because their gaze soars, implying “an abstract relation to the future” (Sontag 38). It is also a common pose in regular portraits of individuals because it is also a formal pose, suggesting pride, dignity, and vision.

In many of the *Larawan* paintings, BenCab retains the caption of the source photograph as the title for the paintings, but in this case he changes the source photograph caption from “A Typical Filipino” to a “True Blooded Filipino.” In the eyes of the West, being a Filipino is far more inferior to being an American or a European. BenCab attacks the myth of colonial inferiority by taking a homogenizing term like “typical Filipino” and using it as a badge of honor instead. The tactic of making the derogatory term complimentary is done with “Gentle Savages,” an allusion to Rousseau’s concept of the “Noble Savage”—that “nostalgic longing for a pure, simple, idyllic, natural state in reaction to European society’s failure to preserve and maintain the



FIG. 2. *The Gentle Savages*, 1972.

natural innocence of man with the rise of industrialization” (Ashcroft, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies* 210).

In 1968, statesman par excellence Carlos P. Romulo declared that “Igorots are not Filipinos” (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 48) echoing Trinidad Pardo de Tavera’s statement at a lecture in 1924 saying “Let us not indulge in idle dreams. Let us admit that there is no such thing as a Filipino race” (Mayo 9). These statements by members of the country’s elite are proof of the endurance of American thought and opinion that Filipinos are a much divided people since they only like to associate with their own ethnic or language groups and are often suspicious of the other groups.

In “The Gentle Savages” (see fig. 2), BenCab challenges the prevalent notion that members of indigenous tribes are not and do not want to be included in the Philippine nation by placing the faces of the Negrito and Mangyan side by side, but within their own separate borders so the painting

looks like two old identification photographs, complete with white edges and faded streaks, placed in frames next to one another. Both subjects in the close ups are frontally posed with a scowl on their faces. The title of the painting comes from Worcester's explanation for his disdain for the word "non-Christian" because he feels it does not properly describe the different tribes of people that inhabit the Philippines: "They cannot be called pagan because some of them are Mohammedan... they cannot be called wild, for some of them are quite gentle..." (Worcester, *Philippines Past and Present* 533).

By zooming in on the Mangyan boy's face and cropping out his holding up a spear, his sparse shelter, and the half-naked women in his family, he does not look like a savage at all because their state of nudity and their primitive forms of shelter are not seen and are therefore not taken into the image's context. The same can be said of the Negrito since his naked torso and his thatched shelter are also cropped out. Removing the lean-to and the thatched house of the Negrito point to the ideological workings at play here. By removing any background and closing in on the features of the Negrito and the Mangyan, the spectator is allowed a closer look at the scowling, unhappy expressions on their faces. On the other hand, by removing the lean-to structure of the Mangyan boy, BenCab is also removing an indigenous piece of Philippine architecture, perhaps another indication of the artist's ambivalence or perhaps even shame towards native material culture.

Cropping has been BenCab's trademark even from the very start of his career. By focusing on a specific area, the viewer sees elements that may have originally been disregarded or missed completely. In zooming in on an image, the original subject is done away with, sometimes resulting in an abstract configuration. He defines space by constructing geometrical shapes: squares, rectangles (Gatbonton, et al. 366), and in some instances, even triangles. BenCab zooms and crops in many of the other paintings mentioned here in this paper, but none as much as in the painting of the Negrito and Mangyan and the painting of the servant girl, to be discussed below. In these two paintings, the subjects are made to occupy their own spaces instead of having to share it with other subjects from the source photograph.

The angle of the two subjects is at the same level as the spectator, making them equal. Since they are frontal portraits with close ups of their faces, they address and return the gaze of the spectator that is viewing them. Their expressions are proud, observant, maybe even unwilling to be submissive since they do not smile or looked relaxed in front of the camera. This returning of the gaze is a manifestation of ambivalence in a colonial subject.

Each of the two images is surrounded by a border that serves as a frame for each photograph. John Berger says that the frames of pictures—

emphasize that within its four edges the picture has established an enclosed, coherent and absolutely rigorous system of its own. The frame marks the frontier of the realm of an autonomous order. The demands of composition and of the picture's illusory but all-pervasive three-dimensional space constitute the rigid laws of this order. Into this order are fitted representations of real figures and objects." (Berger, "Past Seen from a Possible Future" 244)

By separating the two images in their frames, it looks like they are occupying their own separate planes of space when in fact they occupy that one space of the painting. The way these two images are framed in the artist's photograph/canvas, the way they are zoomed and cropped, are treated like the images of the different races of men detained in Bilibid Prison in the book *An Album of Philippine Types* by Daniel Folkmar. This physiognomic study features a frontal and a profile photograph as well as the physical measurements of each subject. Depicting these two tribal men as if they were in surveillance or prison "mug shots" shows Filipinos how Philippine minorities were objectified, observed, looked down on, and poorly treated not only by the colonizers but by Filipinos themselves who ridicule them for being physically and culturally different from the *indios*.

Centering the Marginalized

In the painting "Ang Tao" (see fig. 3), BenCab captures the profile figure of the farmer in the photograph "The Tao" in sepia but the background is an olive or moss green. Both are colors of the earth because this man can



FIG. 3. *Ang Tao, 1972.*

be described as being “the salt of the earth.” Painting this man is the artist’s way of articulating that poverty is a condition that existed a century ago and it still continues until now; even the look of the peasant farmers now are the same as a century ago. Details like the clothes, hat, sprawled feet, and stooped posture have not changed over time. Alice Guillermo writes that in this work, BenCab is “the first artist to show a true image of the peasant in painting” (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 117).

Using two sheets of paper to paint “Ang Tao,” the painter makes no effort to conceal the edges and in fact deliberately separates the two panels. This is a technique of defamiliarization (Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art* 117) because the edges of the drawing paper calls attention to the fact that it is a painting but the fading technique and the realism of the image wants itself to be seen as a photograph. The upper panel contains the image of the man from the top of his head to his torso. The lower panel captures the man’s waist, hands holding the straw hat all the way to his sprawled bare feet. The man is photographed and painted in profile. Max Friedlander says in his essay “Principles and History of Portraiture” that in the profile portrait, the subject inhabits another sphere separate from us the viewers, implying aloofness and aloneness (Friedlander 236-237).

