

Reflections on Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* and the Politics of History

Reynaldo C. ILETO*

Abstract

Teodoro Agoncillo's classic work on Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan revolt of 1896 is framed by the tumultuous events of the 1940s such as the Japanese occupation, nominal independence in 1943, Liberation, independence from the United States, and the onset of the Cold War. Was independence in 1946 really a culmination of the revolution of 1896? Was the revolution spearheaded by the Communist-led Huk movement legitimate? Agoncillo's book was written in 1947 in order to hook the present onto the past. The 1890s themes of exploitation and betrayal by the propertied class, the rise of a plebeian leader, and the revolt of the masses against Spain, are implicitly being played out in the late 1940s. The politics of hooking the present onto past events and heroic figures led to the prize-winning manuscript's suppression from 1948 to 1955. Finally seeing print in 1956, it provided a novel and timely reading of Bonifacio at a time when Rizal's legacy was being debated in the Senate and as the Church hierarchy, priests, intellectuals, students, and even general public were getting caught up in heated controversies over national heroes. The circumstances of how Agoncillo's work came to the attention of the author in the 1960s are also discussed.

Keywords: Philippine Revolution, Andres Bonifacio, Katipunan society, Cold War, Japanese occupation, Huk rebellion, Teodoro Agoncillo, Oliver Wolters

Teodoro Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* is one of the most influential books on Philippine history. My essay pursues three questions, which are not always treated separately or in chronological order. One is why a work like this would have appeared right after World War II and the gaining of independence in 1946. We know it was written in 1947 as the author's winning entry in a national Bonifacio biography contest held in 1948. Another focus of inquiry is the publication of the manuscript in 1956 by the College of Liberal Arts of the University of the Philippines. What was it about the mid-50s that made this book timely and controversial? And a third theme, treated in a postscript, concerns my own interest in this book, starting with how my Cornell mentor introduced me to its author in 1967, and how the Cold War thereby impinged upon my formation as a historian.

Agoncillo was born on November 9, 1912 in Lemery, Batangas, a Tagalog province southeast of Manila. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of the Philippines (UP) in 1934. His career as historian began quite late. From 1937 to 1941 he worked

* Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 3 Arts Link, Blk AS3#06-18 Singapore 117569
e-mail: reyileto@ozemail.com.au

as a technical assistant in the Institute of National Language. He began writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his earliest publications being Tagalog poems. In fact, most of his writings up to the 1940s consisted of Tagalog poems and short stories in Tagalog and light essays in both Tagalog and English. There is a portent of his career, however, in the still unpublished M. A. thesis he submitted to the UP in 1935 titled "The Japanese Occupation of Manchuria," for which he earned the Master's degree in History in 1939.¹⁾

It was only in 1941 that Agoncillo published a historical work, *Ang Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas* (History of the Philippines), written jointly with Gregorio Zaide. He continued to devote his time to Tagalog poems and literary essays until the late 1940s when he began to write magazine articles on colorful rebels, bandits and revolutionaries of the past. By 1950 he seems to have decided upon a career as historian, publishing numerous essays on controversial events during Spanish times and the Philippine revolution. *The Revolt of the Masses* was published in 1956, followed in 1960 by *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* wherein he continued the saga of the revolution up to the fall of Aguinaldo. This same year (1960), Agoncillo published within the UP the first edition of the textbook that would make him a virtual household name: *A Short History of the Filipino People* (co-authored with Oscar Alfonso). This book, having seen several editions and with Milagros Guerrero as subsequent co-author, is still widely used in the schools. Agoncillo continued to publish books in the 1960s and 1970s, though these have been less influential than his earlier works. Up to his retirement from the UP in 1977 Agoncillo also produced a steady stream of short historical commentaries and essays in various local journals and week-end magazines, presaging the career of the journalist-historian Ambeth Ocampo.

