



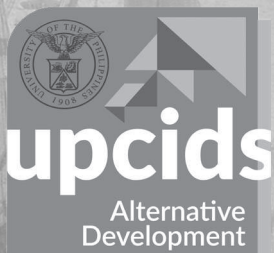




UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
PUBLIC POLICY MONOGRAPHS

# The Game of the Great Powers Rizal on Imperialism

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Published by the  
UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
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The National Library of the Philippines CIP Data

Recommended entry:

Aseniero, George.

The game of the great powers : Rizal on imperialism /  
George Aseniero. -- Quezon City : University of the Philippines  
Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS),  
[2020], c2020.  
pages, cm.

ISBN 978-971-742-129-2 (print)

ISBN 978-971-742-130-8 (electronic)

1. Rizal, Jose Alonzo, 1861-1896. 2. Imperialism -- Historiography.  
3. Colonies -- History -- 19th century 3. Colonization -- Historiography.

959.9025092      DS675.8.R8      P020200057

Copyeditor: Virna Liza O. Guaño

Cover and book design: Ace Vincent Molo

Layout artist: Zylyka Mae F. Gendraule

Image credits: Jan van Leyden, "The Dutch Burn English Ships during the Expedition  
to Chatham, 20 June 1667 (Raid on the Medway)" (1661–1693), Wikimedia Commons •  
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# The Game of the Great Powers Rizal on Imperialism\*

GEORGE ASENIERO

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was fought neither in Spain nor in the United States of America, but in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—the three remaining colonies of the once globe-girdling Spanish Empire. It was a new type of conflict—war between powers over colonies—and Lenin took it, along with the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, as a historic turn: the period of inter-imperialist rivalry. Less than two decades later, the Great Powers turned against each other, and this time, Europe was the battleground. As were the preceding wars, wrote Lenin, that great conflagration of 1914–1918 “was imperialist (that is, an annexationist, predatory, plunderous war) on the part of both sides; it was a war for the division of the world, for the partition and repartition of colonies, ‘spheres of influence’ of finance capital, etc.”<sup>1</sup> With wars in the periphery presaging war at the core in two decades, he asks, “What is the economic basis of this world-historic phenomenon?,” and this became the main theoretical problem to be addressed in his work.<sup>2</sup> He notes that there were others—notably the English economist J. A. Hobson and the Austrian Marxist Rudolf Hilferding—who also wrote about “imperialism,” a term that had come into common usage “in the economic and political literature of the two hemispheres” since 1898 “in order to describe the present era.”<sup>3</sup>

But what about the thinkers and political leaders of the periphery, whose lands would be the initial battlefields and whose people would shed the first blood. Were they aware that the world had entered into a new era? How, in particular, did the intellectuals of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Filipinas see their own struggles for independence from Spain in the broader, international context? What was their geostrategic reading of contemporary international affairs and the fate of their nations therein?

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\* This was presented by the author at the forum “Rethinking Rizal for the 21st Century: Unexplored Themes and New Interpretations” organized by the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) on June 19, 2019 at the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Preface to the French and German Editions (1920),” in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Petrograd, 1917) (IHN ETH-Zurich, 2007), 3. For an excellent discussion of imperialism as theory in the history of ideas and as practice of states in the closing decades of the “long nineteenth century” (1776 to 1914, which saw “the triumph and transformation of capitalism in the historically specific forms of bourgeois society in its liberal version”), see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 9 and all of Chapter 3. Hobsbawm notes that Lenin’s original title for his work was *Imperialism: The Latest Stage of Capitalism*, but this was changed posthumously in subsequent publications to the title it bears now, with crucial (but presumably unintended by author) theoretical implications: nothing can come after the highest, but the latest is always superseded by what comes after.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 11.

Three thinkers stand out: José Martí (1853–1895) of Cuba, Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827–1898) of Puerto Rico, and José Rizal (1861–1896) of Filipinas. All three were regarded by their people as the intellectual leader and moral guide in their nation's political struggle against Spain. All three were visionaries and political organizers who, with great literary verve, analytical perspicacity and sheer force of personality, opened the eyes of their people to the past, present, and future of their nation, and roused them to action. Contemporaries all—Betances was older than Martí by 26 years, and Rizal by 34, but all three died within the space of three years of each other—they resembled each other greatly: Martí took up law and philosophy and letters in Madrid and Zaragoza, wrote poetry and a novel, and was a brilliant essayist; Betances, a doctor trained in Paris, wrote novels and poetry; Rizal, a doctor trained in Madrid, Paris, and Heidelberg, studied philosophy and letters and wrote poetry, essays, and novels. All were committed body and soul to the liberation of their people. But in their respective national struggles, did they see the world in a similar way? In particular, did they *foresee* the Spanish-American War? Living under the shadow of the giant to the north, Martí and Betances would by this mere fact have had to contend with that looming presence, and they did, in their writings and political strategy. But what about Rizal for Filipinas, half a world away from the Americas? He who wrote voluminously on colonialism and dedicated his life to ending it, did he even speculate on imperialism as an emerging phenomenon?

### Spain against its Empire: The anti-colonial struggle

In 1882, the year Rizal arrived in Spain as a medical student, the most powerful politician in Spain gave a speech at the Ateneo de Madrid—“*Discurso sobre la nación*” (Discourse on the Nation)—on where the motherland stood in international affairs. Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, president and architect of the reinstalled constitutional monarchy of Spain (*La Restauración*) (The Restoration), sought to answer his own question: *¿Qué es España?* (What is Spain?). His answer laid the limits to what the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos could do or aspire for and set the aims that the Empire should pursue, in a world of heightened rivalry among the powers.

The Spanish Empire, Cánovas conceded, had been reduced to the Peninsula and the three island-colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Futile, he said, to ponder and lament on the past: the future lay ahead and today there were tasks to be done. Spain remained one and indivisible. Whilst the Empire might have lost “*su gloria de otros siglos*” (her glory of centuries past) with the loss of the South American continent, the Empire must remain counted amongst the elite powers in this day and age—“*ese corto número de naciones superiores*” (“this small number of superior nations”). This the Empire could do only if she remained exactly that—an empire. Against the cacophonous movements for change within the Peninsula and overseas, particularly the separatist insurrection in Cuba, one thing must not change: the Empire must persist in her “civilizing mission” abroad for this gave her honour and prestige. “*Máندانos el deber nuestro, ... que entremos en el número de las naciones expansivas, absorbentes, que sobre sí han tomado el empeño de llevar a término la ardua empresa de civilizar el mundo entero.*”<sup>4</sup>

The Great Powers were expanding and absorbing nations which had taken upon themselves the arduous task of civilizing the entire world, and this should also be the duty of Spain to mankind. He clarified that this did not necessarily mean the old mission of converting natives to Catholicism, reminding the audience that historically the cross always accompanied the sword; rather, it was the

<sup>4</sup> “Let our duty be our command...that we figure amongst the expanding, absorbing nations, which have taken upon themselves the challenge to carry through the arduous task of civilizing the entire world” (translation mine). Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, *Discurso sobre la nación, Ateneo de Madrid, 6 de Noviembre de 1882, Introducción de Andrés de Blas* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1997).

duty of Spain, like any other great power, to spread through all her dominions overseas the values and institutions of *European civilization as universal values*, transforming peoples everywhere according to these values and thus making *the entire world one*. The speech, in short, could well have been delivered today by any of the world leaders on historic state visits, exhorting everywhere the universal values of democracy, human rights, and freedom—or at the United Nations Security Council justifying “regime change” for the recalcitrant. To the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos of 1882, the message behind the ideological veneer was loud and clear: Cánovas would not tolerate dismemberment of the Empire.

The Cubans knew what they were up against. For years, there had been a strong separatist movement in Cuba, and from 1868 to 1878, there was a continuing but uncoordinated separatist insurrection in different regions on the island, which cost 200,000 lives in ten years of fighting and social disorder, but separatism whether revolutionary or gradualist had been uneasily suppressed by the colonial government. A compromise ended that insurrection (*El Pacto de Zanjón*, The Zanjón Pact)—rebels’ arms in exchange for amnesty and reform—and a stalemate between the loyalist *integristas* and nationalist *separatistas* inside Cuba ensued; but continuing Spanish misgovernment and deteriorating economic conditions in the succeeding years stoked the flames of separatism anew, never mind that Cuba (and Puerto Rico, but not Filipinas) was represented once again (the last time for all was 1837) in the Spanish Cortes. To Martí and many others, efforts of reform and the changed status of Cuba *within* the Empire were too little and too late: through that bitter ten-year insurrection and a shorter uprising that followed (*La Guerra Chiquita*, The Little War) Cubans had shown their willingness to shed blood for their conviction that only by decisively winning independence from Spain and taking charge of their own national destiny could they bring about the changes that they wanted for themselves—Spain, politically unstable Spain, had problems of her own. The question at hand was no longer assimilation or independence, but how to win the revolution the next time. This was what occupied Martí and his comrades as they prepared for the revolution, not in Europe and not in Central America but in the United States, where they organized in 1892 the Cuban Revolutionary Party. In three years, they launched the revolution. True to Cánovas’ vision of Spain remaining intact as an empire, the government in Madrid took a maximalist position: the revolution will be crushed, even if it means Spain having “to spend up to the last man and to the last *peseta*.”<sup>5</sup>

As journalist and political party theoretician and organizer based in New York for extended periods of time, Martí followed way up close the rapidly developing intentions of the United States on Cuba. Off and on during the 1880s, there was talk of intervention threats against Mexico and Guatemala, and the same strategic logic would equally apply for Cuba, if not more so; then the focus did shift to this island closest to the continent. In 1889, at an Inter-American Congress held in Washington, options of purchase, annexation, and seizure of Cuba by the United States were discussed and widely reported in the media; writing in an Argentinian journal that year, Martí concluded:

What is becoming apparent is that the nature of the North American government is gradually changing its fundamental reality. Under the traditional labels of Republican and Democrat, with no innovation other than the contingent circumstances of place and character, the republic is becoming plutocratic and imperialistic.<sup>6</sup>

Martí expected that the interest of the United States in Cuba could only increase in the immediate future for reasons not difficult to discern even then and in fact already openly debated in public

<sup>5</sup> José Martí, *Argentina y la Primera Conferencia Panamericana*, ed. Dardo Cúneo (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Transición, 1955),

<sup>6</sup> Joaquín Roy, *The Cuban Revolution (1959–2009): Relations with Spain, the European Union, and the United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9–10.

fora and the press, but he hoped nevertheless that opponents of expansionism would prevail in the formulation of US foreign policy. This hope was boldly enunciated in the Cuban Revolutionary Party's "Bases and Statutes," one of whose aims was to maintain friendly relations with the United States.<sup>7</sup> To Martí, one thing was indisputable: only a successful revolution that would unite all Cubans into building a society that ensured "the welfare and prosperity of all Cubans"<sup>8</sup> independently of class, occupation, or race could counter Washington's expansionist tendencies and strengthen the anti-expansionist forces "in the Land of Lincoln."<sup>9</sup> Decidedly, Cuba's future lay with its sister nations in Latin America, for they would have to act as a united front against the colossus of the North. In 1894, he wrote:

Cuba and Puerto Rico will enter freedom [...] with far greater responsibilities than have the other Spanish American nations. [...]