When painting “Portrait of a Servant Girl” (see fig. 4), BenCab zoomed in on the young woman in the front row at the right and cropped everybody else in the source photograph out. There is no floor and no background behind the girl in the painting, just an empty burnt sienna space thus ensuring that there is nothing to distract the viewer from the image of the girl. This servant girl is given her own space and she takes up almost the whole surface of the painting, giving her the largeness and importance that BenCab feels she deserves. Like a photograph, every detail of the girl’s face and dress is captured by the artist. Attention is paid to the way her clothes are draped around her and to the folds in the cloth, giving volume to the dress. This servant girl is painted much the same way BenCab painted Sabel in the early 1970s to 1980s—in “Sabel Looking Through Time” (1973), “Portrait of Sabel” (1974), and “Sabel Covering her Face” (1980) where she was painted realistically and not as an abstract figure like he did in the late 1960s. Since *Larawan*

FIG. 4. *Portrait of a Servant Girl*, 1972.



is a significant point in BenCab's development as an artist, it is likely that it signaled a transition in his style of rendering other subject matters besides colonial photographs. It is reasonable to think that the way that BenCab executes his portraits shows that he is informed by traditions in Philippine portraiture like Damian Domingo's "Tipos del Pais"(1830) and Juan Luna's "Una Bulakeña."(1895)

As part of his social commentary, BenCab has painted the lower class and the disenfranchised throughout his career, starting with shanties, moving on to the homeless woman Sabel, then to street scenes and the impoverished. In this painting and in "Family of Servants" (1972), both sourced from the same photograph, BenCab paints turn-of-the-century household servants.

BenCab says his paintings of servants and domestics are an allegory of the Filipino servility to our former colonizers and the condition of colonial mentality that continues to this day. But this writer thinks it goes further than that. Illustration of the undesirable situation is an important element of protest or resistance art and this writer thinks BenCab's images of the lower classes are meant for the collective recollection of the upper and middle class minority that the majority of the Philippine population are poor, and that, without peasants, servants, and the lower classes in general, there will be no upper or middle class. The existence of one recognizes and defines the existence of the other. The depiction of the lower classes, the impoverished, the disenfranchised, and the desperate has been a recurring theme not only in BenCab's work throughout the years but in Philippine art in general.

In mimicking the caption of the source photograph for the painting's title, "Types of True Filipinos Waiting to be Called American" (see fig. 5) takes an ambivalent turn with the artist holding up every Filipino's secret desire to be American for the whole nation and the whole world to see. What started out as J.E. Steven's anti-expansionist position on the grounds of racism has, some 70 years later, become the nationalist's constant complaint of the unstoppable "brain drain," that exodus of professionals and intellectuals seeking greener pastures in the United States and other Western nations. This painting is a comment on the mentality of many Filipinos that America is the land of milk and honey, one of the many side effects of

FIG. 5. *Types of True Filipinos Waiting to be Called American* 1972.



the ideology ingrained into them by way of colonial education that affects society to this day.

To express his dislike of this mentality, BenCab's painting zooms in on the squatting figures of the photograph, cropping everyone else out. By focusing on these two men and two women, we can see their somber facial expressions, poverty, and suffering etched in the lines on their faces. These figures are all squeezed together into the upper space of the painting with nothing but a dark brown space for a background. No background allows the viewer to focus on the figures more easily. By being crammed into such a limited space, they look even more pitiable in their squatting position. Squatting was a position that American photographers found to be unusual and animal-like. Knowing this and seeing that the subjects rendered in that position on the ground can only diminish them further, bring about a feeling of guilt and discomfort, even anger, in the viewer. The white wide space in front of them that takes up the lower half of the painting's surface could symbolize the Filipino desire to live the American dream; the blankness of that space could also represent the emptiness of that dream.

Because these paintings are portraits, they cement the subjects in their impoverished, lower class roles in society. But with the subjects being placed at the center of the painting, they are given more individual space instead of having to share it with many others in the source photograph. In giving the subjects more space, BenCab also allows them more dignity. These people become the main focus of the image and therefore the most important, bringing to the center the image that was originally in the periphery.

Transcribing the Elite

In the portraits of "A Typical Mestiza" and "A Gobernadorcillo," BenCab copies everything in the source photograph onto his drawing paper. By making no changes, the artist does not preserve the colonial project but in fact proves the adaptability of images for the use of one ideology or another. In one ideology, the images may represent the ability of the colonized people to accept western ways; in another they become a commentary on race or class.

FIG. 6. *A Typical Mestiza*, 1972.



In “A Typical Mestiza” (see fig. 6), this idealized image of the young mestiza woman, when examined in conjunction with “A Portrait of a True Blooded Filipino” and “Gentle Savages,” is a commentary on the fact that the standard of beauty for both Filipino men and women are not Malay or dark tribal features, but mestizo. Even the artist admits that for him, the mestiza is better able to reveal the sensuality of the Filipina (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 158).

This aesthetic standard is obviously not indigenous and is again the result of hybrid culture whereby the natives absorb the opinions and ideals of their colonizer. We have examples of Olivares’s descriptions of beautiful mestizas that are compared to the ugly, native Filipina somehow finding their way into the Philippine consciousness and staying there until the present. Colonial ideology pervades all aspects of life, making everything native automatically inferior: from his culture, religion, and technology to his intellect and physical features:

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to oversimplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people.... Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture which has been transformed into instinctive patterns of behavior, to recognize the unreality of his “nation,” and in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure. (Fanon 462)

Perhaps judging by the girl’s jewelry and fine clothing, Cid Reyes comments in *BenCab* that since he knew this girl was of a class better than the regular native woman, she probably had the leisure and sensibility to have an album of photographs in her possession (Yuson and Reyes 107). Again this line of thinking comes from the colonial conviction that mestizos are socially and economically superior to locals since they have one parent that is foreign and therefore must be wealthy.

Mestizas as subject appear many times throughout BenCab’s works, but none confronts the fetish that Filipinos have with the fair-skinned woman like the painting, “The Temptation of Juan de la Cruz” (1992), where a farmer

is depicted as looking longingly at a seductively-posed Caucasian woman with reddish brown hair.

Some may argue that BenCab is accepting and participating in the colonial project's main tenet of the superiority of race when it comes to his fascination with the mestiza and how he feels she can better represent Filipina sensuality. But we must remember that because of the ambivalent nature of colonial discourse, there is a constant oscillation of the colonial subject's attraction and repulsion to the colonizer's ideology. Ideology interpellates all; everybody is constituted in it; and nobody is exempt (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 244) even this artist who is consciously trying to reject it. On the other hand, this girl of hybrid race could also connote the hybridity of Philippine culture and people—part local and part foreign—and the artist's fascination with that quality of the culture and people.

"A Gobernadorcillo" (see fig. 7) based on Dean Worcester's photograph, is BenCab's interpretation of a typical bureaucrat with his cane and gold watch exuding authority. This frontal portrait has the subject turned toward the viewers, addressing us and implying intimacy.

Friedlander states that "the more the [portrait] figure becomes visible as a whole, the more solidly entrenched the sitter seems in his station, his profession, his social class, and the more his local and temporal ties will govern the impression. Especially the costume betrays something of the Where and When" (Friedlander 235-236). As we can see the subject from head to toe and his background, we can discern that he has money and a high social position by looking at the sturdy structure of his background in contrast to the flimsy thatched or wood materials of the lower class houses, or his jewelry, clothing, shoes, and relaxed pose, in contrast to the stooped deference of the shoeless, ragged peasant farmer holding his hat in "Ang Tao."