The target of Agoncillo's historical salvoes even in the late 1940s was history written from a colonial viewpoint. Agoncillo was probably influenced by the Japanese model of (and support for, during the occupation) an autonomous history of "oriental" civilization. He felt, however, that from the standpoint of surviving records alone "Filipinist" historians faced a bleak prospect. How could there be a truly Filipino viewpoint in history if pre-1872 documents were written by Spaniards in Spanish? Agoncillo's background in Tagalog literature convinced him that without records in the language of the people their "soul" could not be captured. A history of the Katipunan revolt, for example, cannot be adequately written without materials in the language spoken by the Katipuneros, which for Agoncillo meant digging up Bonifacio's poems and letters, and interviewing his family and associates in their language, Tagalog.²⁾

Agoncillo's solution was to drastically shorten the textbook treatment of the Spanish colonial period up to 1872.³⁾ This move was highly controversial, particularly outside the secular

1) See Medina and Bauzon [1993: Vol. II, 131-135].

2) Agoncillo published Bonifacio's Tagalog papers, with English translations, in 1963; *The Writings and Trial of Andres Bonifacio*. In looking over the bibliography of *The Revolt of the Masses*, one is also struck by the predominance of oral and written documentation in Tagalog. This use of vernacular sources is one of the cues I took from reading Agoncillo in 1969, which I applied to my own work.

3) The bound, mimeographed textbook in my possession states in the preface that this short history was put together "to meet the needs of the freshmen students of the University of the Philippines ↗

confines of the UP. It meant throwing out the standard lengthy accounts of Spanish contributions to Philippine civilization (such as the conversion to Catholicism), omitting mention of much of the activities of agents of the Church and colonial State to which a negative sign is attached, while glorifying every native disturbance or revolt. Agoncillo's construction of history closely followed the model laid down by nineteenth century ilustrados like Jose Rizal and Gregorio Sanciango, themselves deeply influenced by European liberal writings of their time. It is not surprising that Philippine histories for Agoncillo should begin in 1872 since from this year on the ilustrados are at the forefront of developments.

My first acquaintance with the name Agoncillo was not in Manila but in Ithaca, New York, at the office of my postgraduate supervisor Oliver Wolters. Seated behind his desk, he reached back and pulled out of the bookcase behind him the 1960 textbook history by Agoncillo and Alfonso. I didn't know much about these Filipino historians in 1967 because I had attended the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila, a rival of the University of the Philippines, and had been assigned the textbook by Jesuit historian Horacio de la Costa. I was unaware of the history wars that raged in some university campuses in Manila from the late 50s on. I couldn't grasp the full implications, then, of Wolters' warning about this Agoncillo textbook: "*Mr. Iletto, you are not going to write history like this!*"

The admonition against writing like Agoncillo was followed up a year later by encouragement on the part of Wolters and his mentor D. G. E. Hall, who at that time was my acting supervisor during Wolters' sabbatical leave, to write like De la Costa. They had found the skills of this Harvard-trained Jesuit historian to be exemplary and surely worthy of my emulation, in contrast to the "bad" historian Agoncillo. Perhaps they knew that De la Costa had earlier challenged Agoncillo's emplotment of history that would begin in 1872, arguing instead for the importance of the Spanish legacy, particularly Christianity, in the making of the Filipino nation.⁴⁾ But I had not known much about Father De la Costa, either. During my Ateneo days, I hardly saw him because he was stationed in Rome most of the time. Being a neophyte in historical studies, I accepted the advice of my British teachers without hesitation.⁵⁾

↘ who will, beginning June 1960, come under the General Education Program." Anticipating criticism, Agoncillo explains that "those who have been reared in the traditional textbooks on Philippine history will be surprised, if not shocked, to find that the Spanish colonial period has been limited to three chapters excluding the one on 'The Beginnings of Nationalism'. The senior author assumes full responsibility for this limitation. It has been his belief, expressed on many occasions both in and outside the University, that with few exceptions, the documents of the pre-1872 Philippines deal almost exclusively with the history of Spain in the Philippines."

4) In reference to Agoncillo, De la Costa states in his 1961 essay "History and Philippine Culture": "It seems to me that this view does more honor to the sturdy nationalism of its proponents than it does to their understanding of the nature of the historical process. Even if we were to concede that the history of the Philippines begins, or ought to begin, when the Philippines began to be a nation, it should be obvious that we cannot even begin to understand the Philippines as a nation unless we first understand it as a colony" [De la Costa 1965: 28]. For the ongoing debate over Agoncillo's assertion about 1872, see Ocampo [1993: 110-116].