[The islands] lie astride the pivot of America; if enslaved, they would be nothing but a pontoon bridge for an imperialist republic's war against the [...] world already preparing to deny it power; they would be merely a fortress of an American Rome. If free [...] they would be the guarantee of a continental balance [of power], of independence for a still threatened Spanish America, and of honor for the great republic of the North. The United States will find more certain greatness in the development of its own land [...] than in the ignoble conquest of its lesser neighbors, and in the inhumane struggle—once it has them in its possession—that it will unleash against the global powers for world domination.<sup>10</sup>

Martí clearly saw it coming: there most certainly would be an imperialist war in the Americas if and when the United States marched across the Caribbean to establish footholds as a pontoon bridge for eventual predominance over Latin America. Who would fight the giant? He said, "the world [was] already preparing to deny it power,"<sup>11</sup> so the "global powers" themselves, acting in their own self-interest, could be expected to move to check this advance of a would-be new Rome. But the immediate burden was on Cuba and Puerto Rico to win their revolution decisively, and from this position of strength, deny the United States the ease of grabbing them, for only when freed from the Spanish colonial yoke could they be strong enough to resist US imperialism and thereby guarantee a continental balance of power between Latin America and the United States, for the good of all. The hope, here again, was for the North Americans to realize that the greatness of their country lay in the continuing development of their own land and not in the ignoble conquest of their lesser neighbors, and thus to refrain themselves from making a bid for world domination. But it was a hope contingent on one fundamental premise: that Cuba and Puerto first freed themselves from Spain if they were not themselves to be merely pawns in the global power game.

This was exactly how Ramón Emeterio Betances saw it too, but the Puerto Rican doctor would take a step further. Pushing for direct intervention of Puerto Ricans in the Cuban struggle for independence as a common cause, he advocated for the creation of a broader political union to withstand the grand design of the United States. This entity to strive for was what he called the

<sup>7</sup> John M. Kirk, "Jose Marti and the United States: A Further Interpretation," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 9, no. 2 (1977): 275–90, 290, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00020617>.

<sup>8</sup> José Martí, "Speech known as 'Con todos y para el bien de todos' given in Tampa, 26 November 1891," in *Obras Completas, Tomo 6: Nuestra Americana* (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963), 270.

<sup>9</sup> Kirk, "Jose Marti and the United States," 284.

<sup>10</sup> José Martí, *Obras Completas, Tomo 6: Nuestra Americana* (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> José Martí, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence* (New York: NYU Press, 1977), 360.



“Antillean Confederation”—to be comprised by Cuba and his own Puerto Rico, and also for Haiti and the Dominican Republic to join in. To this end he worked tirelessly with his prodigious talents, as propagandist for revolutionary causes anywhere in the colonial world, as fundraiser and recruiter for the Cuban independence movement, as lobbyist with the US Congress against the annexation of the Dominican Republic, as diplomatic representative and press officer of Cuba and the Antillean islands in France, and—when the Filipinos, too, fought their revolution half a world away—as coordinator in Paris for external support for the Philippine independence movement, maintaining contacts with the Filipino revolutionaries until his death in 1898. Earlier than most, he had anticipated US ambitions to take over the old European overseas possessions lying in what the North Americans considered their *Mare Nostrum*; this he sought to counteract by political campaign and diplomatic initiatives in Europe. To those in the colonies who started pragmatically to weigh the balance between Spain and the US as masters of their fate, he had only one answer: “*No quiero colonia, ni con España, ni con los Estados Unidos* (I want no colony, neither of Spain, nor of the United States).”<sup>12</sup>

To Martí, the choice was inescapable in its logic: to revolt against Spain with all their might even whilst preparing to fight the North Americans as well, but it would not be wise to say so openly. On the eve of the assault to be led by him against the Spanish forces, in a letter to a friend dated May 18, 1895, he wrote:

I am in daily danger of giving my life for my country and duty, for I understand that duty and have the courage to carry it out—the duty of preventing the United States from spreading through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from overpowering with that additional strength our lands of America. All I have done so far, and all I will do, is for this purpose. [...] It had to be in silence and sort of indirectly since the achievement of certain goals demands concealment for, if proclaimed for what they really are, obstacles so formidable would rise as to prevent their attainment.<sup>13</sup>

In truth, nothing would be more demoralizing for the Cubans than to know, even as they were yet to launch their revolution, that they were up against two powerful enemies at the same time, or—that would be the wily thing for the North Americans to do, and wait in fact they did—one after the other.

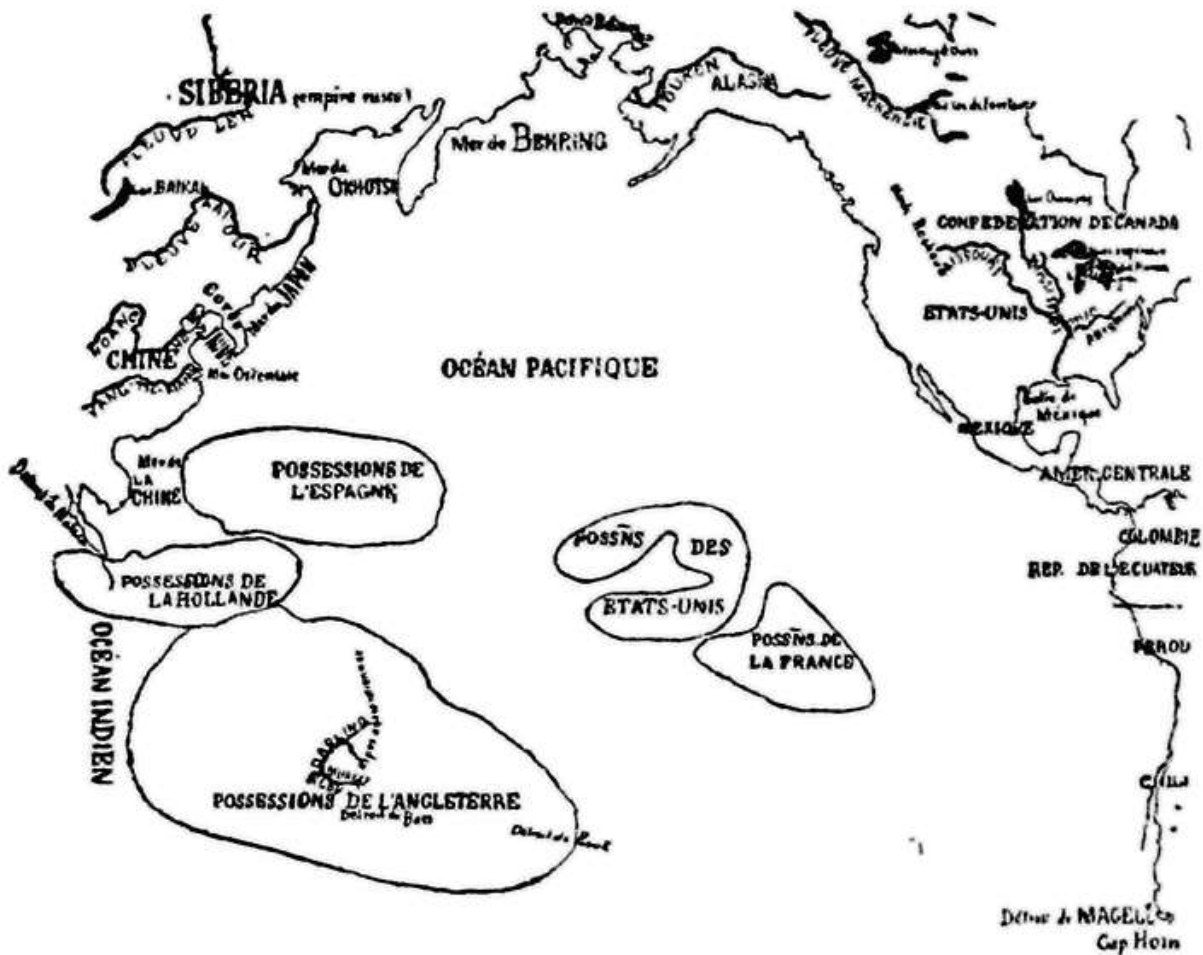
Throwing caution to the winds, Martí on horseback led the charge against the Spanish forces the day after and fell dead. That letter, unfinished, was in his pocket. In it, he had written the now famous last words: “I have lived in the monster and I know its entrails; my sling is David’s.”

### Rizal on *possible* US interest in the Philippines, 1890

Unlike Martí and Betances, Rizal never lived in the United States. He travelled cross-country from San Francisco to New York some three weeks in 1888 but wrote precious little, and this only in a diary and in a letter, about his impressions of the continent. Nothing serious—his light-hearted description of a loud-mouthed American fellow traveler seemed more like notes for a novel. He did comment on the racism he saw for himself, but in passing. He would write more seriously about the United States in early 1890, although only in one highly distilled paragraph, in the closing pages of his essay *Filipinas dentro de cien años*.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Geigel-Gaztambide, “El imperio bueno del 98: una comparación entre los nuevos imperios europeos y el estadounidense,” in *Pasión por la libertad: Actas, Coloquio Internacional ‘El Independentismo Puertorriqueno, de Betances a Nuestro Día*, eds. Felix Ojeda Reyes and Paul Estarde (Paris: Instituto de Estudios del Caribe y Editorial De La Universidad De Puerto Rico), 96.

<sup>13</sup> Jose Marti, *José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas* (New York: Ocean Press, 2002).



A sketch map, by Dr. Rizal, of spheres of influence in the Pacific at the time of writing "The Philippines A Century Hence," as they appeared to him.

Most of the French names will be easily recognized, though it may be noted that "Etats Unis" is our own United States, "L'Angleterre" England, and "L'Espagne" Spain.

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Image and caption lifted from José Rizal, *The Philippines A Century Hence*, ed. Austin Craig and trans. Charles Derbyshire (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912).