In comparing the two images of the Gobernadorcillo and the Tao, there seems to be an underlying bias for the lower class on the part of the artist. Based on the way he gives the Tao the space of two sheets of paper and coloring his background green in an attempt to re-contextualize him in his



A GOVERNADORCILLO

FIG. 7. *A Gobernadorcillo, 1972.*

agricultural environment, BenCab gives this man more time and attention, and with it, importance. In contrast, the Gobernadorcillo is given only one sheet of paper and his image is simply copied onto it, no modification has been made from his source photograph. The smaller amount of attention paid to rendering this *gobernadorcillo* was perhaps in contempt for his position in collaborating with the colonizers. After all, this *gobernadorcillo* can

be a representative not only of Thomas Macaulay's mimic men but of Frantz Fanon's comprador class as well. The comprador class consisted of the native elite who exchanged roles with the foreign imperialists in governing and oppressing the poor. Complicit with the white colonial dominating class, they maintained the colonial status quo rather than participated in restructuring society. Fanon says they wear white masks to cover their black, or in this case, brown faces. It is inevitable that the comprador class should be comprised of more than a few mimic men that dressed, behaved, spoke, and thought like the colonizers. Acting as translators, liaising between the native population and the colonizers, and accustomed to their social rank above the rest of the people, they would have found it easy to assume the roles that their old masters left behind.

Like BenCab's paintings of peasants and servants, these paintings of the elite are meant as an illustration and commentary on the intense class consciousness in the Philippines of the past and of the present. A century may have passed and the fashion may have changed but the upper classes still look the same. They have the same impulse to display their wealth and authority as they did before. A century may have passed but mestizas are still regarded as prettier and thought to be from better families than their native Filipina counterparts.

Effacing the Colonizers

The sources of each of the next three paintings are not representatives of types like the rest of the images but are in fact portrait photographs of American generals—photographs that record their features, allude to their strength of character, and place them in their social role of commanding the Philippines. But in the hands of BenCab their faces are erased. By taking away their identity and individuality, they become devices to serve the purpose of the artist—to challenge and reject the myth of the civilizing mission. His images depict Americans not as liberators or deliverers of enlightenment and development but Americans as tyrants and oppressors.

E. San Juan says that for a post-colonial society, the “demystification” and “dethronement” of those that had power over them is the first order

of the day because the colonial narrative of western supremacy and native inferiority is so strongly ingrained in the colonized collective unconscious and thought processes: “It is not that the myth is not challenged. It is, but almost always on the premise that it has itself created, premises that (as with all myths) rest on very deep foundations within the society that has created them” (374). The reason these myths have such currency even in contemporary society is because we allow them to have such power.

BenCab challenges that myth by mimicry of the portrait photographs. As an ambivalent post-colonial artist, he makes a mockery of them by effacing them. The titles of these paintings compress space and time in order to relate a narrative, another element of resistance art². The use of narrative in BenCab’s work comes from his background with the *Sunday Times Magazine* in the mid-1960s as he was exposed to it through his colleagues who practiced investigative journalism and photojournalism (Cabrera).

These paintings relate a summary of events of the Philippine-American War: the defeat of the Spanish by Admiral Dewey in a mock battle in Manila Bay, the establishment of a military government in the Philippines, the arrival of two American commissions which came to survey, observe, and study the islands, the setting up of administrative offices, and lastly, the effect that the presence of the Americans had on the Filipinos. They were liberated from one colonizer only to be bound again by the very people who were supposed to have helped free them.

In “A Pose After Victory” (see fig. 8), the artist zooms in on the group of officers standing at ease, retaining only the eight men in the center of the source photograph. The victory in the title refers to the outcome of the face-saving mock battle between the Americans and Spanish in Manila Bay. Instead of the usual sepia like the other *Larawan* paintings, this painting is done in shades of red and brown. Like the other paintings in the series though, there is the fading effect. However, using red to create the effect on a picture of military officers makes it look as if blood is staining the men’s white uniforms. What makes the image so disturbing are the facts that the officers are faceless and anonymous, able to represent any foreign military power, and pose so casually. In the source photograph, the officers stand



FIG. 8. *A Pose After Victory*, 1972.

in front of Malacañang, the home of the Spanish governor-general. By taking it over, they symbolically take over all of the Spanish holdings in the Philippines. By removing the background and leaving an empty black space where Malacañang should be, the artist gives them nothing to symbolically claim as their own. Instead, the empty background allows the viewer to focus on the faceless officers' bloody uniforms instead.

The transparency of the images of Generals Funston and MacArthur in "The New Masters" (see fig. 9) suggests to the viewer the omnipresence, unity, and power of not only the men but the American nation whose flag is draped behind them. BenCab zooms in on each figure, altering the perspective and making them both larger in scale as compared to their source photographs so that they take up almost the whole surface of the painting. The way the figures are balanced and positioned in the painting gives the two subjects more of an imperious air than even their individual portrait photographs.

FIG. 9. *The New Masters*, 1972.



THE NEW MASTERS

This is the only one of the four paintings of Americans (including “Brown Brothers’ Burden” discussed below) that indicates that the men in the image are Americans because of the presence of their flag. The officers in the other three paintings could be Spanish, American, or any other Western colonial power that has had interest in expanding their territory to the Philippines.

Everything from the source photograph of “Surveying the New Territory” (see fig. 10) has been removed by the artist: the foot soldiers with guns, the garden and pathway leading to the house, and General Lawton’s face. The painting situates the figure on horseback on a barren and empty plain with what looks like a white outline of mountains in the horizon where the earth and sky meet. His being seated on a horse unaccompanied by any soldier diminishes the status that Lawton had in the source photograph because here he is not depicted as a respected and effective leader of military men but as a solitary, anonymous figure.

The new territory he is surveying is, of course, the Philippines but the land in the painting looks like a blank space, much like the blank space behind the officers in “A Pose After Victory” or the girl in “Portrait of a Servant Girl.” In the case of the servant girl, BenCab zooms in on the image of the girl, making her take up most of the surface of the painting and leaving little space behind her. In this case, the blank space of the land envelops the figure, surrounding him on all sides. The figure is kept at a distance and is not a close up like that of the servant girl. The emptiness of the space could also be read as the artist’s symbolic refusal to give the foreign surveyor on horseback any land, a reversal of the flowering garden of abundance in the source photograph. Land after all is a very valuable commodity especially in the Philippines where it is in limited supply. Land is also one of the prerequisites for a people to have a sovereign nation. If the figure is not given any good land to survey, he is less likely to be able to exploit its resources and people for his own and his country’s gain.