5) Reynaldo Iletto, "Scholarship, Society and Politics in Three Worlds: Reflections of a Filipino Sojourner, 1965-95" [2011a: 105-128]. The Cornell years are treated in [*ibid.*: 109-116].

Even as a graduate student I could readily accept the shortcomings of Agoncillo's *Short History of the Filipino People*, which, after all, had barely progressed from its original, crude, mimeographed format when Wolters obtained a copy of it in the mid-60s. However, sometime in 1969 I read Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* and was so inspired by its treatment of Bonifacio and the Katipunan that I felt I should direct my research to the questions the book raised. In my dissertation proposal dated December 28, 1970, I applauded Agoncillo's *Revolt* for showing that the armed independence movement "was initiated by laborers and artisans in Manila and that the upper classes were only reluctantly drawn into the struggle," whereas other scholars like Gregorio Zaide (with whom Agoncillo had co-authored a textbook in 1941), had tended to view Philippine history as the handiwork of either Spaniards or upper-class Hispanized natives. My research was directed at what I felt were the limits of Agoncillo's treatment of the revolution: His imposition upon his data of reified concepts of "revolution," "nationalism" and "class struggle," instead of describing how Filipinos in various strata of society actually perceived the events around them.

The timing of my discovery of *The Revolt of the Masses* was fortuitous. The Filipino student movement, which had been building up since the mid-1960s, had reached a head with the storming of the Presidential Palace gates by student activists in January 1970. There was talk of revolution in the campuses, a new "revolt of the masses," and students started to forge ties with workers and peasants in order to rekindle the "unfinished revolution" of 1896. Agoncillo's writings from the 1950s to the early 60s had pretty much laid the foundations for this new historical consciousness that swept the youth, to which I was not immune despite my Ateneo-Cornell academic pedigrees.

Looking back, decades later, I am surprised at how little I understood back then of the circumstances under which Agoncillo's magnum opus was conceived, written and published, and of the deeper reasons why Hall, Wolters, and a host of other capable scholars were hostile to, or at least distrustful of, this Filipino historian. These are the questions I explore in this essay.

Japanese Rule and the Return of the Revolution, 1943

The Revolt of the Masses was entered in a contest conducted in 1947-48 and was unanimously judged best entry by a board composed of Jaime C. de Veyra (chair), Eulogio B. Rodriguez, and Faustino Aguilar. Not that Agoncillo had anticipated the contest and did the research especially for it; "*The Revolt* was written at the spur of the moment," he says, "because it was a contest. As a matter of fact, talagang hindi ako sasali [I really wasn't going to join]. It was [literary critic Leopoldo] Yabes who compelled me to. Sabing ganoon [The way he put it, 'can you imagine the number of data that you have? You have the data, why can't you?']" [Ocampo 1995: 20] Agoncillo already had the data at hand when asked to write the book in 1946 or 1947 because he had been collecting it during the previous years — meaning, the Japanese occupation period. His research on the revolution was of the type that the Japanese cultural policy or campaign encouraged and, as we shall see, there are visible traces of this influence in *The Revolt of the*

Masses.

The importance to the writing of *Revolt* of Agoncillo's experience of Japanese rule and the revival during this period of the discourse of unfinished revolution cannot be overstated. In Agoncillo's two-volume work on the "fateful years" of 1941–45 published in 1965, there are the usual condemnations of Japanese imperialism and war atrocities and Filipino collaboration. However, the Japanese administration's support for the revival of Filipino literature and the arts, the events leading to and including the attainment of independence in October 1943, and the "assertive nationalism" of wartime President Jose Laurel, are among the topics treated in an entirely different, positive, manner [Agoncillo 1965].⁶⁾

That Agoncillo would be inspired to gather materials for a new history of the Revolution can be partly explained by the unprecedented return of revolutionary fervor culminating in Independence Day, 1943. This event was hooked on directly to the events of the Philippine Revolution and to early Japanese support for it. Rizal was the dominant symbol of this event. As the newspapers of the period repeated again and again, Rizal had died without seeing his country's independence, and now it was finally arriving, thanks to Japanese help. On Rizal's birth anniversary in 1943, Ricarte even traveled to Calamba to "report to the spirit of Rizal" that the hope of independence would soon be fulfilled.