Rizal ends that essay with a quick survey of the international scene, picking out countries with interest in Asia that may also have some interest in the Philippines should the Filipinos succeed in seceding from the Spanish Empire. He starts with the Europeans:

*Si las Filipinas consiguen su independencia al cabo de luchas heroicas y tenaces, pueden estar seguras de que ni Inglaterra, ni Alemania, ni Francia, y menos Holanda se atreverán a recoger lo que España no ha podido conservar.*<sup>14</sup>

(If the Philippines attain their independence at the end of heroic and tenacious struggles, they can be sure that neither England, nor Germany, nor France, and Holland even less will dare to seize what Spain has not been able to keep.)<sup>15</sup>

These European powers, he is quite sure, will be fully absorbed by the scramble for Africa in the years to come, and none of them would be so lacking sense as to gamble for some poor islands the immensity and wealth of the Dark Continent. England has enough colonies in the Far East—think of India alone—and will not risk putting the equilibrium of powers at risk. Germany will avoid adventurism because any disequilibrium of its power triggered by a war in far places will imperil its existence in the Continent. Avid like all the others, it is nevertheless cautious and will get only what does not yet belong to others. France has more to do in Cochin-China than anywhere else, and moreover has problems of her own demanding attention, both domestic and continental. Sensible Holland is contented with the Moluccas and Java and would prefer Sumatra to the Philippines. But even with Sumatra and Borneo, she treads carefully for fear of losing everything she already has.

He then considers the two Asian powers. China will consider herself lucky enough if she can remain united and not be dismembered, given the danger of herself being repartitioned by the European powers which are already colonizing the Asian Continent. Japan is on the same boat and is under European diplomatic pressure internally that restrains her conduct of external affairs. For her excess population, there is Korea, easier to take—but will she?

He then devotes a longer paragraph on the United States:

*Acaso la gran República Americana, cuyos intereses se encuentran en el Pacífico y que no tiene participación en los despojos del África, piense un día en posesiones ultramarinas. No es imposible, pues el ejemplo es contagioso, la codicia y la ambición son vicios de los fuertes, y Harrison se manifestó algo en este sentido, cuando la cuestión de Samoa; pero ni el Canal de Panamá está abierto, ni los territorios de los Estados tienen plétora de habitantes, y caso de que lo intentara abiertamente, no le dejarían paso libre las potencias europeas, que saben muy bien que el apetito se excite con los primeros bocados. La América del Norte sería una rival demasiado molesta, si una vez practica el oficio. Es, además, contra sus tradiciones.*<sup>16</sup>

(Perhaps the great American Republic, whose interests lie in the Pacific and who has no share in the plunder of Africa, may one day think of overseas possessions. It is not impossible, since the example is contagious, greed and ambition are the vices of the strong, and Harrison expressed himself in this sense over the question of Samoa. But the Panama Canal is not open, the territories of the United States are not swamped

<sup>14</sup> Jose Rizal, "Filipinas dentro de Cien Años," in *Escritos Políticos e Históricos, Tomo VII* (Manila: Edición del Centenario, Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), 161. This was originally serialized in *La Solidaridad* from 1889 to 1890 (numbers 16, 18, 21, and 24).

<sup>15</sup> Translation of all quotes by Rizal in this essay is mine.

<sup>16</sup> Rizal, "Filipinas dentro de Cien Años," 162–63.

with inhabitants, and if she were to make this attempt openly, she would not be given free rein by the European powers who know only too well that the appetite is opened with the first bite: North America would be too troublesome a rival, once it gets into the business. Moreover, this would be contrary to her traditions.)

Rizal recognizes offhand that the interests of the United States lie in the Pacific. This is what her leaders themselves declare as a matter of national interest, and the pattern is clear for all to see. In 1875, Hawaii becomes a virtual US protectorate, at the instigation of American planters on the islands. In 1878, the United States acquires a coaling station at Pago Pago, Samoa, so crucial for its steamships traversing the Pacific Ocean. And in 1889 (the time of writing of *Cien Años*), the United States acquires Pearl Harbor as another coaling station and future naval base. Truly there is no question that the interests of the United States lie in the Pacific; the question rather is *where next* in the vast ocean the Americans might put their mind to. But so far they have *not acquired* any overseas possessions by the usual ways of conquest, annexation,<sup>17</sup> and colonization; the legal instrumentality of a protectorate and the commercial transaction of leasing territory seem to suffice for their purposes—for now. They *may* yet, he concedes: “it is not impossible.”<sup>18</sup>

Rizal finds it significant that the great American Republic has taken no part in the plunder or spoliation (*los despojos*) of Africa—words that had become current and would be inseparable from any subsequent discourse on imperialism—and he takes this to mean that Washington is not inclined so far to play the Big Powers’ game. But then again, who knows? The economic motive (*la codicia*, greed or covetousness) is always there—this was precisely what Lenin theorized as the compelling motive of monopoly capitalism propelling imperialism. Rizal himself explains it a bit further in a fragment of a draft that was not integrated into the published essay.

*Por último, en la época presente se establecen colonias en territorios que se suponen libres o no pertenecientes a ningún señor, como las que se forman en el centro y en las costas oriental y occidental del África, con más pudor y menos hipocresía, para explotar las riquezas que aquellos terrenos vírgenes encierran. Desapareció el antiguo pretexto de la conversión al cristianismo...*<sup>19</sup>

(Finally, in the present epoch colonies are established in territories supposedly free or not belonging to some lord, such as those which are being formed at the center and the eastern and western coasts of Africa, with more honesty and less hypocrisy, in order to exploit the riches that those virgin lands conceal. The old pretext of conversion to Christianity has disappeared.)

It is a different form of domination, he remarks; unlike colonialism, this one has no need for ideological rationalization as cover for hardnosed business interests, none of this pretension of Europe’s civilizing mission. It is economics that motivates the scramble for Africa, and that is that.

Then there is the “ambition” of power to aggrandize itself, which was what contemporary observers of global affairs were primarily concerned with. This drive is inherent to the dynamics of the interstate system at the core: call it force of example or the contagion effect as Rizal puts it, but the logic of the interstate system is such that when one state increases its power by strategic positioning or territorial

<sup>17</sup> Except for Midway Island, annexed in 1867, but no one seemed to notice.

<sup>18</sup> Jose Rizal, “Filipinas dentro de Cien Años,” In *The Philippines, A Century Hence Hence*, tr. Charles Derbyshire (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912), 162–63, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/35899/35899-h/35899-h.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Rizal, “Filipinas dentro de Cien Años,” 441.

aggrandizement or arms build-up, so do the others. Power among states is not an inherent attribute of each, but a relationship between two or more; so any increase in the power of one state disturbs the ranking system and affects the equilibrium, provoking the other state(s) most affected to redress the balance by doing the same. Rizal lived through that century of global politics since the Congress of Vienna where Balance of Power held the key to peace, or kept war under lock; thus, in his speculation on the motives of the European states, he talks of “equilibrium” and “disequilibrium” as a major factor in the calculations of statesmen. By the same logic, he expects that, like any other state, the United States may “follow the example” of others should they acquire strategic footholds overseas or embark on self-aggrandizement—another way of saying that Washington will not allow the power differentials among states to deteriorate to her detriment and will surely do the same. He cites in particular the case of Samoa, whose perfect strategic location for a coaling station in the Pacific was the object of intense rivalry among the Germans, British, and Americans.

Samoa was indeed a classic case of a society torn apart by contending external forces, to which Rizal would return in a subsequent text. The Americans were the first to move to negotiate a treaty with the Samoan chiefs, but they lost time in getting the US Senate to ratify it, giving the quicker Germans the chance to establish the strongest presence there with a trading company in place. When finally ratified, the American-Samoan friendship treaty was on a nonexclusive basis, so to the annoyance of the State Department and the Navy the Americans now had to contend with the Germans and the British for influence in the islands, a course of action firmly set by President Harrison. This is not exactly “follow the example”—Rizal’s ordinary-language phrase is clearly inadequate here—but rather involves positioning oneself so as not to give the others a strategic advantage, whether in military or commercial terms, over oneself. As we shall see later, it was at this time when a major paradigmatic shift was occurring in America’s geostrategic thinking, highlighting the indispensability of tiny islands in the midst of the ocean to control of the seas: Germany, the UK, and the US were already at this time playing catch as catch can in the immensity of the Pacific.

But then Rizal presents counter-arguments to himself. Even if it is not impossible for the United States to acquire overseas possessions, it is rather unlikely to happen—he seems to be convincing himself and the reader. These are four, simply stated as bullet-points in a single compressed paragraph. It is for us to explicate their full significance.

Firstly, the Panama Canal is not open. A curious interjection: why does it matter to the US, and why should it affect Washington’s possible interest in the Philippines? The Panama Canal, after all, was an ambitious French undertaking which proved to be more formidable than the construction of the Suez Canal. Begun in 1880, construction was vigorously pushed by *Société internationale du Canal interocéanique* against all odds; but by 1889, when Rizal started writing *Cien Años*, the French engineers and their tens of thousands of Afro-Caribbean workers were nowhere near their target, and the project was overwhelmed with massive problems—from shortage of finance capital to underestimated technical challenges to high mortality of workers from malaria and yellow fever. By any reckoning, the French proved unable to back up with material resources the sheer audacity with which they embarked on the project. But the audacity was not that of Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal, who ventured to duplicate in a tropical jungle what he did in the desert. The real audacity was that the French dared encroach into a hemisphere declared by the Americans in their Monroe Doctrine of 1823 as their hegemonic zone. President Hayes reasserted this policy in 1879 when the French announced their plans: any such canal must be regarded as “virtually a part of the coastline of the United States.”<sup>20</sup> Rizal does not comment on this and states only as a fact that since

<sup>20</sup> Richard Overy, *The Times Atlas of World History* (Times Books: London, 1984), 246.

the Canal is not open, the US cannot be expected to make any move such as would have repercussions for the Philippines. We shall get back to this later to explain what is really meant by this.