The faceless Americans in the *Larawan* series are like some of Rene Magritte’s paintings—“The Son of Man” (1964) where the subject’s face is covered with a green apple or “The Lovers” (1928) where the faces of the couple are covered by white sheets—in that they are representatives of the

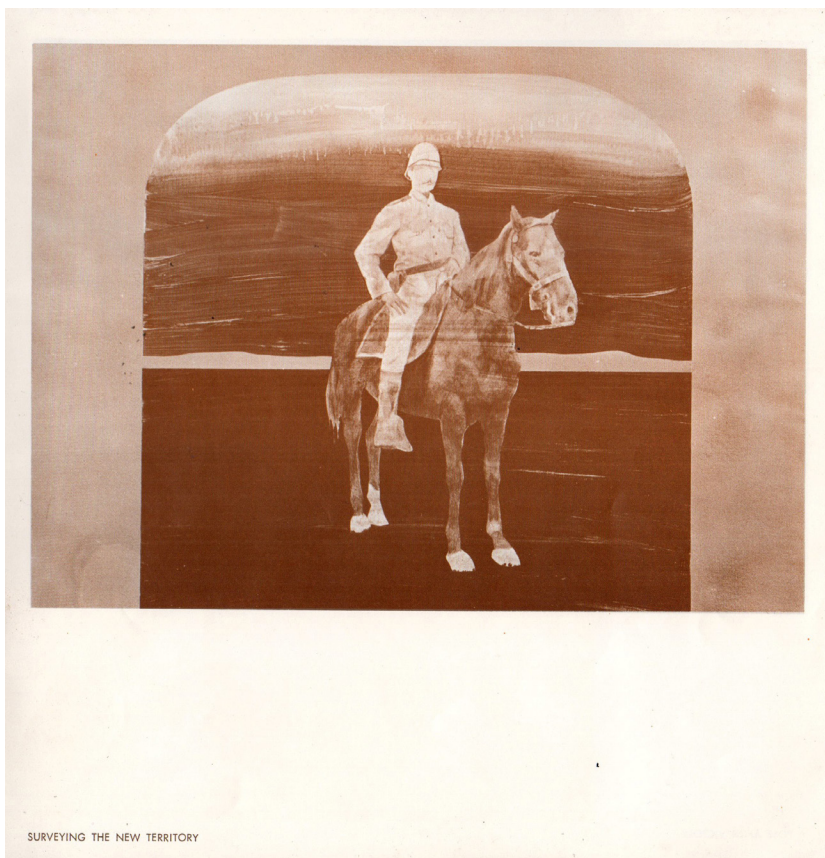


FIG. 10. *Surveying the New Territory*, 1972.

middle or upper class but at the same time are anonymous. By painting these faceless figures, BenCab makes the Americans look like specters or ghostly presences. Like ghosts, the colonial past and its corresponding ideology are omnipresent even though these may not always manifest physically for all to see.

Some people may argue that, with BenCab's painting these images of our former American colonizers, he is feeding the myth of their power and superiority, making it endure and continue to this day and therefore feeding the insecurity that Filipinos have about their double colonial experience. Indeed,

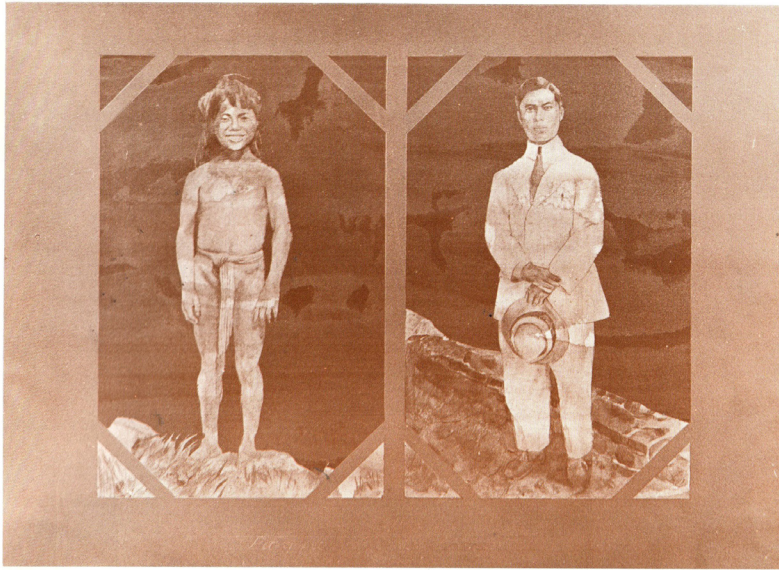
by painting these images, BenCab articulates the anxiety that Filipinos have regarding the colonial past that has been ingrained in our psyche but at the same time undermines the myth of their military superiority by connoting in the officers' bloodied uniforms that they killed several thousand Filipinos in their efforts to suppress their rebellion. He erases the personalities and identities of the generals in charge of assimilating the islands into American control by erasing their faces, and lastly, gives the expansionists only barren and empty land to conquer, not islands rich in natural resources which they had intended to exploit. In painting these military officers, BenCab confronts and challenges the narratives that have such deep foundations in our society's consciousness.

Using Natives as Allegory

Another method of dethroning or demystifying the myth of superiority of the colonizer is by illustrating the negative effects of the colonial project on the local population, a side that is never mentioned in the colonizer's publications. These last paintings to be discussed show the effects that western colonization had on Filipinos. What were originally seen by Americans as positive effects of colonial presence and romantic adventurism in the travel books are now seen by Filipinos as loss of native identity and oppression by a foreign power.

The Igorots are a subject that BenCab has dealt with time and again in his works. Starting with four paintings in *Larawan*, he continued with etchings in the 1970s to 1980s and other paintings up until the late 1990s. The paintings in the 1972 *Larawan* exhibit that had Cordillera tribesmen alongside images of Christian Filipinos and members of the American military were: "Pit-a-Pit's Metamorphosis," "Brown Brothers' Burden," "A Citizen of the Interior," and "Homage to a Vanishing Tribe."

In the *Larawan* series, BenCab did a painting based on the two images of an Igorot boy entitled "Pit-a-Pit's Metamorphosis." In this particular painting, BenCab appropriates the photographs and caption from Dean Worcester's frontispiece. The title directs the viewer to the fact that the



PIT-A-PIT'S METAMORPHOSIS

FIG. 11. *Pit-a-Pit's Metamorphosis*, 1972.

two images are separate, taken several years apart, but they are of the same person.

"Pit-a-Pit's Metamorphosis" (see fig. 11) deals with the changes and loss of identity that many Igorots went through as a result of an aggressive American civilizing mission. They were encouraged to change their clothing, hair, culture, and even their names, as Pit-a-Pit did by adopting the name Hilary Clapp. The second image of Pit-a-Pit shows that he has become another example of the mimic man that colonial education had created—a triumph for the colonial project but a loss for Filipinos in search of their

identity. The image of Pit-a-Pit appears in a later painting entitled “Now I Have Two Names” (1983), a reference to Pit-a-Pit changing his name to Hilary Clapp when he was taken in and educated by Rev. Clapp. The use of before and after images of Igorots is also seen in an etching called “From Hillman to Sergeant” (1978), but this time not by formal education but in the Philippine Constabulary. Before and after photographs are an integral part of colonial visual discourse. They are evidence that the colonial project is effective but when seen from the point of view of the native Filipino in whom the change took place, it becomes evidence of identities lost and it triggers memories of the deliberate erasure of local culture.