More significantly, in view of Agoncillo's later work, Independence in 1943 was also portrayed as a culmination of Bonifacio's armed struggle. On the anniversary of Bonifacio's birth on November 30, 1942, the founder of the Katipunan secret society was proclaimed as the "militant exponent of Oriental liberation from the West." "In the spirit of the New Order, Bonifacio lives again and shall live forever," the *Tribune* editorialized.⁷⁾ In August 1943, on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Revolution in Balintawak and always an occasion for honoring Bonifacio, Director Eulogio Rodriguez of the National Library wrote of the Katipunan founder as a "man of action... one of the first East Asians who faced the reality, dared lead his countrymen in driving away the Westerners from Philippine shores in order to conserve this part of the Orient for the Orientals" [Rodriguez 1943; Martin 1952: 185]. Japanese and Filipino officials preparing the stage for independence took time out to pay a visit to Rizal's death cell in Fort Santiago as well as to the Bonifacio Monument in Balintawak [Martin 1952: 178].⁸⁾

Half a million people attended the independence ceremony on October 14, 1943. Here is Agoncillo's account of this momentous event:

As General Emilio Aguinaldo, assisted by General Artemio Ricarte, hoisted the Filipino flag in front of the inaugural stand, to the tune of the Philippine National Anthem, many in the crowd shed tears of joy.

6) See, in particular, Chapters 9 ("The Captive Republic") and 12 ("Stage Shows and Blue Pencils").

7) *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, November 29, 1942; Editorial, "Hero's Day," *Tribune*, November 30, 1942, in Martin [1952: 184.]

8) See also Reynaldo Iletto, "Wars with the US and Japan, and the Politics of History in the Philippines" [2011b: 46–49].

It was the first time since the Japanese occupation that the Filipino flag was displayed in public and the Anthem played. Loud and prolonged cheers rent the air as the old flag fluttered in the breeze, alone. [Agoncillo 1965: Vol. 1, 394]

Note the dominant role played in this event by veterans of the Revolution and Philippine-American War. Furthermore, the detail about the crowd shedding tears of joy indicates the return of the past — the unfinished revolution — in this flag-raising event. Columnist “E.M.” of the *Tribune* described how “not a few were moved to tears” when the flag was hoisted by Aguinaldo and Ricarte. The people present at the ceremony, he further explained, “while having no illusions about the farce that was Philippine independence, were sincerely touched by the sight — for the first time in the life of most of them — of the Philippine national flag being hoisted alone in the breeze.”⁹⁾ Laurel added to this process of reconnecting with the past when he spoke of independence as a fulfillment of the dreams of the heroes of 1896 and of the new Republic as a successor to Aguinaldo’s Republic of 1898.

Although the Second Republic enjoyed a short life-span — October 14, 1943 to August 17, 1945 — it pursued many initiatives that would bear fruit after 1946. The Laurel government took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Japanese policy of de-Americanization and the search for Oriental roots. It pursued its own nationalist agendas in the areas of foreign policy, language, national history, and character building, even though the return of the Americans prevented much from actually being implemented. This would have been the setting for Agoncillo’s painstaking research on Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan secret society — topics that had been neglected during the American colonial period.

Liberation, Independence, and the Huk Rebellion

The liberation of the country from Japanese control in 1945 immediately followed by the granting of independence by the United States in 1946 gave rise to a discourse of nationhood that forms the backdrop of Agoncillo’s attempt to intervene in 1948 through his *Revolt of the Masses*. This official discourse can be gleaned from the numerous speeches delivered by Filipino leaders from President Osmeña in 1945 to President Roxas in 1946 and 1947, and President Quirino in 1948.