Secondly, the territories of the United States are not overpopulated. Overpopulation, along with the related problem of lack of livelihood opportunities (because of shortage of land and scarcity of employment), is of course the major motivation for *settler* colonialism. For lack of livelihood opportunities at home, Spaniards settle in South America, the English move to North America and Oceania, and Japan—as Rizal speculates in this essay—might settle her excess population in Korea (rather than in the Philippines, farther away). But the United States faces no such problems, so why should Americans want to settle elsewhere?<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, should she aggressively expand overseas, North America will meet with resistance by European Powers. This is the mechanics of the system of Balance of Power, set in place by the Concert of Europe at the end of the Napoleonic Wars: any move by a state that disturbs the strategic equilibrium of the interstate system elicits a reaction from the others. Expectedly, Pres. Harrison's declaration of America's economic and military interests in the Pacific island leads to a near-war event with Germany. Rizal concludes from this case that aggressive expansionism by the United States will not be permitted by the European powers, and that the certainty of such reaction will deter Washington from further pursuing such policies. The Europeans can be expected to nip it at the bud, for once North America "has a first bite" and "gets into the business," it will be too troublesome a rival to contain. Predatory politics is what Rizal clearly has in mind; a decade later comes a new word for this: "imperialism."<sup>22</sup>

But, and that's a very big but, and Rizal suddenly ends his ruminations here: he says that this is contrary to America's traditions. Contrary to which tradition exactly? It cannot be that of waging wars, because warfare has been part of American history from the beginning, and Rizal of course knows that. Warfare broke out in the New World just a generation after the Pilgrims came to New England in 1620: the Indian Wars did not end until the massacre of the last Indians at Wounded Knee in 1890 (when Rizal completed writing *Cien Años*). Even before the American Revolution, the colonists already warred against the French (and their Indian allies), a trans-Atlantic extension of the conflict between France and England, and after the Revolution came a number of wars: with the British again (War of 1812), the Barbary Wars (against the pirates in North Africa), the Seminole War (against Spaniards and their Indian allies for hegemonic supremacy in the hemisphere, which produced the Monroe Doctrine), the Mexican War (which completed the territorial expansion westward to the shores of California), and the most bitter of all, the Civil War, to keep it all together. Decidedly, warring is not contrary to America's traditions. Indeed the trans-continental expansion of the United States from the original thirteen colonies, and the struggle to keep the ever-expanding territory one and entire,

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that in imperialism, it is not poor migrants and oppressed minorities who move in and take over the land (like the Pilgrims to New England); it is capital (what Lenin calls "export of capital") that comes to dominate.

In Hawaii, it was capitalist agriculture—the sugar trust—that took over the islands and later, with the support of the United States Marines, deposed the native monarchy, Queen Liliuokalani, paving the way for Hawaii's annexation. This was in 1893, so still lay ahead when Rizal wrote *Cien Años*.

<sup>22</sup> Note that Martí was already using the word in 1889 (see footnote 3), which he must have picked up from Anglo-American journalism. Hobsbawm gives a history of the word: "[T]here is no doubt that the word 'imperialism' first became part of the political and journalistic vocabulary during the 1890s in the course of the arguments about colonial conquest. Moreover, that is when it acquired the economic dimension which, as a concept, it has never since lost. [...] The word (which does not occur in the writings of Karl Marx, who died in 1883) first entered politics in Britain in the 1870s, and was still regarded as a neologism at the end of that decade. It exploded into general use in the 1890s. By 1900, when the intellectuals began to write books about it, it was, to quote one of the first of them, the British Liberal J. A. Hobson, 'on everybody's lips...and used to denote the most powerful movement in the current politics of the western world.' In short, it was a novel term devised to describe a novel phenomenon." Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 60.

was achieved either by purse or by force, and many of the country's heroes were generals and many generals became presidents.<sup>23</sup>

The tradition that Rizal refers to is the belief amongst Americans that their place in the world (between two oceans) and their place in history (the landing of the *Mayflower* divides history into a before and after) mark them out as a nation destined to create a new world isolated from the never-ending conflicts of old Europe. In crossing the Atlantic, they as a people left behind them the values and traditions of the old world, particularly the propensity to war amongst the powers arising from their “entangling alliances” and, equally to blame, from their cynical methods of statecraft. Americans are far from there now, geographically and morally, with a geopolitical premise and a moral promise all their own: we Americans, counseled George Washington in his farewell address, shall not “implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her [European] politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities. Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course.”<sup>24</sup> A course so different it is exceptional: just as divine providence has put Americans in a world apart, so shall they part from the ways of the world. Geographical isolationism and moral exceptionalism combine to make America unique, with a tradition and orientation all her own, shared with no other nation. This means, as a matter of policy, not to get involved in other people's wars; it does not mean, in practice, not to wage wars of your own.

Rizal leaves it at that.

What are we to conclude, then? That the United States can pursue territorial expansionism; engage in annexationist, predatory, and plunderous wars (I am using Lenin's words here); join the global power game of the European states (Rizal's words); in short, be imperialist as the Europeans are—*no es imposible*, Rizal states clearly—but that it will not, because all this is contrary to her traditions? A would-be imperialist restrained by itself, is there such a thing?

Was this all that Rizal wrote on the United States and imperialism? Published in his lifetime, yes. Unpublished, no.

### Rizal on geopolitics, 1890 (?)

Among Rizal's extant papers are many fragments of drafts, research notes, and unfinished manuscripts, covering a very wide range of topics that display the multitude of his talents and the diversity of his interests. One of them, undated, is simply labeled by the editors of his complete works as “*La política intercontinental (fragmento de un borrador, sin fecha)*.” If I were to put a date on it, I would venture 1890. *Cien Años* was published in *La Solidaridad* in four installments between September 1889 and February 1890, hectic months when Rizal was finishing his exhausting work on the annotation of Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*; at this point he was already feeling the pressure to get on with *El Filibusterismo*. I would therefore add that this “fragment of a draft” was written not long after February

<sup>23</sup> Thus, long before Rizal's time, the battle song of the US Marines was historically complete:

From the halls of Montezuma [Mexican War]  
To the shores of Tripoli [the Barbary Wars],  
We will fight our country's battles,  
On the land and on the sea...

With “regime change” effected in Libya only recently, the Marines' song gets a fresh workover. For a comprehensive treatment of warfare in US history, see Edwin P. Hoyt, *America's Wars and Military Excursions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987) and William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> George Washington's Farewell Address, September 17, 1796, quoted in Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 32.

1890, perhaps meant to be the beginning of a new essay but abandoned in favor of getting started with that incendiary novel—or perhaps for some other reason we have yet to explore. But even the novel had to be set aside for a while, as Rizal shifted next to respond to the continuing colonial discourse on “the lazy native” as cause of his own poverty. To deconstruct this insidious myth, Rizal turned to history and sociology (today we would call it the sociology of underdevelopment) and set aside his prognostics of global affairs.

So we have only what he managed to write down, which I reproduce in full and translate below. A single paragraph, of the same length as the paragraph on the United States in *Cien Años*, it is in some ways a mirror image of that one. Which is to say, it is the reverse of what he says there... or if not quite, nearly so. In stark contrast to the published paragraph, which starts with that adverb of uncertainty “Acaso...” (“Perhaps...”) that casts a sense of tentativeness to his observations throughout, this one starts with the certainty of stating a matter of fact, and carries that tone of conclusiveness all through the text.

*La política intercontinental (fragmento de un borrador, sin fecha)*

*La política intercontinental señala el primer paso de un coloso: Los Estados Unidos dejando sus tradiciones para tomar parte activa en la política colonial de las naciones europeas. Así lo han dado a entender en la última cuestión de Samoa, así lo ha declarado el Presidente Harrison en su Mensaje y así lo interpretan las primeras potencias colonizadoras de Europa. Los alemanes se han encontrado con un obstáculo, la resistencia de un pueblo joven, robusto y no acostumbrado a sufrir derrotas, y el Viejo Canciller no viendo en la discordia ni utilidad ni seguridad en el éxito prefiere dar solución a las diferencias por medio de un Congreso. La Inglaterra ve en el brother Jonathan un digno rival, que sigue el mismo sistema que ella, y naturalmente se alarma. Todas estas naciones que miran a lo lejos se disputan las islas del Pacífico para establecer estaciones, depósitos de [illegible] para cuando [illegible]...<sup>25</sup>*

(Global politics (fragment of a draft, undated))

Intercontinental politics marks the first step of a colossus: the United States, departing from its traditions, takes an active part in the colonial politics of European nations. So has it been meant to be understood on the last issue of Samoa, so has it been declared by President Harrison in his Message, and so has it been interpreted by the first-ranked colonial powers of Europe. The Germans have met with an obstacle, the resistance of a young nation, robust, and not inclined to suffer failure; thus the old Chancellor, seeing no usefulness in discord, nor any assurances of success, prefers to seek the resolution of dispute by means of a Conference. England sees in her brother Jonathan a worthy rival, who follows the same system as she, and is naturally alarmed. All these nations who look far dispute amongst themselves the islands of the Pacific, there to establish bases, depôts of [illegible] so when [illegible]...

He thus starts by finishing off the fourth of his own counter-arguments with which he ended that paragraph in *Cien Años*: negating what he says there, he announces that the United States has abandoned definitely and decisively its tradition of isolationism, and now takes part in the colonial politics of European nations. It does so with great force, that of a colossus. No buts and ifs here. No

<sup>25</sup> Jose Rizal, *Escritos Varios por José Rizal, Tomo VIII, Segunda Parte* (Manila: Comisión Nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), 433.



prevarications and hesitations. No need for the diplomatic game of ambiguity to cover real motives. President Harrison himself acts differently: in *Cien Años* he “expressed himself in this sense” (*se manifestó algo en este sentido*) of seemingly following the example of other states; now he boldly declares his government’s intention in his message to Congress. America will not be pushed out of Samoa, let this be understood by the first-ranked colonial powers of Europe: she will not hesitate to go to war with any of them. If Rizal still uses the word “colonial” to describe this policy and practice of the Great Powers, it is because “imperialism” has yet to enter his world of discourse, but he already points to the radically new element in interstate behavior. The old colonialism used force to conquer a militarily inferior people in order to subjugate them and take over their lands and colonize them. The new colonialism—imperialism—uses force against other powers in order to wrest from them their colonial possessions (repartition of the colonies) or repel them from one’s hegemonic space (division of the world) or to dispossess and carve up a declining empire such as Manchu China (spheres of influence). No island in the midst of the ocean is too small to fight over; the Powers are aching for a fight. Nor is an entity too big to be carved up by the Powers: witness the scramble for Africa, Britain’s dominion over the South Asian sub-continent, even the threatened partition of China as noted by Rizal. The objective is to amass power worldwide, to be in control of strategic positions for military and commercial purposes, to gain access to the natural wealth of territories regardless of whose colony they may be. Recall in this connection what Rizal says about the partition of Africa—the economic motive is understood by all the powers because they all pursue the same, there is no need to fool each other and the natives with any civilizing mission as a screen or justification. The motive to exploit the natural resources (*explotar las riquezas*) of these lands needs no justification other than itself, economic self-interest, and it is only the strong—“*ese corto número de naciones superiores*” as Cánovas put it—who have the privilege to pursue it: in the age of rivalry among the Powers, might is right.

What so impressed Rizal that he changed his mind was the unexpected turn of events on the issue of Samoa (*la última cuestión de Samoa*). Let us review the chain of events. The Americans, British, and Germans—their respective friendship treaties with the Samoans signed and their coaling stations in place—played domestic politics with opposing factions vying for power. When the Germans instigated their local ally to usurp the power of the reigning king in 1888, and civil war erupted, Washington threatened intervention if the Germans continued to use force to influence the outcome of the war. For months, the two navies were locked in a stand-off at Apia Harbor, three US warships and three German warships on the ready to fire at each other, with a British warship monitoring the tense situation. The firefight, sure to come at the bat of an eyelash, was prevented by an act of God: in March 1889, a devastating typhoon wrecked all the ships, snuffed out a lot of lives, and brought some sense to prevail over the confrontation after the storm. But the clash of interests remained, another round expected.

