



## EXCAVATING HISTORICAL TRUTH: AN ARCHIVAL STUDY ON THE UNITED STATES-PHILIPPINE ECONOMIC RELATIONS

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### Abstract:

This paper argues that historical truth can be excavated not just from existing published books in the academe, but also from unpopular references such as speeches, documentaries, and museum archives. Paying attention to these references substantiates one's understanding about a phenomenon and expands historical knowledge through an in-depth analysis of the archive. This archival study zooms into a Central Intelligence Agency document, specifically an address delivered by Miguel Cuaderno, Sr. in New York City in 1953. Delivered by the first governor general of the Central Bank of the Philippines, it highlights the following essential discourse in the United States-Philippine relations and decolonization: absence of reciprocity along economic opportunities between the two countries and resistance to the economic inequalities as experienced by the colonized nation. This speech is just one of the few examples of an archive that can potentially be beneficial in seeking for more historical narratives in US-Philippine relation discourse.

**Keywords:** archival study, decolonization, economic inequalities, historical truth, United States-Philippine relations

### 1. Introduction

For more than 300 years, the Philippines was under Spanish colonization. It was in 1898 when the Pearl of the Orient Seas became an object of the American conquest. Analogous to many documents of imperialism, it brings forth two sides of history. In his article "Imperialism and Filipino Nationalism", Silvestre (1973) foregrounds imperialism's tremendous role in the globe.

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It can either be beneficial or destructive. To the imperialists' side, it is justifiable for the colonized nation may benefit from the progress it attains from the colonizer. However, it can be as worse as an entirely evil experience, especially among the victims of unruly treatment.

As the United States capitalized on benevolent assimilation, the Philippines learned how to govern itself through the selfless democratic trainings from the imperialist. Hence, waiving the Philippine flag for its independence was just for a show. The nation was still under White supremacy for the Philippines was dubbed to be incapable of self-government due to lack of leadership experience. This, according to Rafael (2000), is a racist assumption that the colonized nation never knows how to stand on its own feet and is just inferior to the American leaders. Even up to date, some Filipinos still believe that the country will be more progressive if it is under American colony. It may be a manifestation of lack of historical narrative and historical understanding on US imperialism. This may result to the emergence of historical amnesia (Caronan, 2012) for entirely believing that the Philippines will never independently lead its own shores.

In spite of some notable social inequalities the Philippines has gone through under American colonialism, Lande (2001) believes that Uncle Sam has brought quite a significant impact to Juan Dela Cruz (referring to the Philippine nation). For one, an upward social mobility for the resourceful and linguistically intelligent Filipinos has been possible. Education became an instrumental motivation both for the elite and low-income families in order to succeed in life. This is credited to the free public education in both rural and urban areas. Secondly, the spread of the English language contributed to job opportunities here in the country and abroad. However, there are language studies in the present explaining that some sectors of the Philippine society are at a disadvantage because of not having an access to English (Martin, 2012; Phillipson, 1992). Thirdly, the systematic process of expanding roads and highways, known to be a certain interest of Governor General W. Cameron Forbes, contributed to a more efficient transportation and a more productive trade and industry.

Caronan (2012) stressed that the US imperialism was justified due to saving the Philippines from the "*mismanagement of Spain*" and the "*brutality of Japan.*" This is one historical narrative that may be acceptable to some yet unacceptable to others. It is possible, as I argue in this paper, that other social, political, and economic inequalities experienced by Juan Dela Cruz from Uncle Sam can be excavated not just from existing history books, but also from other unpopular references such as speeches, documentaries, and museum archives. To reinforce the excavation of historical truth, research faculties are needed. By this, it does not only pertain to writing skill as an instrument, but an internal and inherent research faculty. To name some, the resourcefulness to find archives, the intellect to connect one historical information to another, and the willingness to dive into archival studies vis-à-vis Philippine-US relations. These are all needed in unpacking historical truths and expanding hidden narratives of Philippine literary and cultural studies.