In his inaugural address as Commonwealth President on May 28, 1946, Roxas pictured the pre-war U. S. occupation as a Golden Age [Fonacier 1973: 41–55]. The Philippines was then “a land of comparative plenty” and the U. S. colonial government was trying to implement a policy of social justice for the farm tenants and the poor. But the Japanese invaded in 1941 and their occupation is likened by Roxas to a Dark Age. The Filipino people endured this age of darkness because “there was never a moment in which our hearts or convictions faltered. The Filipinos discharged their debt of allegiance to the United States with a payment of loyalty which has

9) “Our Today,” *Tribune*, October 15, 1943, in Martin [1952: 179].

never been surpassed.” Filipinos, declared President Roxas, owe *utang na loob* (lifelong debt) to America for her forty years of tutelage in democracy and freedom.

Roxas’ task in this speech was to reassert the narrative of Philippine progress, which had been disrupted by the war and the divisive forces it unleashed. This narrative had to culminate in Mother America’s granting of independence to her “daughter republic” in the Orient. Thus Roxas reminded his audience of how America’s teachings “took deep root in a soil made fertile by our great heroes of pre-American days — Rizal, Mabini, and Bonifacio. Our hearts were prepared when the Americans came in 1898.” He argued that the Revolution of 1896 had prepared the ground for America’s completion of that event through tutelage and the granting of independence on the coming Fourth of July.

Roxas insisted on the eternal presence of the American spirit in Philippine national life: “A nation is something more than the people who inhabit a geographic area. It is a spirit, a tradition and a way of life.” But because of our lasting faith in the benevolent teacher America, “[w]e have clasped to our bosom her system of government, her language, her institutions, her historical traditions. We are to be a free nation largely because we were aided in that direction by the love of liberty and the goodwill of the American people. If we succeed as a nation, if we are able to survive as a nation — and of course we will — we will have America to thank.”

Roxas’ lavish praise of America reflected popular sentiments towards the liberators. But his reassertion of the official narrative of Philippine progress under U.S. tutelage was not universally accepted. The opposition was pushing the line that the Revolution had been disrupted by the U.S. intervention and remained unfinished to this day. The Japanese had certainly encouraged the disavowal of the notion of U.S. tutelage. But in this postwar period, there were those “articulate few,” as Roxas called them, who regarded the American benefactor as an imperial power in disguise. The U.S. Congress may make mistakes, Roxas says, “but I have faith that justice will be done us by a country which has been our mother, our protector, our liberator and now our benefactor.... Our feeling toward America is not represented by the loud complaints of an articulate few in our midst.” Roxas then aligns his detractors with the new enemy called Communism: “Shall we give comfort to the enemies of liberty in the crisis which now grips the earth? The forces of evil may be defeated, but they are not dead. And there are new forces of evil growing even in nations which were our allies.”

On July 4, 1946, the American flag was lowered at the Luneta and Commonwealth President Roxas was inaugurated as the first President of the Third Republic. His speech at this historic occasion is an important document in that it attempts to provide a seamless interpretation of Philippine history from the first stirrings of nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century to its embodiment in the nation-state that has become independent on July Fourth.¹⁰⁾ It encapsulates the official discourse on history and heroes that young historians like Agoncillo would challenge through revisionist works like *The Revolt of the Masses*.

Roxas speaks of the nation as a child that was nurtured by U. S. tutelage until it became

10) For the full text of the Independence Day address, see Fonacier [1973: 57-72].

mature enough to play a role as an independent nation on the world stage. Even the nation's revolutionary heroes are tacked on to a universal series of "soldiers of liberty": Yes, Roxas declares, we Filipinos "owe to our own heroes ... to Rizal, to Bonifacio, to Mabini, to Quezon, and to Del Pilar and to many others a gratitude of memory, both deep and abiding. But in this supreme moment we must likewise pay tribute to the great apostles of freedom of many lands who contributed to our independence and nationhood, just as surely as if they had lived and died on our soil. Kosciusko, Lafayette and Simon Bolivar were all soldiers of liberty, equally with Washington, Jefferson and Franklin D. Roosevelt." Rizal and Bonifacio would be venerated in the shadow of Jefferson and Washington.