Rizal had speculated that Germany would bare her fangs, and America would back down. He was in awe with Germany, then the fastest growing industrial economy in the world, at the apex of the intellectual and scientific world, *vainqueur de la France* in the Franco-Prussian War less than a decade earlier, and under the hegemonic leadership of the most astute statesman of the epoch. He was definitely not impressed with the United States as he traversed the entire continent west to east by train. And yet, it was Bismarck who sued for peace. It was not North America that met with the resistance of the European powers, as Rizal had speculated in *Cien Años*; it was instead the “the Germans [who] have met with an obstacle, the resistance of a young nation, robust and not inclined to suffer failure.”<sup>26</sup> A war in the Pacific had been avoided, thanks to the merciless typhoon. The “old Chancellor, seeing no usefulness in discord, nor any assurances of success, prefers to seek the resolution of dispute by

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

means of a Conference.”<sup>27</sup> The Americans prepared themselves well for the Berlin Conference—there they were equally prepared to fight to pursue their agenda. This was the instruction of Secretary of State James Blaine to the American delegates to the Berlin Conference:

Our interest on the Pacific is steadily increasing; our commerce with the East is developing largely and rapidly; and the certainty of an early Isthmian transit from the Atlantic to the Pacific (under American protection) must create changes in which no power can be so directly or more durably interested than the United States.<sup>28</sup>

They got what they wanted. Germany, USA, and UK agreed amongst themselves to guarantee protection of life, property, and commerce for each of them, and declared a joint protectorate or condominium professing to recognize a Samoan monarchy whilst running their respective affairs on the islands as they well pleased (ten years later the “unstable” monarchy would be done away with altogether and the islands were partitioned between Germany, which got the western islands, and USA the east, with some sort of rights for UK).

Rizal also notes that England’s reaction to America’s entry into the power game is one of alarm, naturally, but surprisingly not more. John Bull sees in Brother Jonathan (as Uncle Sam was known then) a worthy rival, by no means an enemy. *Paso libre* from the powers that mattered: there will be no restraining the American colossus. Rizal thus concludes that his third counterargument has been invalidated by events.

These are nations that look far, notes Rizal, and for now they dispute amongst themselves the islands in the Pacific for naval bases, coaling stations, etc. The draft ends here, with some words or phrases illegible. Following his line of thought, we can deduce that what follows “to establish bases, depôts of [illegible] so when [illegible]...” has to do with logistics of men and materiel for any eventuality, including war.

What about the second counterargument—that the United States territories are not overpopulated? True, by the usual understanding of the word and in comparison with other countries, the USA can in no way be thought of as “overpopulated,” as the US Census of 1890 reveals. But the same Census also concludes that with the massacre of the last Indian braves at Wounded Knee that same year, leaving the Plains Indian lands defenseless for the taking, there is in fact no more frontier land to conquer, the United States having reached the western limits of the continent.<sup>29</sup> A startling revelation to a people grown accustomed to endless expansion westward, this leads many Americans to worry that if the US does not expand any further, it will explode.<sup>30</sup> But where the land ends, the sea begins, and *that* is the

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Blaine to Kasson, Phelps, and Bates, April 11, 1899, *Foreign Relations, 1889* (1890), quoted in Stuart Anderson, “Pacific Destiny’ and American Policy in Samoa, 1872–1899,” *Hawaiian Historical Society* 12 (1978): 45–60, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/5014543.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> “Frontier” was defined conventionally as “the outer edge of the area with a population density of at least two persons per square mile. [...] After the census of 1890, the superintendent of the census observed that for the first time in American history, a single frontier-line was no longer visible on his map. The frontier, in that sense, had come to an end.” Overy, *The Times Atlas of World History*, 221. In this sense, the continent-state had become “overpopulated.”

<sup>30</sup> Overy’s *The Times Atlas of World History* (1984) sums up this historic conjuncture in a way that fits perfectly the thrust of this essay: “As the great powers of Europe pursued their imperial dreams in Africa and Asia, the United States enjoyed the luxury of a built-in empire. The westward movement may be understood as a type of domestic imperialism, with many of the same motives as the imperialist movement in Europe but with profoundly different results. The native culture of North America was not merely conquered but destroyed; an integrated capitalist democracy developed in its place” (220). Rizal thus understood it this way: for as long as there was a frontier westward to conquer, the USA would not step out into the world to grab colonies elsewhere; the corollary of course is that once the “built-in empire” was exhausted, it was time to engage in “external” imperialism. He obviously thought, in *Cien Años*, that the frontier had not yet been reached, the territories were not yet “overpopulated.”

new frontier. “Whether they will or no,” writes Alfred Thayer Mahan in the December 1890 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, “America must now begin to look outward.”<sup>31</sup>

“*Naciones que miran a lo lejos*,” (nations who look far) says Rizal of the powers engaged in “colonial politics.” For the United States, one man looks farther than anyone else and single-handedly sets the theoretical underpinnings for a paradigmatic shift in US geostrategic thinking: Mahan, then President of the Naval War College, chief naval strategist, and friend of the future US President Theodore Roosevelt. His book, given as lectures in 1887 and published in 1890: *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*. No book is to have greater influence on the course of US geostrategic thinking than this theoretical distillation of the hegemonic conflicts between Holland, England, France, and Spain. Its major thesis: command of the seas is the chief element in the power and prosperity of nations and it is therefore “imperative to take possession [...] of such maritime positions as contribute to secure command.”<sup>32</sup> Sea power is the controlling factor of global events as shown by history, from the conflict between Rome and Carthage in the ancient world to the Napoleonic naval wars between Britain and France: the Power that rules the waves rules the world. Thus the indispensability of taking possession of the Hawaiian Islands, “of unique importance” geographically for the “commercial and military control of the Pacific.” Thus the imperative to have the Samoan islands as coaling stations and naval bases. And thus the crucial significance of the Panama Canal: in the absence of adequate naval power, the Isthmian Canal—in Mahan’s view—constitutes more of a danger than an asset. The strategic policy is imperative: “We must without delay begin to build a navy which will at least equal that of England when the Canal shall have become a fact.”<sup>33</sup>

This takes us back to what Rizal says in *Cien Años*—at his time of writing, “*el Canal de Panamá [no] está abierto*” (“the Panama Canal is [not] open”) and for so long as it remains unfinished the United States is not expected to make a move for more islands in the Pacific. He knows for a fact that the French project is getting nowhere after ten years of herculean but sisyphusian efforts. Perhaps he concludes, like many others, that it will remain a failure and so there will be no fundamental change in the geostrategic equilibrium. As it happened, the French did give up three years later. But in 1899, the US set up the Isthmian Canal Commission and, in 1901, at its recommendation, bought out the defunct French project: the Americans took over the Canal in 1904 and finished it in 1914. On Mahan’s geostrategic policy recommendation, however, no time was wasted at all. That same year of 1890, the Navy began to build. In five years, starting from 12th place in the world, it rose to the top. It was ready to rule the waves.

So on the matter of the Panama Canal, Rizal only needed to see subsequent events unfold for him to knock off his first counterargument as being no longer valid, since it was conditional after all on an eventuality: *if and when* the Canal is finally opened, *then* the geostrategic value of the Philippines will loom large in Washington’s calculus of power. In 1890, he could not possibly foresee the United States taking over and completing the Canal. But he clearly saw that the great powers “looked far ahead” and were ready to dispute amongst themselves control of the islands in the Pacific for coaling stations and naval bases “so when [illegible]...”

This brings us back to Martí and Betances, for the purpose of the Panama Canal was to link the Pacific to the Atlantic, and its achievement would redefine geostrategic imperatives in both oceans:

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War: 1890–1914* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 149.

<sup>32</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power: Present and Future* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, Ltd., 1897), 52.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Tuchman, *The Proud Tower*, 150, 153.

Cuba and Puerto Rico stood right at the opening of the Atlantic side of the Canal. Mahan had said so, that the opening of the isthmian access to two oceans would demand the rapid build-up of the US Navy. This meant ships, the most modern of them, and naval bases, in the most strategic places. In the Senate, in 1895, Henry Cabot Lodge was quick to draw the conclusion for all: once the Panama Canal is built, “the island of Cuba will become a necessity”<sup>34</sup> to the United States, not just for strategic purposes as argued by Mahan but also because fundamentally

our immediate pecuniary interests in the island are very great. They are being destroyed [in the ongoing revolution]. Free Cuba would mean a great market for the United States; it would mean an opportunity for American capital invited there by special exemptions; it would mean an opportunity for the development of that splendid island...<sup>35</sup>

Sen. Morgan could not agree more: “Cuba should become an American colony.” And Sen. Frye put a finishing touch to it: “We certainly ought to have the island [of Cuba] in order to round out our possessions. If we cannot buy it, I for one, should like an opportunity to acquire it by conquest.”<sup>36</sup>

### The sling of David

“My sling is David’s,” wrote Martí on the eve of his death. Against Goliath, you can only fling a stone and hope to hit precisely your mark, with loads of self-confidence in what you do and absolute faith in the rightness of your cause—there is no other way. For Martí, this was not to be. He was going to die in great pride, he wrote in his last letter, knowing that this fight for freedom was what he had always wanted for his people, and that his people were fully behind him. He would have been prouder still had he known what they did accomplish. Spain, true to her word, spared no soldier to fight the rebels: 200,000 of them crossed the Atlantic to an island of barely a million and a half inhabitants, the largest movement of troops across the ocean in history (until the Normandy invasion, and subsequently the Gulf War, at roughly half-century intervals). The Cubans fought on to victory. The cost in lives on both sides was catastrophic. 200,000 Cubans died in five years, to add to the 200,000 who had died in the Ten Year War—in total, a quarter of Cuba’s population. On the Spanish side, 160,000 lives of young people in the same period, young men who mainly came from very poor rural families. “This is not a war against the Spaniard,”<sup>37</sup> Martí had written, “but against the greed and incapability of Spain.”<sup>38</sup> And he also said, “We Cubans began the war, and both Cubans and Spaniards will end it...”<sup>39</sup> But in fact they did not. In 1898, the Cuban Liberation Army was dispossessed of its victory when the United States declared war against an unwilling Spain, and by diplomatic maneuverings in Paris, grabbed Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines as spoils of war.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America: A People’s History of the Post-Reconstruction Era*, Vol. VI (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 543. See also H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), particularly the first three chapters on the US takeover of the Philippines.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Tuchman, *The Proud Tower*, 156.

