

Book Review

Between Empires: Martí, Rizal, and the Intercolonial Alliance, by Koichi Hagimoto. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Pp. 196. ISBN 9781349462025.

Jose Monfred C. Sy

The tail end of the 19th century witnessed a dramatic shift in the narrative of world modernity. Following the so-called Spanish-American War in 1898, the old Hispanic empire faced its deposition by a rising power, that is the United States, signaling the end of an age represented by European power and ushering in the American empire. Out of the many overseas territories of Spain, Cuba and the Philippines both notable for having waged fervent anticolonial movements—had almost simultaneously achieved a provisional “independence” from the empire before becoming targets of American expansionism. While much has been said about this periodic transition, transpacific analyses that pull together the geographically distant, yet historically intertwined, Cuban-Philippine relations are still to be formulated. Koichi Hagimoto’s *Between Empires: Martí, Rizal, and the Intercolonial Alliance* seeks to contribute to this inquiry by drawing linkages between two of the most prominent figures in the wars of independence from Spain: José Martí (1853–1895) of Cuba and José Rizal (1861–1896) of the Philippines.

Unlike the occasional historiographic, political, or economic approach in area studies, Hagimoto’s *Between Empires* examines literary and cultural relationships between the two regions, which the author observes to have gained prominent attention only in the recent decade. Literature and culture, Hagimoto opines, can illuminate certain dimensions of the anticolonial projects tucked in the periphery of other standpoints. His book compares the *fin de siècle* literature,

figurations, and even the veneration of nationalists Martí and Rizal, whose lives and works are key in the cross-cutting histories of anti-imperialism. While some scholars have already noted the connection between the two heroic figures, their unashamedly anti-imperial texts have yet to be explored until *Between Empires*. Here, Hagimoto contends that Cubans and Filipinos, both sandwiched between empires at that time, “shared certain political ideologies and struggles, and Martí and Rizal were the very engine of these struggles in their respective countries” (p. 5), forming a very novel transhistorical and transgeographical relationship best abbreviated by the concept of an “intercolonial alliance” against Spain and the United States in the late 19th century. Resolute with the possibility of an inadvertent alliance, *Between Empires* unearths the similarities and differences in Martí’s and Rizal’s writings, which, to the author, seem to anchor nationalism to anti-imperialism. Bolstered with historical documents, the book wraps its head around the deployment of the two figures’ ideas as an articulation of protest, laying the conditions for “a cross-cultural, transoceanic form of alliance against imperial domination” (p. 2).

What are now known as Cuba and the Philippines are similar not only in being colonial enterprises but also as parcels of a national project for Spain. During the 16th century, both Cuba and the Philippines inaugurated the development of the Galeón de Manila, an oceanic, transpacific trade system that would be the first to reach Acapulco, Mexico from Manila, Philippines. Indeed, Spanish interests over such territories lie in the establishment (or enforcement) of commercial and authoritative power behind a veneer of spiritual consolidation of Catholicism. Preceded by the unsuccessful Ten Years’ War (1868–1878), Martí’s War of Independence (1895–1898)—a thirty-year revolutionary moment—represents the zenith of Cuban nationalism in the 19th century. On the other hand, Rizal’s politics, to the author, is best understood in its castigation of the influential Catholic Church, an indispensable characteristic of Spanish imperialism, with its imposition of excessive tariffs, tribute, and forced labor. Numerous revolts, some inspired by Rizal’s anti-friar campaign, emerged out of public discontent. Many have noted the ambiguity of Rizal’s political stance that may differ from the 19th century Philippine nationalist movement partly inspired by his writing. This is not so dissimilar to the context of Cuba, whose revolution was defined by “conflict, not consensus.” Sister colonies in the Caribbean and in Southeast Asia demonstrated a diversity of political thinking during the 19th century.

To Hagimoto, while there is no direct and formal correspondence between the Cuban and Filipino anticolonial projects, their tenuous linkages draw scholarly fascination at two levels:

First, the Cuban and Filipino independence movements were liberal in nature, but with a dimension of social protest that spoke to the expansion of modern imperialism in the form of capitalism. Second, coming at the cusp of the twentieth century, these movements preceded the contemporary notion of anti-imperial collaboration that would reach its climax with the Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations in 1955. (p. 6)

Hagimoto ties the two observations to assert that a transnational form of anti-imperialism has already existed almost half a century before the ossification of a “Third World” concept, which is today iterated by what we call the “Global South.” For the author, these serendipitous parallels only realize a specter of transpacific collective consciousness—an intercolonial alliance, so to speak.

As far as current historical evidence shows, there is no direct correspondence between Martí and Rizal. Still, Hagimoto insists on what could only be described as a *spectral* relationship between the two:

Despite their different political positions, both men were killed by the Spaniards within just 19 months of each other: Martí died in the battlefield, while Rizal was accused of inciting a rebellion he did not support and was executed by Spanish authorities. After their deaths, they became iconic figures of nationalism and anti-imperial resistance in their respective countries. Today they remain at the epicenter of Cuban and Filipino national hagiography, often regarded as apostles, heroes, prophets, redeemers, and saints (there is even a religious cult in the Philippines that believes in the divinity of Rizal). (p. 3)

The similarities between the two are, as the author fancies, “ghostly.” The two never met face-to-face despite the overlaps in their stories. Moreover, their untimely deaths at the turn of the century only bolstered the deployment of their political thoughts. Martí’s and Rizal’s “haunting” in Cuba and the Philippines, respectively, can be perceived to this day, as both continue to be celebrated in holidays,

appear on postcards, stamps, and currency, and even lend their names to streets and buildings.