In the government's reading of history the American colonial period enables the gradual Filipino entrance into the world community of nation-states. The discourse on heroes follows the same pattern. Rizal's importance for nation building hinges upon his recognition as both a world-historical figure and a national hero. Thus the Filipino people have a head start in entering the world stage. As Vice-President Quirino puts it in his 1947 Rizal Day speech, "Rizal was the outstanding man of his epoch not only in his own country but outside the Philippines as well."¹¹

The centrality of Rizal in the building of the nation is evidenced in the annual commemoration since 1898 of his execution on December 30, 1896. A lavish monument was erected at his execution site, and lesser but no less imposing ones on practically every town plaza. Even Filipino settlements in Hawai'i and California could boast of their Rizal statues. The promotion of this central, unifying figure was especially crucial during the tumultuous postwar period. Says Quirino, "Rizal's monument stands in every public square, his name appears in practically every main street, his bust adorns the front of every school, his portrait graces every hall, office or gallery, Rizal in countless names of barrios, municipalities, cities and provinces, Rizal in text-books, Rizal in great speeches and famous poems."

The memorializing of Rizal in images and writings was expected to shape his people's consciousness and actions. Quirino points out how Rizal was expected to be present "in the elevated thoughts and writings of his countrymen, Rizal in the heart and soul of every liberty-loving people, Rizal in the supreme moments of civic and patriotic ecstasy, Rizal pervasive in the entire atmosphere of the land he redeemed." Only in the sense of Rizal's ghostly presence within each citizen could the nation be recognized by itself as well as by others. But latched on to Rizal's presence is that of America — which brings us to the crux of this postwar appropriation of Rizal. Towards the end of his speech Quirino makes reference to Rizal's essay, "The Philippines a Century Hence":

Rizal could clearly visualize the coming of America. But did it have his blessing? Who knows? Subsequent events, however, proved that American occupation of the Philippines was the highest blessing that ever befell the Filipinos similar in a way to the advent of Spain. He did not know that America would give us our independence and more than independence her laws and philosophy of

11) Elpidio Quirino, "Rizal," Luneta, December 30, 1947, in Collas [1955: 78-80].

democracy on which to build our own charter of freedom.

The Philippines would become victims of a “terrible war” as Rizal predicted, but he did not expect that we would emerge “fully vindicated in our aspiration for freedom and independence, with a new character, new life, new soul, new name, finally accepted as a sovereign nation with all the good will *What Rizal thus left out in his prophecy it was the task of the great Republic of the United States to fill in and to fulfill*” [Collas 1955: 78–80, italics mine].

At about the time Roxas and Quirino were delivering their speeches about historical epochs, unfinished revolution, and the spirit of Rizal, Agoncillo was beginning to publish parts of his *Revolt of the Masses* manuscript. In the November 1947 issue of *The Newspaperman*, the magazine of the Newspapermen’s Guild of which Agoncillo was a member, appears an essay by him titled “The Katipunan Newspaper.”¹²⁾ A blurb about the author states that he is “one of the most promising among the younger Filipino historians ... a prominent member of Institute of National Language ... [and] an authority on the Revolutionary Period of Philippine History.” Agoncillo’s essay is short but to the point. The second paragraph states:

The more than three hundred years of Castilian overlordship did not yield for the Filipinos any degree of progress in the political, economic, social and agrarian fields. The country’s economy was dismally feudalistic and its society was ruled by a clique of rapacious and indolent aristocrats, with the Filipino peasants as their chattel, to be bartered away any time at the mere wave of the Spanish grandee’s hand.

A characteristic of Agoncillo’s writings, at least at this stage of his career, is the conflation of past and present when speaking of the Revolution. Add another fifty to those three hundred years of Castilian overlordship and have the Filipinos dismantled their feudalistic economy? Agoncillo highlights the fact that in the Katipunan’s newspaper *Kalayaan* that carried a Yokohama dateline, one of the articles “urged the Filipinos to take up arms to secure their liberty. So fiery and subversive were the contents of the paper that in less than six months, the membership of the Katipunan rose to more than thirty thousand. People flocked to the leaders of the Katipunan and demanded immediate revolt against Spain.” *Kalayaan* “was responsible for the growth of the Katipunan and therefore prepared the people for a clash of arms.” The history of “militant Philippine journalism,” concludes Agoncillo, must begin with the founding of this newspaper.