<sup>37</sup> José Martí and Máximo Gómez, “Montecristi Manifiesto,” March 25, 1895, *Modern Latin America*, accessed June 12, 2018, <https://library.brown.edu/create/modernlatinamerica/chapters/chapter-4-cuba/primary-documents-w-accompanying-discussion-questions/document-8-montecristi-manifiesto-jose-marti-and-maximo-gomez-1895/>.

<sup>38</sup> Koichi Hagimoto, “Theatrical Performance in the Manifiesto: Comparative Analysis of Martí’s Manifiesto de Montecristi and Rizal’s Filipinas dentro de Cien Anos,” in *Between Empires: Martí, Rizal, and the Intercolonial Alliance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 59–90.

<sup>39</sup> Martí and Gómez, “Montecristi Manifiesto.”

<sup>40</sup> Raul Izquierdo Canosa, “The Cuban Struggle for Liberty and Independence” (Paper presented at the Dapitan Conference 2008: La Lucha por las Libertades, Cuba, Filipinas and Puerto Rico and the Political Struggles of Spain, 1868 to 1898).

Like Martí, Rizal envisioned in the last section of *Cien Años* a post-revolutionary nation, liberated by its own efforts and ready to face with newfound strength new challenges both within itself as well as in the world system (*[en la] patria, así como en el exterior*). That system had entered a new period of rivalry among the great powers, this he understood perfectly well, as we have seen. He saw his country, like Martí did his, as a vital piece in the global chessboard. Islands in the ocean not worth your trouble of seizing, he wanted the great powers to think, Africa is more valuable for your economies; but capital and state go hand in hand in the Age of Empire, and hegemony is to be won not in the depths of the Dark Continent but in the vastness of the seas. He had no illusions, just the faith of Martí that a people who have risen from oppression will not allow themselves to be oppressed again. As Rizal anticipated North America's geopolitical interest in the Philippines, he would have taken the same cautionary line of Martí not to speak openly of it so as not to demoralize the national liberation movement still carrying out its anti-colonial struggle. Furthermore, his geopolitical analysis made public would weaken his own argument against Spanish intransigence so forcefully challenged in *Cien Años*: why even revolt against Spain if only to fall into American hands? Were these not the reasons why, after writing that single paragraph on la política intercontinental, he stopped right there, not wanting to draw openly his own conclusions on the possible fate of his people? "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"<sup>41</sup>—and the evil to combat today is Spanish colonialism; but tomorrow? He did say this towards the end of *Cien Años*: "*Muy probablemente las Filipinas defenderán con un ardor indecible la libertad comprada a costa de tanta sangre y sacrificios*" ("Very likely the Philippines will defend with inexpressible valor the liberty secured at the price of so much blood and sacrifice").<sup>42</sup> The new men (*los hombres nuevos*) will build their country, strengthen it with their combined forces, and set it on the path to progress.

Rizal was in exile in Dapitan when the revolution broke out in Cuba. There was also an outbreak of another type there, and equally deadly—typhoid and yellow fever. At the suggestion of his friend Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal offered his services as a doctor to the Spanish government to save lives in Cuba.<sup>43</sup> He was on his way to Spain when a revolution broke out in his own country, for which he would be blamed, found guilty, and executed. Last-minute pleas for his life reached the highest level in Madrid, with the aged former President of the Republic, Francesc Pi y Margall, braving the blinding snow to personally plead Prime Minister Cánovas to spare the Filipino's life, a gesture of mercy and goodwill which could only redound to the good of Spain herself. But Cánovas, the most skillful operator in Spanish politics of that century, had become a prisoner of his own fixed ideas about *el Imperio* and was unable, as in his self-destructive policies on Cuba, to exercise better judgment in rapidly changing situations. Another unpardonable miscalculation: he thought the execution of a man like Rizal would put the fear of God in his people and abort their revolution.

Ever the astute reader of events yet to unfold, the old man in Paris could see Spain's single-minded determination to destroy at all cost the Cuban Revolution, and now the Philippine Revolution too, would leave all parties losers to the benefit of the bystander, the United States. Betances grieved the

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 6:34 (King James Version).

<sup>42</sup> Jose Rizal, "Filipinas dentro de Cien Años," in *Prosa selecta, narraciones y ensayos*, ed. Isaac Donoso Jimenez (Madrid, Espana: Editorial Verbum, 2011), 226.

<sup>43</sup> Additionally we learn from Pio Valenzuela that Rizal told him in Dapitan shortly before departing from that town of exile that "his intention in applying for the post of military doctor was to study the war in a practical way; go through the Cuban soldiery if he thought he would find there solutions which would remedy the bad situation in the Philippines. If he were admitted as a military doctor in Cuba, he explained, he could return to the Philippines when the necessity arose." "The Memoirs of Pio Valenzuela" (1914), in *Minutes of the Katipunan* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1978), 97. Valenzuela's secret mission to Dapitan was to disclose the existence of a revolutionary organization, Katipunan, that was awaiting his active leadership and to inform him that the revolution could break out at any moment. It should be pointed out that Valenzuela's testimonies (1896 and 1914) are caught up in controversy.

death of Martí, martyr of the revolution, and now he grieved the death of Rizal, martyred for the revolution—two great men he had never met personally but had heard so much of. With Martí, he had corresponded on the business of politics; from Rizal, he now had only a copy of his ultimate poem. He saw how the axis of power in the Caribbean could tilt so quickly to *los anglosajones* (the Anglo-Saxons)—the ineptness of the Spanish government was making it so easy for the North Americans to just step into the rubble and pick up the pieces. He blamed in particular Cánovas:

In Spain there is only one true retrograde and reactionary leader, and he is precisely the one who confronts Cuba with a policy of ‘to the very last man and the very last *peseta*,’ the one who tries to suffocate all efforts that her patriots do to free her, and that man is Antonio Cánovas del Castillo.<sup>44</sup>

One man heard him and took him at his word. Michele Angiolillo, an Italian anarchist who had been in and out of prison in several countries and who lost many friends in Barcelona to the sweeping and merciless martial law measures that Cánovas had taken following an anarchist bombing in Barcelona on June 5, 1897, on his way from London, visited Betances at his home in Paris. Afterwards, he headed straight for Spain, convinced more than ever from their talk that it was his mission to rid the world of the Spanish Prime Minister for the crimes he committed in Spain, Cuba, and the Philippines.<sup>45</sup> There he tracked down his prey, vacationing with his wife at a spa in the resort town of Santa Agueda, and shot him dead.

Betances, when asked about his alleged involvement in the assassination of Cánovas, neither affirmed nor denied and simply said: “*No aplaudimos pero tampoco lloramos.*”<sup>46</sup> As to what he thought of the man who had described himself by this deed as not an assassin but an avenger and an executioner, he added: “*Los revolucionarios verdaderos hacen lo que deben hacer.*”<sup>47</sup> The anarchist as true revolutionary had done his duty. The revolver he had bought in London for this deed was, in the anarchist’s mind, the sling of David.

1898: The United States declares war on Spain, with Cuba as battleground and contested prize. Reluctantly, with honor to preserve but an empire sure to lose, Spain takes on the country with the most modern armada in the world. Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders land on Cuba. Admiral Dewey blows off the Spanish Navy at Manila Bay. The diplomats of the warring states meet in Paris to settle their business on the spoils of war. In that city, that same year, Betances dies, heartbroken with the turn of events that he has nevertheless warned against. He has had disagreements with the Cuban revolutionary leadership lately, who now are at a loss to reorient their struggle in a three-cornered fight and give up in the chaos. But his biggest deception is with his own countrymen, who pose no fight at all and even seem to welcome the invaders from the north: “*¿Y qué les pasa a los puertorriqueños que no se rebelan?*”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in José M. García Leduc, *Ramón Emeterio Betances: Renovación historiográfica en los albores del centenario de su fallecimiento* (Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005; Pasig: Anvil, 2006), 193, quotes London newspapers citing a Reuters report that Angiolillo “has admitted that he shot Señor Cánovas in order to avenge the Barcelona Anarchists, and Dr. Rizal, the insurgent leader who was executed in the Philippines.”

<sup>46</sup> “We don’t applaud, but neither do we cry” (translation mine). Félix Ojeda Reyes, *El Desterrado de París: Biografía del Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827–1898)* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Puerto, 2001), 359.

<sup>47</sup> “True revolutionaries do what they have to do” (translation mine). *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> “And what’s the matter with the Puerto Ricans that they are not rebelling?” (translation mine), “Carta a Eugenio María de Hostos.” Quoted in Ojeda Reyes, *El Desterrado de París*, 359.

Rizal was perfectly right in *Cien Años*: his countrymen truly did defend with indescribable ardor the independence they had won a *costa de tanta sangre y sacrificios* (at the cost of so much blood and sacrifices). The Filipino-American War proved to be far costlier in lives, more destructive of the country, and more devastating of the collective psyche than the revolution against Spain. But he would have bemoaned the greatest tragedy of all resulting from that imperialist takeover: the loss of internally nurtured and self-developing nationhood that he and countless Filipinos had sacrificed their lives for, the cooptation and deformation of the nationalist movement to serve America's hegemonic ends, the replacement of his own moral vision of the nation as an ethical community which had permeated that nationalist movement and inspired the struggle for freedom by an apprenticeship as client-state in American-style politics. The irony and pathos of it all is that Rizal's struggle against Spain was systematically appropriated and skillfully deployed by the US colonial government to placate and subjugate the Filipinos anew. This re-engineering of Rizal's image and ideas has influenced, consciously or not and in varying degrees, his countrymen's perception and reading of him ever since.<sup>49</sup>

Blumentritt, who on so many issues thought exactly like his friend Rizal (except religious matters) and continued to have great influence on the Filipinos for the rest of his life, revealed in 1900 that he had seen it coming and tried to alert the Filipinos to avert this impending national disaster:

A short time before the Spanish-American War began, rumors spread in the European press, rumors speaking of the understanding between the Filipinos and the Americans. I immediately addressed some Philippine friends who were living in the Far East, begging them to entreat the Philippine patriots not to ally themselves with the Americans, because at the time I suspected already that the Americans, in case of victory, might stay in the archipelago, or give up their former allies to the vengeance of those powerful Spanish elements that had demanded and obtained the head of Rizal. My letters did not reach their destination until the war had begun, and my friends replied that my advice had come too late: in consideration of the impossibility of the Spaniards making the necessary reforms in the country, they had allied themselves with the Americans, confident that by means of this alliance they would obtain their independence.<sup>50</sup>

Blumentritt contributed his voice to the anti-imperialist movement in the United States, arguing as late as 1900 that Washington should let the Filipinos regain the freedom they had won and lost again. As anticipated by Rizal, there was indeed a powerful backlash in the United States, and the nation stood divided on precisely where their traditions of exceptionalism and isolationism should lead them, now that the fate of millions in the Caribbean and in the Pacific was in their hands. The imperialists had the vast resources of finance capital ready to flow into the colonies and the overwhelming influence of yellow journalism to excite the national imagination, yet they barely had the numbers in Congress, and they won by the slimmest of margins. But they had God on their side. President William McKinley revealed that, in his prayers, God revealed to him that imperialism was a godly duty.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> This is the compelling thesis of Floro Quibuyen's *A Nation Aborted: Rizal, American Hegemony, and Philippine Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008). Solidly researched and forcefully argued, this starts with a comprehensive critique of the existing literature on Rizal before brilliantly developing its own systematic (re)reading of all of his major works, explicating their internal unity and articulating their precise historical significations. If, as Hegel says, the whole is the real, only by studying all the works of Rizal in their totality can his individual writings and utterances be understood as to what he really meant in each of them. As Quibuyen demonstrates, few of Rizal's critics have done that.