Igorots are a recurring theme in BenCab’s paintings and prints because he says he admires them as a people because culturally, they are complete. They are farmers, hunters, carpenters; they build their own style of shelter create their own music and musical instruments (Cabrera). He feels that their culture must be preserved because it is vanishing at an astonishing rate, hence he gives one of his paintings the title “Homage to a Vanishing Tribe.” The artist laments that we can only imagine what Igorot, and even local Filipino culture would be like had we not been colonized by the Spanish and the Americans. BenCab believes that perhaps we as a people would not be so anxious about what Philippine painting and Philippine culture is if we could only remember what things were like before (Reyes, *Conversations on Philippine Art* 160).

Since post-colonial culture is a hybrid culture, BenCab in his own way continues his homage to this vanishing culture by fusing their images, history, and the elements of their material culture with more modern aesthetics adopted from the West to create a completely new imagery. This way, culture that was looked down on by the colonizers and Filipinos alike and relegated to the periphery can become part of the Filipino consciousness and are given the attention that he feels they deserve. In fact, BenCab mentioned in his interview with this writer that there are even artists in Baguio that have gotten in trouble for appropriating rituals and tools which were sacred to the Igorots and using it in their artwork: “Artists are the new *mumbakis*”; just as *mumbakis*, or high priests, have the power to invent new

rituals, artists invent their own rituals as well, particularly with performance art (Cabrera). A hybrid post-colonial culture allows the national culture to be more inclusive of ethnic groups, incorporating them with what already exists and then building from there, unlike a colonial culture which excludes, marginalizes, and destroys whatever local culture exists by discrediting it and replacing it with their own.

The painting “Brown Brothers’ Burden” (see fig. 12) is what Alice Guillermo describes as a “striking metaphor of the colonial situation: tribal Filipinos carry a stout faceless white man in a litter (*Protest/Revolutionary Art* 97). The title refers to Governor General Taft’s policy of treating the Filipinos as “little brown brothers,” a term indicative of America’s benevolent intentions but is in fact very belittling and condescending to Filipinos. The title is also an allusion to Rudyard Kipling’s term “white man’s burden,” a reference to the civilizing mission’s imperative that all white races have the task of civilizing and educating the great brown masses whose lands they colonize. Many of BenCab’s titles are appropriated phrases from colonial terminology, but again because of ambivalence, the phrases incite anger and rejection in the post-colonial subject instead.

One of the men holding the palanquin is a native Ifugao in a traditional loincloth whereas the other man on the left looks like he is a peasant, with his straw hat, long sleeve shirt, and short trousers. So the white man in this painting is borne on the shoulders of not only indigenous tribes but of lower class Filipinos, who make up most of the Philippine population. In this painting, BenCab is articulating his view that all Filipinos bore the burden of colonial domination and that we bear it still.

Because the subjects of the painting are placed in the center of the image with no background, all the viewer’s attention is focused on the faithful way the Ifugao tribesmen are rendered such as the detail of the suit and even the wrinkles in the waistcoat of the man seated in the palanquin. The only thing that is missing is the man’s face. Because the man is rendered nameless, faceless, and therefore anonymous, he can represent not only the adventurous travel writer in the source photograph but the colonial will in general, more

FIG. 12. *Brown Brothers' Burden*, 1972.



than willing to oppress and take advantage of the native population whom they regard as inferior to them.

All of these paintings are re-functioned as photographs, be they of tribal groups, *indios*, mestizos, servants, governors, peasants, or American officers, form a radial of associations around the same event—the event of Philippine colonization. All these images were placed in an ongoing context, one related to the next related to the next, tying them all together in what was supposed to be the experience of looking through an old photo album. By simulating the experience of photographs in an album, it makes each subject in the paintings more personal to the viewer because it is like they have been included and preserved in a family album—they are all Filipino, no matter what their race or class is. Actually, by making these turn-of-the-century images function as photographs, they become records of the ancestors of the tribal groups—*indios*, mestizos, servants, peasants, or elite of the country today.

The post-colonial counter discourse that BenCab is participating in is, by definition, not simply a reversing or dismantling and replacement of the colonial/post-colonial binary due to the hybrid nature of post-colonial culture. It is the conscious identification, reading, revealing, and taking apart of the dominant discourse from the position of the native intellectual. BenCab actively does his part in eroding the myth justifying the American mission of expansion to the Philippines by making his paintings masquerade as photographs in order to enable the Filipino's political and national memory and to awaken them from their complacency. He appropriates the colonial tool of photography along with all its functions, and resists the ever-present colonial ideology by conferring importance on his subjects by making them portraits of individuals instead of representative types, by effacing and making anonymous the images of the Americans, and by illustrating and narrating the negative impact of the colonial experience on the Filipino people.

What makes the photograph-paintings particularly Filipino are the subjects of the images themselves: they are all Filipinos. There are some subjects who may be mistaken for being from other cultures—for example,

the Mangyan and Negrito could be mistaken for African tribe members and the Ifugao tribesman could be mistaken for one from South America. But even if this is so, the images still show the pervasiveness of the colonial presence in all non-Western countries around the world.

Conclusion

When looking at and studying colonial photographs, the viewer comes in contact with a way of seeing; in the case of colonial photographs, the colonial gaze. Like the gun, the camera has been used to subjugate its nations by providing images that communicate the myth of the invincible colonial will. Colonial photographs are like trophies of conquest, and to come in contact with them is to come in contact with colonial violence (Rafael 77). There is much power implied in “shooting” a photograph: in the process of posing the subjects, surveying them, assigning and classifying them into representative groups, and enabling the photographer to represent the subject motivated by colonial ideology.

In painting the subjects in colonial photographs, BenCab transforms the captured images in the snapshots into a counter-discourse that disavows the ideological authority that imprisoned and objectified them. With his *Larawan* series, BenCab resists and counters the colonial ideology inscribed in his source photographs by re-imagining and re-inscribing the images through mimicry, space, effacement, and allegory, making what were originally type photographs into portrait paintings.

With the implied ambivalence on the part of its post-colonial artist, these images that mimic colonial photographs become blurred copies of the original, occupying a space on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. They show Filipinos how they were seen by American photographers as inferior beings, thus validating the colonizer’s own sense of superiority. The colonizer and colonized construct each other in the sense that the way each one sees the other confirms his own view of himself (Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 96).