Agoncillo’s essay, an extract from *The Revolt of the Masses*, was clearly intended to provide

12) *The Newspaperman* was the organ of the Philippine Newspapermen’s Guild, which was organized as a trade union in April 1945. In its second issue (Aug.–Sept. 1947), union President Cipriano Cid states: “In the field of political action, the Guild should rally its members to the defense of these rights which they should make use of but have to date not exercised. They should fight with all their might against the present tendency to recede into prewar reaction and status quo.” Issues of the magazine from 1947 to 1948 are lodged in the Mauro Garcia Collection, Sophia University library.

historical legitimacy to the magazine *The Newspaperman*, by incorporating it in the lineage of *Kalayaan*. What kinds of essays did this publication contain that would qualify it as an example of "militant Philippine journalism"? In the same issue with Agoncillo's essay is a longer piece by Jose Llanes titled "The Peasants' War."¹³ The first paragraph states: "The peasant war in the Philippines springs from causes rooted deep in history. While we may deal with these causes in their present forms in this series of articles, we will here discuss them from a purely historical standpoint."

The blurb about the author states that Mr. Llanes is a staff member of the *Manila Times*. He was once a guerrilla leader in northern Luzon during the Japanese occupation, and that "resistance experience" resulted in his "profound interest in labor problems and social reform." Llanes' treatment of the Spanish colonial period, geared toward uncovering the historical roots of feudalism that continues to exist until the present, is basically the same as found in Agoncillo's *Revolt*. Clearly, Llanes and Agoncillo shared the same viewpoint about the past.

Llanes' article is instructive for what it reveals about an alternative discourse to that propounded by his contemporaries Roxas and Quirino, as discussed earlier. There is, in fact, an oblique reference to official discourse in Llanes' contention that "What we glorify in our schools and textbooks and in speeches during our holidays as the 'heroism and patriotism of the Filipino people' is, in the last analysis, the struggle of the *aparceros* [sharecroppers] and the dispossessed freemen of earlier times." Not that Roxas and Quirino ever spoke in these terms, but that these officially-unheralded figures from below are, to Llanes, the *ultimate* makers of history.

In contrast to the official downplaying of Bonifacio's role in history (and the concurrent adulation of Rizal), Llanes states: "One of the principal causes of the Philippine Revolution was agrarian. The Katipunan was founded by a plebeian, Andres Bonifacio, and its membership was mostly of the masses, the *aparceros*, the agricultural laborers and the landless tenants." There were other important contributors to the revolutionary cause such as Rizal, Del Pilar, Lopez Jaena and so forth, but to Llanes they only played second fiddle because they initially just wanted reform. It was the "plebeian" Bonifacio who actually took action by raising the cry of revolt in August 1896. In the end the Revolution failed because the upper-class nationalists betrayed the masses through the Pact of Biak-na-bato in 1897. Agoncillo in *Revolt of the Masses* similarly hails Bonifacio as "the great plebeian" and develops these same ideas.

In stark contrast to the position of America in official postwar discourse, Llanes flatly states that "American occupation of the Philippines did two things: 1) America replaced Spain as the ruling power and 2) it retained the Filipino *ilustrado* class." The American regime allowed the

13) The title harks back to *The Peasant War in the Philippines*, a monograph that first saw print in 1946 and was said to have served as a "manual" of the postwar peasant movement and Huk army. The language and historical perspective utilized by Llanes are almost identical to the 1946 work, which states, for example, that "the Katipunan was founded by a plebeian, Andres Bonifacio, and its membership consisted mostly of the masses...." *The Peasant War in the Philippines* was reprinted in *The Philippine Humanities and Social Sciences Review* [n. a. 1958: 373-436]. The copy I have is a mimeographed version dating from the student movement in 1970.

landowning and moneyed class to expand its power and to “dominate and monopolize our national and political life. The 1896 Revolution failed as a social revolution.” Llanes ends with the warning that “today, there is reason to believe in the claim that ‘the bolo poised at Balintawak is still poised.’” In other words, contrary to President Roxas’ claims, the unfinished revolution remains unfinished. The feudal system born from Spanish times persists today, with “American monopoly capital super-imposed upon a feudal basis.”