## 2. Theoretical Perspectives: 'Historical Forgetting' and 'Scarcity of Archives'

Cuaderno's speech constitutes an assertion of the country's rights for the sake of a sound and flourishing economy. The message he delivered in 1953, seven years after the declaration of independence, shows that the Filipinos' voice needs to be heard among American communities – to regain the real meaning of freedom. Ateneo professor and writer Charlie Veric considers years after 1946 as a “*major historical shift where legitimacy of colonialism was questioned*”. With the so-called “*lack of scholarship on 1946 and its aftermath*,” as Veric (2020) pointed out, many other official documents can be further studied along with Cuaderno's address. Hence, this work may be anchored on two theoretical perspectives: Veric's “*Children of the Postcolony*” and Omnia El Shakry's “*History Without Documents: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East*.”

Veric's “*Children of the Postcolony*” accentuates five intellectuals emerging from different fields who have tremendous contributions in literary arts and culture vis-à-vis “*foundations of the cultural archive of decolonization*.” These are Edith Tiempo in literature, Fernando Zobel in modern artistry, Bienvenido Lumbera in vernacular writing, E. San Juan, Jr. in ethnic studies, and Jose Maria Sison in mass revolution. In his book introduction titled “*Reconstruction and Reckoning: Entanglements of Filipino Postcolonial Thought*,” he presented two themes concerning methods of postcolonial reconstruction. The first theme is on “*silence or invisibility*” which encompasses the roots of the Filipino postcolony and is comparable to African decolonization while the second theme is centered on the relevance of Philippine independence from the United States and its transnational influence. He postulates that recognizing the silence or invisibility is the initial step of reconstructing the postcolonial discourse. If the so-called historical roots or the “*life-world of the disappeared*” will be exposed, then the reconstruction may be started. He also stated that the Philippine Independence in 1946 has a mark in global history.

Borrowing the concept of “*historical forgetting*” which Veric (2020) used in his recent book, scholars should never ignore the milestones that have transpired in this period, particularly on how it affected both the imperial America and the Philippines as its former colony. As he questions why 1946 remains “*a lacuna in Filipino historiography*” despite its prominence in world history, it may serve as an awakening call for scholars, both the seasoned and the young, to focus on this line of thought – to reconnect to what has been started on the writings of decolonization so that historical forgetting will not occupy space in the Philippine literary and cultural spectrum. Relating this view to the CIA document I purposefully picked, such helpful material (Cuaderno's address) reveals the economic struggles of a country in the Far East, including the countless inequalities it brings forth due to its unreasonable financial and political control. Imposing restrictions on exports through quotas and the excessive control of administering its own currency are definite indications of economic impartiality and abuse. As Cuaderno puts it, the real meaning of US-Philippines economic relations is just and rational. As he argues, the reciprocal trade arrangement proposed by the Philippine Government must be “*mutually beneficial to both countries*.” Unfortunately, this was not fulfilled.

In the same vein, El Shakry's work on the archives of decolonization in the Middle East is highly associated to Veric's idea on the theme of silence or invisibility. As he clarifies that there

is a common denominator between the Philippines and Africa in terms of scarcity in generating postcolonial studies, El Shakry (2015) also admits challenges with regard to researching on Middle East decolonization. The University of California associate professor questions the possibility of conceptualizing the archives of decolonization if scholars are grappling with *"history without documents."* As she explored on the inaccessibility of materials as possible sources of investigation, many historians think that accessing archives in national libraries is a complete conundrum. As El Shakry (2015) exemplifies such data gathering predicament, historians who are interested to study the *"Nasir era"* in Egypt would find accessing the colonial archives close to impossible for these have been dispersed with *"Nasir's close associates"* across the region. Oftentimes, these cannot be easily touched even if they are in *"personal, governmental, and archival locations."* This problem goes beyond isolating religious and secular thoughts due to emergence of ideological conflicts. It already entails finding something unsearchable, something impossible. Instead of perceiving scarcity of historical archives as a problem, it can pragmatically be turned into a strategy: to find other routes, alternatives, and solutions.

In the absence of archival evidence, El Shakry (2015) borrowed Sasson's concept of *"chasing phantoms in the archives"* (2000) which is suggestive of having a conscious effort to come up with alternatives as possible sources of analysis such as *"oral histories and interviews, family holdings and private collections, published memoirs and letters, press reports, and foreign archives."* The way she addressed such *"historical dilemma of scarcity"* was also mentioned by Veric (2020) in his explication of postcolonial reconstruction.