To see the photographs that objectify Filipinos and uphold colonial ideology and then compare them to paintings done by a Filipino artist

that lived and grew up in post-colonial Manila is to see how these two very different texts compete in the imagination of the nation. The photographs see poverty, inferiority, Otherness, and the benefits of the civilizing mission whereas the paintings erode the colonial myth in the photographs by acknowledging the poverty, accepting the racial distinctions and even taking pride in them, and lamenting the loss of indigenous culture due to the civilizing mission.

It is ironic that a mechanical piece of equipment like a camera has a naturalizing effect and makes ideology brought in by the colonizers seem so natural to the native population. Conversely, more organic tools like a paintbrush and an artist's hand have a greater capacity to expose flaws in the myth, undermine it, and develop the post-colonial culture anew. BenCab's creation of painting-photographs is a metaphor for hybridity itself. Here we have a post-colonial artist appropriating a tool of surveillance as well as the subjects that it gazes at as a means of rejecting colonial authority. In doing this, it is an act of refusing the colonizer's sale, claiming it as its own, and then gazing back at those that surveyed them.

By making his paintings masquerade as photographs, BenCab appropriates the techniques and functions of photography, and in so doing, BenCab makes them take on the advantages as well as the pitfalls of photography. The *Larawan* painting-photographs gain the role photography has in triggering collective political and social memory, so that Filipinos can make peace with the past and hope to make better decisions, processes, and knowledge for the future. After all, "a people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history" (Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 33).

There is no definitive order in which to look at the *Larawan* painting photographs but it is better if they are seen within categories of race, class, dress, accoutrements of turn-of-the-century life, and images of the colonizers so that the viewer can compare the images in the same categories with one another. For example, this writer suggested in a previous section that "A Governadorcillo" has more of an impact and more meaning can be acquired when seen together with "Ang Tao." Then, one can really appreciate the

contrast and disparity in the way BenCab renders “A Typical Mestiza” when compared to the “Gentle Savages” or the “Portrait of a Servant Girl.”

A limitation of photography that comes with BenCab’s appropriation of its functions is that they derive much of their meaning from their context in relation to other photographs and texts. Depending on the way the photograph itself is represented, it can take on a different meaning since an image is shaped according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it (Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 29). When seen together as a series, the *Larawan* paintings effectively communicate what the viewing experience is meant to be like walking through an old photo album, an album representing the artist’s ideas on what it is to be Filipino, depicting a collective Filipino memory, Filipino fraternity, and connectedness. All of these ideas and meanings can only be achieved in the constructed context of a photo album. The sometimes transcribed and sometimes re-inscribed images of BenCab’s *Larawan* series are a reflection of who constitutes the imagined community of the Philippine nation. To remove photographs from the company of other images that construct its context is to strip them of part of their meaning, allowing them to be de-contextualized and applied for other purposes or to create other meanings. If the *Larawan* images are seen separately, they are still beautiful works of art but they lose some of the effects of resistance against memory atrophy and colonial ideology, and they are reduced to mere nostalgia.

There are of course exceptions with very strong images like “Brown Brothers’ Burden” and “Pit-a-Pit’s Metamorphosis” which are a metaphor of the colonial experience; but for the most part, the painting photographs need each other to have its intended impact on the viewer. The intended effect of the photo album is not so much a call to action but a reflection of the past and the changes that can be made in the process of moving forward.

One of the ironies of the *Larawan* images though is that no matter how BenCab may try to appropriate the functions of photography, they are still, at the end of the day, original paintings by a famous and established artist, making them a valuable commodity in this capitalist society. All art is susceptible to this condition, even art of protest and resistance: “The ‘tragedy’ is the

tragedy of the easel painting which cannot escape the triviality of becoming a desirable possession. And all the protesting art of recent years has been defeated in the same way... The more violent, the more extreme, the rawer it becomes, the more appeal it acquires as an unusual and rare possession” (Berger, “Art and Property Now” 105). Another irony is the fact that BenCab is well collected in the United States, the land of our former colonizers against whom this artist is reacting in the first place.

Artwork that was able to participate in the re-creation of national identity and identification of areas for action and change based on past experiences has some of their powers curtailed or it loses some of its efficacy since the images are separated from one another and kept in the private libraries of art collectors, inaccessible to the viewing public. Conscious of the art market and its commodification of his and other people’s works, BenCab makes it a practice to print exhibit catalogues before his shows to make his work more accessible to everyone else (Cabrera). Those who cannot attend his shows to acquire a copy of the exhibit catalogue can buy packets of postcards of his artwork in bookstores and gift shops. The postcards though are a mix of the artist’s paintings and prints from different series throughout the years and are not sold by theme, subject, or series of paintings. The paintings are also re-printed in black and white so the element of color and the meanings it can imply are lost. A better alternative for viewers would be the recently-printed BenCab coffee table book that features color photographs of his paintings and other books like *Art Philippines* and *Tuklas Sining* that feature a selection of Filipino artists and their work, including that of BenCab.

BenCab successfully achieves the post-colonial artist’s aim of creating counter-discourse by appropriating colonial texts, and then re-imagining and re-inscribing a new text motivated by memory and national identity. The success that the *Larawan* paintings have in counter-discursive practice extends up to the points of creation and exhibit. Once the works leave the artist’s hands, they evolve, become commodities, and take on new and different meanings in the context created by the art collector who now possesses the images. But with the help of mechanical reproduction in exhibit catalogues and art books, the painting-photographs again take their places in

the resistance of colonial ideology and the imagination and development of a new Philippine identity. The task of a painter is to imagine what may not be clearly seen by others, and he effectively does so with his painting-photographs. By looking back to the past, BenCab shows Filipinos our past and how it has shaped us as a nation; but it is not all that we are.

APPENDIX

Interview with the artist in his Manila residence

Ecology Village, Makati City, January 14, 2005

Minelle Pama (MP): Who do you really paint for?

Benedicto Cabrera (BC): For myself.

MP: So when you paint something do you feel this need to share this image with other people?

BC: Oh, yes. Yes. I think one reason was, I used to work for the *Sunday Times Magazine* and I was exposed to, you know, the investigative journalism, exposed to photographers of that time. That kind of narrative idea also.

MP: When you think of a painting, does it begin with “I want to say something...?”

BC: Yes, my early stages.

MP: So it starts with a message?

BC: With a message, yes. Because I think during that time, my first show was 1966, I was doing *barong barong, manggagawa, mga scavengers*, things like that. That time the trend was minimalism, that was the international style so when I came up with it, *parang*, it's the timing. Suddenly, even if you work with the representational, it's not even modern at that time. During that time it was abstraction, *parang* people started appreciating and it was successful.

MP: You said before that one of the assets that the Filipino artists have is his ability to adapt.

BC: Well yeah, out of necessity, because you have to do so many things on your own, you don't specialize. It's a lot of economics too. I was painting and I had my job to support my art.

MP: Plus the Filipino artist doesn't have the same cultural experiences that the Western artist or example expressionism, etc.