<sup>50</sup> "America and the Philippines," *Washington Sentinel* (organ of the Washington Anti-Imperialist League), March 10, 1900.

<sup>51</sup> This is well discussed in Chapter 3 ("End of a Dream—The United States: 1890–1902") of Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*, 134. Lenin, who made the fullest use of the US takeover of the Philippines to sustain his thesis on imperialism, sums up the problématique and is worth quoting in full:

Out with the old tradition, in with the new. The Americans might have been God's chosen people to refashion the history of mankind, but since God's talk with McKinley—in our time with George W. Bush as well, who was told that “regime change” was a godly duty—they could well choose their way as they go along. *Deus vult!* God wishes it! Many an American orator turned to this battle-cry of the ancient Romans and the Crusaders to justify modern imperialism on the eve of a new century. Tradition, as Eric Hobsbawm has shown in extensive historical studies, is a pliant tool of politics and can continuously be reinvented.

This was revolting to one man: Leon Czolgosz. A son of Polish migrants, he grew up on a farm in Ohio believing in the American Dream. Whilst eking out a life and home for himself as a factory worker, he worshipped the icons of history and the ideals they espoused. The turn of events in recent years had left him bewildered. Morally unmoored from the pillars of the Republic, he drifted to anarchist circles. One day in 1901, he got it into his head that he had a duty to do: to eliminate the one man who personified the treachery committed against the American Dream. At a public ceremony in Buffalo, he shot President McKinley mortally. To fellow-anarchists, he had revealed that he was troubled by what the government had been doing, that nothing made sense anymore, especially the conduct of the US Army—how, after liberating the Philippines from Spain, could it now be at war with the Filipinos? “It does not harmonize with the teaching in our public schools about our flag,” he said.<sup>52</sup> In his confession he wrote, “I killed President McKinley because I done my duty [...] because he was an enemy of the good working people.”<sup>53</sup> In his heart, his sling was David's.

## The logic of history

Rizal brings *Cien Años* to a close with what seems to be an afterthought.

*Sin embargo, no es bueno fijarse en lo eventual; hay una lógica imperceptible e incomprensible a veces en las obras de la Historia. Bueno es que tanto los pueblos como los gobiernos se ajusten a ella.*<sup>54</sup>

(Nevertheless it is not good to stick to the probable. There is a logic at times imperceptible and incomprehensible in the workings of History. It is well that both peoples and governments adjust themselves to it.)

Lenin is known to have said that History is full of tricks. Analysis leads you to expect what is probable to happen, but imperceptibly and incomprehensibly, History might just take a different course, following its own logic, away from your expectations and suppositions. It is not good to get stuck on the probable, cautions Rizal, for something else completely other might happen instead.

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“In the United States, the imperialist war waged against Spain in 1898 stirred up the opposition of the ‘anti-imperialists,’ the last of the Mohicans of bourgeois democracy, who declared this war to be ‘criminal,’ regarded the annexation of foreign territories as a violation of the Constitution, declared the treatment of Aguinaldo, leader of the native Filipinos (the Americans promised him the independence of his country, but later they landed troops and annexed it) as ‘Jingo treachery,’ and quoted the words of Lincoln: ‘When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs others, it is no longer self-government; it is despotism.’ But while all this criticism shrank from recognizing the inseparable bond between imperialism and the trusts, and, therefore, between imperialism and the foundations of capitalism, while it shrank from joining the forces engendered by large-scale capitalism and its development—it remained a ‘pious wish.’”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 123. Chapter 2 (“The Idea and the Deed—The Anarchists: 1890–1914”) of Tuchman's *The Proud Tower* and Anderson's *Under Three Flags* provide masterful accounts of *fin-de-siècle* anarchism whose global center was Spain and had the Spanish Empire as its area of political relevance.

<sup>54</sup> Rizal, “Filipinas dentro de Cien Años,” 164.



History has a logic of its own. A whole philosophical discourse lies behind this thought, but clearly, it is not his intention here to philosophize. He wants to advise his people and their leaders that as the logic of History takes its course, they can only adjust to it.

Rizal understood that the world had entered a new epoch as the last decade of the century began. He had peered as far as he could into the future, analyzed as objectively as he could current global events and what they portended, and prognosticated on the possible more than which he would not elaborate further—it is not good to stick to the probable. In 1892, he was in exile in Dapitan—for how long in that lonely place it was useless for him to speculate. He opened a school for the brightest and bravest boys—admission was based on bravery, demonstrated through tasks in a secret initiation, for “education is useless to a coward.”<sup>55</sup> He adopted much of the German curriculum, knowledge needed for los hombres nuevos (the new men) with its strong emphasis on the sciences and maths, history and geography, and practical skills. And he taught them English alongside Spanish, explaining to his adolescent students, “Whether we like it or not, English will be spoken in this country.”<sup>56</sup> As translation material, he used what he happened to have at hand (his entire library was left behind in Hong Kong), an English version of a Japanese novel about a prodigal son, *Hatsuo*, which the students would have to translate into Spanish. He talked fondly of the Japanese people and of his wonderful stay in their country.<sup>57</sup>

1895. The Cubans revolt. Expected. Closer to home, a world-historic event: China acknowledges military defeat by the Japanese after months of warfare in the Korean peninsula, and in the Treaty of Shimoneseiki (April 1895) relinquishes all its historic tributary claims on Korea, gives up Formosa to the Japanese, and also cedes the Liaotung peninsula with its all-important naval base Port Arthur. Korea is “free” for the Japanese and the Russians to now fight over. The world is shocked. Rizal, hearing of it in Dapitan, realizes that the country he loves and greatly admires, which he has hoped to be sympathetic to the Filipino cause and possibly be a source of arms and ammunitions come the revolution, has embarked on the imperialist road. The logic of History imposes itself. Rizal tells his students something they do not understand: that he fears that in fifty years the Philippines, too, will fall into Japanese hands.<sup>58</sup>

In the Sino-Japanese War, Rizal gets a measure of the meaning of his afterthought in *Cien Años*. The polite and respectful people he admired in the land of cherry blossoms have sent their army to wrest a country and an island from a declining empire’s sphere of influence and are prepared to oppose any other power with interest of its own in this region which they now claimed as the extension of their “natural economy.” Imperialism has a logic of its own and bends national traditions, customs, and morals to its imperatives. How then can the Filipinos turn now to Japan for assistance in

<sup>55</sup> Gualberto Laput, “Rizal’s Student in Dapitan Recalls Service, Duty, Sense of Dedication,” *Rappler*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/156965-rizal-student-dapitan-jose-aseniero-service-duty>.

<sup>56</sup> This is from the unpublished manuscript, *Memorias de José Aseniero*, written by one of Rizal’s students in Dapitan. English was taught alternately with Spanish: Mondays and Wednesdays, Spanish language, and instruction in Spanish of all the other subjects as well; Thursdays and Saturdays, English language, and the other subjects in English as well.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* One of the descendants of those students wrote this in 1961: “My father and I were listening over the radio in the mountain fastness of our evacuation place in the crucial days of the Japanese invasion when, of all heart-breaking news, it was announced ‘Bataan has fallen.’ Tears welled in our eyes. My old man suddenly remembered and said: ‘Dr. Rizal’s prediction has come true.’ [...] He told me that he had kept it all to himself as he was afraid he would be misunderstood for a Japanese propagandist. And when the stories of the atrocities were told, he could hardly believe them for according to him Dr. Rizal had always spoken highly of the Japanese people for he had lived with them in their own country. He used to tell his pupils how polite, how courteous, how clean and industrious the Japanese people were. He wanted his people to emulate the good traits of the Japanese. They were well disciplined, patriotic, and law-abiding people. In fact, there were only two peoples Rizal, in all his travels, highly admired: the Germans and the Japanese.” Francisco G. Aseniero, *Sr. Rizal’s Retreat: Dapitan, 1892–1896* (unpublished manuscript).

their own revolution? Without a foreign country willing and able to provide support and furnish arms and ammunitions your revolution cannot win, Blumentritt has counseled. 1896: the existence of the Katipunan is disclosed to Rizal in Dapitan, his leadership is needed, the revolution awaits him. Yes, but how to fight a powerful army without arms, and whence to source the weaponry? Where is the country that shall provide official or secret support when all hell breaks loose? The Filipinos somehow still think that country is Japan—for there is no other.<sup>59</sup> But for Rizal, Japan is no longer Japan.<sup>60</sup>

Rizal reveals his deep chagrin with that nation that has held some hope for Filipino revolutionaries but has now joined the game of the Great Powers in the memorandum for his defense of December 12, 1896, written in confinement at Fort Santiago. Curiously, he does not mention here what to the Spaniards in particular is the most obvious of all that late in 1896 and at the height of the Cuban Revolution—that the United States is watching, and waiting.

*Ahora, que he creído también que poco a poco vendría la autonomía y después la independencia al cabo de los años, es verdad. España abandonará esto cuando se convenza de que su porvenir está en Marruecos, y que esto cuesta más sacrificios que otra cosa, y lo abandonará aunque la quieran detener los Filipinos, como lo ha tratado de hacer varias veces en los siglos pasados. También he creído que si España negaba sistemáticamente libertades a Filipinas habría insurrecciones y así lo he escrito, lamentando que llegase este caso y no esperándolo. Este es el sentido de lo que dije: que era menester ser digno, unirse, para que cuando lleguen los acontecimientos, no caigamos en manos del Japón, ni de Inglaterra ni de Alemania.*<sup>61</sup>

(Now, it is true that I have also believed that little by little autonomy would come, and then, in time, independence. Spain will leave once she is convinced that her future lies in Morocco, whilst here the cost of sacrifice is greater than anything else, and she will leave even though the Filipinos may wish to stop her, as she has tried to do at various times in past centuries. I have also believed that if Spain systematically denied liberties to the Philippines there would be insurrections, as I have written, lamenting

<sup>59</sup> See Floro Quibuyen, “Japan and America in the Filipino Nationalist Imagination: From Rizal to Ricarte,” in *The Philippines and Japan in America’s Shadow*, eds. Kiichi Fujiwara and Yoshiko Nagano (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2010), 106–31.