These postcolonial perspectives may be applicable in archival studies, social sciences, language, and even literature and culture. Agustin (2022), for instance, anchored his explication of symbolic representation of culture and identity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by zeroing in on the postcolonial assertions of Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon.

### 3. Methodology

This paper is qualitative in nature, specifically an online archival study. L'Eplattenier (2009) highlights the essence of archival studies both in the classroom and research work. She argues that the methods section utilizing archives should include the name and location of the material, the pivotal points and issues raised in the archive, and even the missing articles of the material. In other words, it is imperative to include what was analyzed, how it was analyzed, and where the material was located.

One of the documents at the Central Intelligence Agency online archives relative to decolonization is an address delivered by Miguel A. Cuaderno, Sr., the first governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines. He delivered his typewritten ten-page speech at the Philippine Session of the Far East Conference of the Far East-America Council of Commerce and Industry, Inc. on a Thursday morning, October 8, 1953 at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. I was able to access this online archive from the CIA website as suggested by my Literary Theory and Cultural Studies professor. This document was initially used to write an article as a learning activity sometime in July 2020 which I eventually expanded into a research article.

#### 4. The United States-Philippine Economic Relations in Cuaderno's Address

In the introductory part of his address, Cuaderno expressed his sincere appreciation for participating in the annual conference and exclaimed that *"the selection of the theme is indeed a happy one."* Anchored on the theme "Foundations for Understanding and Economic Cooperation between the United States and the Far East," he reacted how timely and relevant the conference is. It served as an avenue for countries in Southeast Asia to express their economic and political turmoil, propose for beneficial modalities on the existing agreements with U.S., and convince the American leaders that such proposals need concrete actions and immediate response. Pointing how pleased he was with the theme, he expressed what one should bear in mind towards it – that those countries in the Far East region have gone through *"similar experiences in the past and are now engaged in analogous efforts to diversify and develop their national economies."*

Focusing on how to establish equitable economic relations between the Philippines and United States, Cuaderno emphasized how countries in Southeast Asia suffered from the ravages of war. In the case of the Philippines, its newly-won political freedom in 1946 was not an indication of economic prosperity due to many restrictions imposed by the U.S. government. This formidable array of barriers includes tariffs and quotas for Philippine products exported to the States. However, whenever the latter exports its raw materials to the former, it is never quantifiably limited and no economic restrictions are imposed, making the agreement beneficial yet one-sided. Apart from these restrictions, the Philippines could not also profitably sell its products due to the imposition of duty on the supply and materials imported from the U.S. Such executive agreement, as posited by Cuaderno, needs a thorough reexamination for a more balanced and impartial economic undertaking.

The Philippine representative in the confab also highlighted the following concrete proposals on the existing economic arrangement: 1. providence of a limited and reciprocal free trade between the two countries with an imposition of full duties on all imports, except for the commodities on free-duty list; 2. elimination of the provision in the agreement that the Philippine government still needs approval from the U.S. in exchanging the par value of peso and transacting in foreign exchange; and 3. reciprocity between the two countries in terms of governing immigration, land ownership, and exploitation of natural resources.

Clearly, Cuaderno was not just addressing the economic problems of the nation, but he was also informing them the root cause so that the listeners, who are predominantly Americans, would be able to see the factors contributing to the dilemma on the trade negotiations. All these proposals were crafted for the betterment of the nation amidst all economic inequalities.

#### 5. Economic Inequalities and Partially Disguised Imperialism

Locating the historical context of Cuaderno's address, Maxfield and Nolt (1990) zeroed in on the U.S. sponsorship of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in the Philippines. Both researchers claim that the 1946 Philippine Trade Act was a compromise victory of the colonial liberals. They explained that a mandate of free-trade between the two countries until 1954 and a gradual increase of standard tariff rates until 1974 were implemented. Such increase was

questioned considering that “*normal tariffs*” may be applied instead. In addition, any activity related to foreign exchange control would need the approval of the President of the United States. Not ending there, all major exports coming from the Philippines would have quotas and additional quotas will be added in the succeeding years while no limitations were imposed on the exports of the U.S. All these highlighted economic agreements on the trade act were highly opposed by Cuaderno. As he mentioned in his speech, such “*one-sidedness on the economic relations should no longer be tolerated.*” As countries in the periphery, including the Philippines, crave for a better economic pattern after being victimized by the wrath of war, they also deserve to regain their national dignity and counter the “*intolerable anachronism*” experienced by the nation.