- BC: No, we do have that because we're influenced by what comes out in *Time* or *Life Magazine* before or *Art International* magazines. But we have our own genre paintings also, for example, our Amorsolos.
- MP: So when you paint for yourself, being an artist you do have to keep in mind that these paintings will be sold. Do you really have a target audience or do you just leave it to the gallery?
- BC: No. To begin with, I don't really have a target audience but what happened was it came really naturally. Because I took up fine arts but I didn't major in painting or in advertising, I was under Larry Alcala who's a cartoonist and I majored in illustration. I just wanted to have a job. I was doing layouts and five years after college I was invited to exhibit and the works sold well. I love to paint at the same time I can earn from it.
- MP: The fact that your work has a political message, some even call it subversive....
- BC: It's not subversive; it's more of a commentary. Because there's a thin line between propaganda art and being common art.
- MP: But do you take offense when people call you a subversive painter?
- BC: No, no it was my idea for them to know; that's one reason. I did some etchings, some juxtaposition of two elements.
- MP: So your work has a social commentary but in the end when these works are sold....
- BC: To people who can afford it, yeah.
- MP: To people who can afford it and they're kept in private collections.
- BC: Whenever I have an exhibition I make sure that I come up with a catalogue so everybody can see it. For my first exhibition at the Luz Gallery, I had a catalogue made which I spent for and its one way of disseminating your ideas to other people, those who cannot afford to buy your work, and I've been doing postcards. And the fact that it gets reproduced is one way of also sharing your vision with others. Of course selling your work is also a good exchange. I have to buy paints. I have to buy everything.

- MP: Does the fact that your work is kept in homes instead of out in public, does that affect you as a painter?
- BC: Well in a way yeah. The reason I did etchings also as a way to have several editions, not just out even in spite of that even my etchings got....
- MP: Sold to the wrong people? [Laughs]
- BC: Yeah [laughs] but then I came out with a book of etchings. And then these things come up in the States. What they do is just reproduce what I have in the book. During the Marcos times there were these support groups that were in the States that chose my work and made a calendar or postcards without my knowledge, but I don't mind; it's one way of sharing. Maybe that's why I'm popular, that's one way for people to know my work. I see young artists copying my postcards or maybe variations of my work.
- MP: Do you like that?
- BC: I don't mind
- MP: So you don't have an issue with intellectual property rights?
- BC: As long as they don't exploit it too much. I mean it depends who does it, if they do it for money. If it's for a better cause, it's ok.
- MP: When you know that people read these art reviews about your work and people say to themselves, "This is a social commentary about poverty or about colonial mentality" for example and people say, "Yes, you're absolutely right", does that satisfy you as artist?
- BC: Yes, I think a lot of people can relate to my work, which is good. I've had experiences that other people experienced so they can also sympathize. Like after the big earthquake in Baguio, I did a series on the aftermath of disasters. Everybody has the same experience whether you're poor or rich; if disaster comes, they don't choose who the victims are. It's a wider range. It's universal. Like what happened in the tsunamis; it's not just the Sri Lankans or the Thais but people from Sweden also.

- MP: It's been twenty-five years since you created the *Larawan* series or the Sabel series. Is this the vision you had for your paintings when you made them?
- BC: When you're young and idealistic you come out with these kinds of new issues that you want to show your audience but as you get older you get more detached from this kind of reality. Like the realistic Sabel paintings, the disinherited, she is an excuse for me to do a variation.
- MP: And you keep going back to her after several years.
- BC: Yes, she becomes abstract; she becomes Japanese-y. It's a variation.
- MP: Would you say that with age you became more jaded; you became less idealistic as a person and as an artist?
- BC: No, I enjoy doing the painting; there are times when I came back with a commentary. For example when I had my show in Japan [people said that] my paintings were so historical and post-colonial. It depends on the audience too and the ideas that I get. Other works I do for pure enjoyment, like this one [pointing to a painting behind him]; she's still Sabel.
- MP: Do you think this post-colonial condition that the Filipinos have has gotten better?
- BC: I don't think so. We're still very conscious of foreign signature brands, because of globalization. When Filipinos go abroad they come back wearing, you know. It's not exclusive anymore. You can now buy Armani in the *ukay-ukay* for 150 pesos. The margin is getting smaller as the world is getting smaller.
- MP: I know that the big debate from Amorsolo's time right up to the 60s and 70s was this quest for the Filipino identity or Filipino-ness.
- BC: Well yeah. I went through that kind of hang up; you go through that. As a young artist you go through that and in the end you cannot change the world [laughs]. I go more for what is universal. Self-respect, respect for others.
- MP: So you think then that we haven't found our identity?
- BC: No, as long as the work is done by a Filipino and some artists are more conscious of the nationalism in art, we have that as well. You

have the young artists who are doing Philippine art work; they have a lot of commentaries now, social realism. For me, the direction is everywhere. There is no such thing as avant-garde anymore. There's new millennium art, and I notice the tendency in international art is installation. Sometimes it's just a collection of something. Like Aquilizan. It's more of a concept. He used a collection of toothbrushes and arranged them from light to dark to show the gradation. I mean this has been done before by Armand. It's a variation of a variation. Art is like that, it goes around in cycles.

MP: Are you one of those artists that believe that there's nothing original anymore?

BC: There's always something original that will come up with the technology now. You can see that I'm conservative or traditional because I love to draw from life. I like drawing, painting, sculpture.

MP: Let's go back to the inspiration for the *Larawan* series. It was written in your book that you used to have an antique stall in London.

BC: Yes I use to collect books, maps, photos, and things.

MP: Was this at the antique market in London?

BC: No, at the antique market I wasn't selling those. I was selling oriental collections. I had kids and couldn't support myself with just painting, so that was on the side. I love objects to begin with. The fun is discovering a nice object for cheap and then selling it for more. London is expensive and I had three kids. Those were my early struggles; I'm now 63.

MP: During that time, were colonial photos really as popular as people say they were? Was there really a cult of the primitive in London at that time?

BC: These were mostly travel books. Dean Worcester wrote a book *Filipinos Past and Present* printed in 1898, [at the] turn of the century. The first concept I had of *Larawan* I was to make a parallelism of the past and the present. Like the servant girl, then she became the domestic helper, and now an OFW. And we haven't changed. We're still in that kind of servitude.

MP: Was there a large circle of people that were interested in collecting colonial photographs of maps?

BC: Right now yes. But during that time in the 70s no one was really interested in them. Now they're everywhere.

MP: Well, thanks to you.

BC: Yeah, they became aware of those things. After that even Gilda Cordero-Fernando came out with that turn-of-the-century book. Now they know where they got all my sources because these are in a way copied. It's an interpretation of those pictures . . . Those things I was collecting in London were cheap then. I got this small map of the Philippines for 4 pounds; it's now 30,000 pesos. There weren't a lot of Filipino collectors then. I love collecting. You learn from it.

MP: You get a lot of ideas from it too. I was reading somewhere that Picasso and even Gauguin....