<sup>60</sup> It is instructive how Blumentritt in Europe reacted to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. Writing in the political journal *Globus* in September 1896, he says that the initial impact of the Japanese victory should motivate the Filipinos with “a certain self-confidence [...] [T]he splendid victories of the Japanese army and fleet must have awakened the belief in the Filipinos that the Asian race was called to terminate the European supremacy in East Asia and to give at least the latter back to the Asians.” But then, considering the motive of the war and the fact that it was the Chinese with whom the Japanese had just fought (the war with the Russians was still several years away), he came to the conclusion that the Japanese could not be trusted and that a Filipino victory in the revolution might just lead to the Philippines becoming a colony of Japan or at least falling under her sphere of influence. The ever loyal Catholic then ended up with the totally indefensible position of seeing “the Spanish soldiers [...] fighting not merely for the Spanish property foothold, but also in defense there of the most vital interests of the Western Christians as against the orientalism of the Japanese.” Writing this at a time when he knew that Rizal’s life hung on a balance, Blumentritt might have been trying to play politics with the Spaniards in the hope of saving his dear friend’s life.

The following year, with Rizal gone, Blumentritt recognized the fallacy of his reasoning: “Then I was still of the opinion, shared and expressed in the noble groups in Spain, that Japan, in relation to the insurgents of Luzon [...] played the role with which Uncle Sam played vis-à-vis the Cuban rebels. Subsequently, it became apparent that Japan behaved quite correctly...” (*Osterreichische Monatsschrift für den Orient*, Vienna, October 1897), quoted in Harry Sichrovsky, *Ferdinand Blumentritt: An Austrian Life for the Philippines* (Manila: Vera Reyes, 1987), 118–19. Blumentritt stood corrected yet again by history—but much later after his death, when Japan embarked on her imperialist design of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. My point is that the onset of Japanese imperialism in 1894 changed the political landscape of East Asia and that Rizal and Blumentritt were among the earliest to see that this had a bearing on the Philippines, even if they might disagree on the proper course of action. And of course history proved them right in their apprehensions.

<sup>61</sup> Jose Rizal, “Datos para mi Defensa” in *Escritos Políticos e Históricos, Tomo VII* (Manila: Edición del Centenario, Comisión nacional del Centenario de José Rizal, 1961), 333.

that such a case draws near and not hoping for it. This is the meaning of what I said: that it was essential that we be worthy and united, so that when these developments come to pass, we shall not fall into the hands of Japan, nor England nor Germany.)

“*Ser digno*”: to be possessed of *dignitas*, an inner moral strength, a manifest authoritativeness, a principled resolve, that compels respect from others. “*Unirse*”: be united as a people, to be resolutely one. These are the imperatives of a nation striving to be free, and primed to defend that freedom from other powers. But bitterly Rizal faces up to the stark reality of imperialism:

*Mi sueño era la prosperidad de mi país. Yo sabía que por las armas era imposible tener libertades y menos independencia, pues no lo consentirían las otras naciones colonizadoras como Inglaterra, Alemania, etc. El Japón nos comería después.*<sup>62</sup>

My dream was the prosperity of my country. I knew that through arms it was impossible to have liberties and much less independence, because this would not be permitted by the other colonizing nations like England, Germany, etc. Japan would swallow us up afterwards.

Do we not have here, in his own words, publicly recorded in an official event, the compelling reason why Rizal thought it futile to revolt against Spain just then? His geopolitical analysis led him to the inescapable conclusion that international conditions brought about by inter-imperialist rivalry moved against any chances of a revolution attaining independence.<sup>63</sup>

The quandary of the Filipinos turning to other powers for help when these had designs of their own on Filipinas had been a constant in Rizal’s mind. As he stated further in “Datos para mi Defensa,” this was a subject that came up in conversation with a Japanese personality several years back. Left unidentified in the text and rendered in the plural, this could only have been the well-known novelist, radical activist, and journalist Suehiro Tetchō, whom he met by chance onboard the SS *Belgic* as they departed Yokohama for San Francisco in July 1888. The two traveled together all the way across the United States and across the Atlantic to Europe, Rizal as always the multilingual interpreter for his newfound friend who spoke only Japanese. Tetchō was a firm believer in Asianism and subsequently wrote enthusiastically about Rizal and the Philippines in several literary works.<sup>64</sup> He did not seem to have convinced Rizal.

*Hace ya mucho tiempo, en Julio de 1887, ciertos personajes japoneses me preguntaban por qué no nos sublevábamos diciendo que ellos nos ayudaría, etc. etc. Yo les contesté que estábamos bien con España y que no queríamos pasar de una mano a otra: que con España a pesar de todo, nos ligaban tres siglos, una misma religión y vínculos de afección y agradecimiento, cosa que no tenemos con otra nación. Replicaron que el Japón no tenía interés ninguno en Filipinas, y sólo ayudarían por cuestiones de raza; yo me sonreí, y les demostré por la historia que sus antepasados no habían pensado como ellos.*<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>63</sup> I say “a revolution,” not “the Revolution,” because historic events with a capital letter name given to them are conventions of historians to totalize a series of events with a cumulative thematic thrust and a narrative structure, in most cases *after* the events but certainly never at the beginning. Rizal did not repudiate the Revolution for how could he do so when this was yet to happen. What is clear from his own words is that he did not want a revolution to break out and did his best to prevent it from happening, for the precise reason given.

<sup>64</sup> See Caroline S. Hau and Takashi Shiraishi, “Daydreaming about Rizal and Tetchō: On Asianism as Network and Fantasy,” *Philippine Studies* 57, no. 3 (2009): 329–88.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 338. “July 1887” must be a typographical error.

(Already some time ago, in July 1887, certain Japanese personalities were asking me why we were not rebelling, saying that they would help us, etc. I answered them that we were fine with Spain and that we did not want to pass from one hand to another: that with Spain *in spite of everything* we are conjoined by three centuries, the same religion and bonds of affection and gratitude, something we don't have with any *other nation*. They replied that Japan had no interest at all in the Philippines and they would help purely for reasons of race; I smiled and showed them from history that their ancestors had not thought the way they did.)<sup>66</sup>

I come to the conclusion that Rizal, in 1896, was well aware that the global power configuration had changed—and not imperceptibly and incomprehensibly to him, but with full intelligibility in all its clarity. He fully understood the stakes at hand in the era of inter-imperialist rivalry, the utter seriousness of the situation, the perils that awaited the Philippines. As Martí thought for the Cubans, he too thought the Filipinos had to be united, secure of their place in the world and prosperous, and most of all *dignos*, if they were not to fall from one imperialist power to another. But what were the real prospects at this historical conjuncture? He alone in the nationalist movement had the global perspective to know that it was not a matter of starting a revolution or even of ending it, but of the day after. He thought a revolution under those circumstances futile. He said no more.

Unheeded went Rizal's plea to his countrymen. The events of 1896, from Balintawak to Bagumbayan, led inexorably to full-fledged revolution, his martyrdom—in a dialectical twist of fate—having turned into the ultimate rallying cry for the Filipinos to rise in arms against colonial rule. It was a nationalist revolution unaware of the geopolitical realities of inter-imperialist rivalry whereof precisely he spoke, a revolution against colonialism in the Age of Imperialism. The run of events proved him right: “if Spain systematically denied liberties to the Philippines there would be insurrections;” this struggle for independence “would not be permitted by the other colonizing nations like England, Germany, etc.,” and of these Great Powers it was the new colossus, the United States, “young..., robust, and not inclined to suffer failure,” that displayed undeterred determination to expand over the Pacific, ready for war with whomever. In the end, he was also right in foreseeing the aftermath of a revolution against Spain: the patriotism and heroism of his people:

Very likely the Philippines will defend with inexpressible valor the liberty secured at the price of so much blood and sacrifice.<sup>67</sup>

And so his countrymen did... in the Philippine-American War.

<sup>66</sup> The knowing smile, and no doubt a sad one. Years later it is for Lenin to give the knowing smile on a speculative scenario: “Let us suppose that a Japanese is condemning the annexation of the Philippines by the Americans. The question is: will many believe that he is doing so because he has a horror of annexations as such, and not because he himself has a desire to annex the Philippines? And shall we not be constrained to admit that the ‘fight’ the Japanese is waging against annexations can be regarded as being sincere and politically honest only if he fights against the annexation of Korea by Japan, and urges freedom for Korea to secede from Japan? Lenin, *Imperialism*, 147–48. Lenin's test of professed moral condemnation and fraternal support is echoed in Chomsky's critique of the American intervention in Libya: “There is, however, a very simple test to determine whether the professions of noble intent can be taken seriously: do the authors call for humanitarian intervention and ‘responsibility to protect’ to defend the victims of their own crimes, or those of their clients? Did Obama, for example, call for a no-fly zone during the murderous and destructive US-backed Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, with no credible pretext? Or did he, rather, boast proudly during his presidential campaign that he had co-sponsored a Senate resolution supporting the invasion and calling for punishment of Iran and Syria for impeding it? End of discussion. In fact, virtually the entire literature of humanitarian intervention and right to protect, written and spoken, disappears under this simple and appropriate test.” Stephen Shalom and Michael Albert, “Interview with Noam Chomsky: On Libya and the Unfolding Crisis,” *ZNet*, March 30, 2011, <https://chomsky.info/20110330/>.

<sup>67</sup> Jose Rizal, “Filipinas dentro de Cien Años,” 226

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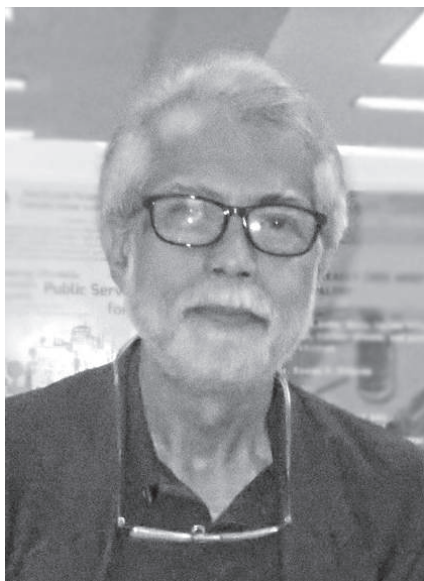
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ISBN 978-971-742-129-2 (print)  
ISBN 978-971-742-130-8 (electronic)