The novel—and clearly provocative—notation of a transhistorical and transgeographical alliance asks us to go beyond the framework of the nation to examine better cross-colonial politics and forms of protests. Off the bat, Hagimoto cautions us that his use of an “alliance” is not a suggestion of a tangible coalition between Cuban revolutionaries and Filipino nationalists. Instead, *Between Empires* contends that we understand these equivalences as an alliance to raise the possibility of collective consciousness among the colonized, a truly bold position given the milieu. The concept of an intercolonial alliance resonated well with Benedict Anderson’s (2005, 3) idea of an early globalization, hinting at the potential link between the two territories. However, when Anderson anchors this link on the possible correspondence between Filipinos exiled in Europe and Cuban revolutionaries, he does not elucidate connections between the two Spanish colonies—a task *Between Empires* takes upon itself.

An imaginative assertion necessitates an equally novel method. As such, Hagimoto oscillates from a comparative analysis of anticolonial writings to commenting on Martí’s and Rizal’s influence to their respective nation’s nationalist/anti-imperialist movements. The author trusts that writing, as a discursive practice, allows these authors to express their politics and concerns not only about their historical present, but also about the future of Cuba and the Philippines in diverse ways.

Chapters 1 to 3 articulate the intercolonial alliance through a sample of Martí and Rizal literary production.

Chapter 1 explores Martí’s *Lucía Jerez* (1885) and Rizal’s *Noli me tangere* (1887), two important novels that distill anticolonial sentiments. Written around the same time, *Lucía* and *Noli* as Hagimoto suggests, dramatize the colonial agenda through the use of melodrama and the reversal of gender relations inherent within the genre. Here, Hagimoto argues that the plethora of female and male characters and the reversal of expectations regarding them inflect symbolic interactions between imperial powers and the conditions of resistance.

Chapter 2 moves away from genre fiction and gravitates toward the political essay. Hagimoto compare Martí's "Manifiesto de Montecristi" (Montecristi Manifesto, 1895) and Rizal's "Filipinas dentro de cien años" (Philippines within One Hundred Years, 1889–1890). The chapter examines how these manifestos imagine national solidarity as a subversive response to Spanish colonialism. While the two texts have been conscripted as historical sources in other studies, Hagimoto moors his arguments to theatricality as a technique of creating a fictional reality in the context of nationalism. These "necessary fictions," as others have called it, construct the ideal future subject, a Cuban "people" and a Filipino "race."

Chapter 3 turns its attention to Martí's and Rizal's comments on the United States. The chapter primarily explores how they appropriate and translate facets of American society into the Cuban and Philippine contexts. Hagimoto reminds us that Martí spent almost 15 years in the country he viewed as a monster. Whereas, Rizal only visited the upcoming empire briefly in 1888, an interaction that Hagimoto holds no less important than Martí's. The chapter unfolds by investigating a series of writings, such as Martí's "Emerson" (1882); "El terremoto de Charleston" (The Charleston Earthquake, 1886); and "Nuestra América" (Our America, 1891), and Rizal's *El filibusterismo* (*The Subversion*, 1891). Here, Hagimoto identifies symbolic representations—inspired by interactions with the United States—that strategically reflect the defiant gestures of Cuba and the Philippines.

The final chapter of the book wraps up the copious series of analyses by leaving the symbolic dialogue between Martí's and Rizal's writings for a moment to focus on the exchange of personal correspondence and journal articles between 1896 and 1898 by figures influenced by the two. Here, Hagimoto reads Mariano Ponce's *Cartas sobre la revolución* (*Letters on the Revolution*, 1897–1900) as well as the journals *La República Cubana* (*The Cuban Republic*, 1896–1897) and *La Solidaridad* (*The Solidarity*, 1889–1895), further broaching the historical interplay between the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. Hagimoto firmly asserts that Martí's and Rizal's writings established the foundation for a cross-colonial relationship at the turn of the century, one that is articulated by the abovementioned texts, indicating an awareness of a shared (colonial) enemy across the globe. From the close reading of writing production to an exposition on their discursive deployment,

Hagimoto offers a sweeping reimagination of Martí's and Rizal's positions in the historical development of radical movements in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia.

Scholars in area studies and Philippine studies can consider Hagimoto's *Between Empires* as a wellspring of well-wrought observations on independence movements. The book illuminates not only ideological contacts and transcendental solidarity that may have been concealed by other frameworks. *Between Empires* also invites us to think strategically outside well-worn approaches and imagine links that may be impossible, if not for clues scattered in verbal texts.

Nevertheless, caution must be made in embracing the assumptions made in *Between Empires*. While the author acknowledges that his analyses hinge on textual exegesis, his recommendations border on the veneration of an imagined intercolonial alliance. Other documents, both available and undiscovered, may better scaffold what seems to me as Hagimoto's projection of a discursive analysis on ideological positions and historically informed developments. Filipinos must especially be careful in delving into the book, lest they fall in the trap of the now proverbial "veneration without understanding."

This risk of misreading is complemented by the boon of proper understanding. Despite such spectrality haunting the fringes of the book, *Between Empires* enjoins us to form linkages that at first seem fragile, if not for a methodology that champions discursive texts. Upon closer inspection, the alliance suggested by Hagimoto only testifies to how heterodox, radical practices in as early as the 19th century refract the democratic aspirations and collective consciousness that movements across the world demonstrate today. The notion of an intercolonial alliance presents an alternative to how we understand the development of "post" colonial polities in history, revealing how anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles are not only questions of local struggles against domination. Koichi Hagimoto behests that we rethink historical and geographical borders to exhume solidarities in the past that we can learn from in the present.

Jose Monfred C. Sy is an instructor at the Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas at the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he is also taking up his master's degree.

Reference

Anderson, Benedict. 2005. *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination*. London and New York: Verso