BC: Picasso was collecting Japanese prints....

MP: And tribal art.

BC: And then that changed their compositions. Even Van Gogh....

MP: Yes, he was collecting tribal art.

BC: African art, yes. I think you look at the past, your tradition, and you incorporate it into the modern.

MP: Do you think the Filipino can do the same with our tribal art?

BC: Our Cordillera art is very underrated. What we know about international art is African and Indonesian art. Most of our work goes out of the country because people appreciate it there. It's a pity because a lot of foreigners, French, Japanese buy them out. This is why I try to get what I can and keep it here.

Something I admire about the Igorots is that they're farmers, carpenters; they build their own homes, they do their own music. I mean it's complete. That's something I like, to be complete. You can't see that in the US or in Europe, they have this focus or specialization. You have to find something that you specialize in and you become known for it.

MP: So these artists get typecast, so to speak. Yes, one thing I've noticed about your work though is that you constantly evolve from different subject matter.

BC: Yeah, I have so many interests. Like collecting, when you collect you learn. I'm always fascinated with anthropologists who study things. These are my friends, I go out with them. We go to Palawan, things like that.

MP: How do you feel about people that take cultural artefacts and show them out of context and make them into something else?

BC: Well there are some artists in Baguio who have been trouble in a way of appropriating. *Kasi* they'd use some pieces and do some rituals and mix the two elements. Let's say the ritual is from Bontoc but the pieces are from other cultures and sometimes they're [the Igorots] very sensitive about that. You cannot just appropriate something sacred to them. But you cannot help that the contemporary artist will have his own interpretation so like I said it is not community-based like what you had originally.

There's a new kind of thing, like Kidlat Tahimik and the *bahag*. Artists are like the new *mumbakis*. Most of these *mumbakis* or high priests invent rituals also, so artists invent their own rituals also in a way, particularly when you do performances. But you can put it in a contemporary way like David Medalla.

MP: To go to the topic about evolving, what made you transition from political art to something so popular like Rock Sessions?

BC: Again it's my idea of documenting. I wanted to give them faces, I mean you hear their music but you don't know who is singing. I also started doing writers but it's so difficult. I started doing F. Sionil Jose, Nick Joaquin. A lot of them died already. What I wanted to do was a whole series of these artists that I know side by side with their original writing, something handwritten. It's more personal than just seeing them printed already. I just love portraiture. When you're doing a writer you're able to get in touch with them you can talk to them and you learn.

- MP: So how is this different from portraits of artists in rock magazines for example?
- BC: When you sketch them and you ask them to sit still it's different. In magazines it's more of an interview, but with me it's more of a conversation or just listening. When I did Joey Ayala it was a personal concert with me.
- MP: Yeah because he was playing while you sketched him.
- BC: He was playing for one hour. Wow! So it was a nice privilege. At the same time they're in the book, they're part of it. Then you learn more. People are so amazed that I know all these people. While I was doing that I went to their concerts as well. It was fun. Some drawings were spontaneous; some are not.
- MP: About these books, not just *Rock Sessions* but *Etchings* and *BenCab*, are you involved at all in the writing process? Do the writers show you what they've written about you?
- BC: No. I didn't want my book to come out yet. What I wanted was a book of drawings first before the coffee table book but it was Manolo Lopez that said let's come out with a book. He was the one who published it. Cid Reyes is a person I know and he's a very good writer.
- MP: Cid Reyes has written a lot of reviews and articles about your work. Do you ever tell him what you intend with your painting or do you just leave him to interpret it on his own?
- BC: Well both. At one time he did a series of interviews, conversations with artists. So in a way he knows me already. And it's an interview also which is good so it's not just an interpretation of what you've done but also what insight I have. Critics are good; they can tell you your weakness.
- MP: What about critics that you don't know. For example when you have a show, do you take time out to talk to a critic?
- BC: Some of them; some critics don't even talk to you. They just look at your work, leave and then write about it. I don't mind. They can say, "Hey you've been repeating yourself" and other things.

MP: About your *BenCab* book—it is similar to your idea of the book on rock stars and writers. There were your paintings on one page next to a written text of Cid Reyes on the next explaining that work. Did they show you at any stage what the book was going to look like or were you surprised with the way it came out?

BC: No, I have experience in publication. Noli Galang is my designer. There were some paintings that I wanted him to include which he never included and there were some insignificant paintings which he will blow up. There were some disappointments also but he is the designer and sometimes the writer will suggest a painting to be included, things like that. I didn't put so much into it.

MP: So you were hands off?

BC: Yeah. I want to give them a free hand.

MP: Is it that you don't care what critics say? I mean you're established already as an artist so do you feel that you're at a point where no matter what anyone says....

BC: Oh yeah. You have to please yourself first. Why should you be dictated by what these writers say? There are some dealers who call me saying, "Hey, you come to Davao and do the Muslim women", for example. There are some people who suggest I do a series on whatever. If it's a good idea I accept, but you should be the one to decide. Some dealers will say, "Why don't you do this? It's sellable." That's when the pressure comes.

MP: Do you dictate the price?

BC: The market dictates the price. The gallery, it's up to them. There are some dealers that buy from the gallery then sell it for more.

MP: I was reading this essay on the culture industry [Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"], and the writers say that with the art industry, no matter how underground or anti-establishment an artist is, once he is acknowledged as an artist he becomes part of that system. What do you think of that?

BC: It does happen. I'll tell you about Nena Saguil. Before, she was living abroad, surrounded by artists and all these other people. First thing she said was, "You have to suffer first." And then she was saying "It took me 8 years before I had my show." Then she started being patronized. When she came back and she had an exhibition patronized by Imelda Marcos, people were buying her work and she had a bit of money. She can buy what she wants. She said, "It's not bad being bourgeois!"

It's human nature, you know. You have a bit of money that can relieve you of your suffering and help you, why not? It's human nature. It depends on your priorities. It depends on the artist also. There are some artists that want a BMW. It really depends on the artist. I want to put up a museum, I earn from my paintings. For me it's an exchange. You use your art in exchange for something you want.

Notes

1. BenCab's use of the style of painting called *tromp l'oeil* helps him choose photographic images as his subject for painting, but it should not be mistaken for photorealism (or super realism) because this style often chooses banal subject matter like shop windows and building exteriors. It uses a combination of visual complexity and emotional neutrality. A technique to execute this style of painting is projecting a color slide onto a canvas and copying from that. Photorealism is distinguished from other art movements by its apparent rejection of formal and painterly qualities which distinguish individual artists' styles from one another and by making the photograph the subject of painting. See Brigstocke 570.
2. Strategies artists can use to make their point more forceful include beauty, illustration, narrative, humor, and shock tactics. The narrative strategy tells stories by compressing time and space into the work. The work can use long descriptive titles to make the story clearer and they are meant to be reconstructions of the past. See Lazzari and Schlesier 381.

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