What Maxfield and Nolt (1990) interestingly noted which I have not found in Cuaderno’s address is the fact that the Philippine government initiated tighter quotas after the presidential elections in 1949. It was crafted by Cuaderno, but revisions were made by the United States. Having the longest term as governor of the Central Bank of the Philippines, he was highly favored by the American government. They would usually commend his economic management policy and protect him from his political antagonists. For an instance, Ambassador Cowen defended Cuaderno from his rivals, telling them that his “*continued presence in the government is a must.*” President Elpidio Quirino, who assumed presidency after Manuel Roxas’ sudden death in 1948, also wanted to oust Cuaderno at the Central Bank. As a political strategy, he encouraged Cuaderno to run as a senator, but he strongly refused it and continued serving the agency until 1960.

The economic inequalities which Cuaderno mentioned in his address may be viewed in two dimensions: one is America’s absolute dominance over its former colony and the second is its impartial ways of implementing reciprocal benefit in economic relations. He explicitly mentioned that countries in the Far East were no longer gratified with the kind of freedom dictated by foreign rulers, thus a “*higher level of economic freedom*” must be achieved. Shaffer (2012) calls such phenomenon as “*partly disguised imperialism.*” He emphasized that many historians agree that the 1946 Philippine Independence was a shallow and unequal declaration. What was granted by the generous U.S. was only a “*shadow of independence,*” resulting to the country’s economic and political dependency. Some critical internationalists, he mentioned, share the same perspectives on America’s policy being akin to European imperialism. Specifically, as U.S. expands its power through numerous policies and agreements, these also lead to economic exploitation of the weaker nation. Some of these writers presented in his essay on American critical internationalists and Philippine independence were Harold Ickes, Hernando Abaya, John Collier, Laurence Salisbury, Dale Pontius, Ira Gollobin, Richard Walsh, and Pearl Buck.

What is noteworthy on Shaffer’s archival study is that the granting of Philippine independence is definitely questioned in an American home, specifically the critical internationalists. These non-Filipino writers, journalists, and researchers disclosed the many inequalities experienced by the weaker nation from the superior one – such that in a neocolonial society. Hence, they boldly corresponded on the authentic meaning of Philippine Independence, raising questions against “*Truman’s foreign policy, imperialism, decolonization, and global militarization*” and they compared it to Roosevelt’s intent of a “*progressive foreign policy and a decisive break from colonialism.*” If other critics call the impending grant of Philippine Independence

as a *“banana republic with military base”* or otherwise an *“independent dependency,”* Shaffer (2012) calls it an *“arc of disillusionment”* and *“partly disguised imperialism.”*

Taking El Shakry’s viewpoint on historical scarcity and Veric’s insight on lack of scholarship on 1946 and its aftermath, I also had difficulties in finding a possible document to analyze relative to decolonization. Resourcefulness in finding the potential material, such that of Cuaderno’s address and supporting it with secondary sources on US-Philippines economic relations is never a piece of cake. It does not only require historical discernment, but also a careful selection of archives relevant to the discourse at hand.

## 6. Conclusion

The economic inequalities and struggles of the Philippine government has been amplified by Cuaderno in his speech in New York. These political interests were echoed in the speech so the Americans themselves would realize the economic impartialities and agonies experienced by the Philippine nation. Alongside with it, more research studies may be penned to answer issues on Central Bank management and economic policy after Cuaderno’s leadership, the sustainability of the US-Philippine economic relations, and other pressing concerns on Filipino postcoloniality. As Martin (2009) puts it, education might have the power to propel people’s cultures, but it also has the power to silence the voices of marginalized communities. The same logic patterns with research studies on decolonization. Apart from archival studies, it is also possible to focus on literary analysis involving symbolic representation of culture and identity (Agustin, 2022), such that in Afro-Asian and Philippine literary texts.

Truly, it is through scholarly works that we can uplift our postcolonial knowledge and search for historical truths of the Philippine nation. And the documents that we need might just be in museums, university libraries, and web archives, begging to be read.

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