Three issues later of *The Newspaperman*, dated April-May 1948, there appears a similar-sounding essay titled “Our Peasant Problem” authored by militant labor organizer Guillermo Capadocia. There is very little disagreement, he says, over the fact that “the main cause of the turmoil in Central Luzon and other agrarian sectors of our country is the desperate economic plight of the workers on the land in these areas. The peasant is discontented because it cannot make a decent living out of the land, under the present semi-feudal system of tenancy.” Capadocia frankly states his position: “I am a Huk myself so I know how the peasants of Central Luzon feel.”

The Huks and the PKM (*Pambansang Kaisahan ng Magbubukid* — National Peasant Union), states Capadocia, “fought the late President Roxas so bitterly not so much because they believed that, personally, he was their sworn enemy, but because they were convinced that he was, to use their own words, ‘a fascist who was willing to serve as a tool of American interests.’” The Huks are willing, however, to come to terms with President Quirino because “they believe he has no secret commitments with American imperialists and that he is an honest political leader as far as Filipino political leaders go.”

The appearance of Capadocia’s article in *The Newspaperman* alongside the contributions of Agoncillo and others shows how the official discourse on the unfinished revolution’s culmination in 1946, thanks to American tutelage and largesse, was challenged by a group of intellectuals and activists sympathetic to a mounting rebellion against the government in 1947 and 1948. For the epic saga of a joint Filipino-American struggle against Japan culminating in the Liberation of 1945 had one glaring flaw: The *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (Anti-Japanese People’s Army) or Hukbalahap, under the guidance of the Communist Party, arguably the most consistent and effective guerrilla army, was to be excluded from the Filipino-American narrative through its disarming by the U. S. Army in 1945. For the Huks, independence in 1946 meant betrayal, not fulfillment.

The Huk Supremo, Luis Taruc, would put the events of the Liberation differently in his memoirs. When the Americans came in 1898, he says, they “crushed a people’s movement that had come into being in the struggle against Spain.” And when they returned in 1945 they tried to “crush another people’s movement that had come into being in the struggle against Japan.” America’s role as liberator and tutor, so emotionally articulated in the speeches of Roxas and Quirino, is belittled by Taruc as a sham so that the U.S. could “make huge profits in our country.” Since 1899, “posing as our friends and benefactors, [the Americans] have robbed and plundered our wealth, and they held back the achievement of our democracy and freedom. When they pretended to give us independence, in 1946, it was only as a smokescreen to hide an

even greater domination" [Taruc [1949]1953: 265].

For the Huks and the many intellectuals and activists sympathetic to this movement, the events of 1945 to 1948, involving a liberation that turns into a betrayal, and an independence that masks continuing exploitation, were viewed through the prism of history. Taruc hailed Rizal's accomplishments as a writer and scholar; he acknowledged that Rizal upheld "our national honor." But Rizal could not possibly be the symbol of "the next and higher stage" of the movement. The middle-class elements that shunned revolution took shelter behind an elevated figure of the "idealist and frustrated" Rizal, while pushing into the background the accomplishments of "the militant Bonifacio" [*ibid.*: 273]. This had been the case throughout the previous decades; the educational system under the Americans had promoted this thinking. In the late 1940s, the question of Rizal versus Bonifacio was more than an academic exercise. The debate lay at the core of the ideological struggle that manifested itself in an armed rebellion and its suppression by the state and its imperial patron. This is the political backdrop to the appearance of Agoncillo's book.

The Revolt of the Masses, 1948

In the concluding pages of *The Revolt of the Masses* [Agoncillo 1956: 311–312], the author Agoncillo alludes to himself as "a young man in search of materials on the Revolution" who not long ago came upon an old man "whose face showed traces of battle scars. There was something fiercely noble in the gait of him on whose shoulders hung the heavy weight of years. His white hair contrasted sharply with his tanned face." Agoncillo struck up a conversation with this man and the Revolution became the major topic.

In his younger years, this man had fought the Spaniards and he reminisced about those days "when heroism was a rare privilege and patriotism a magnificent duty." But in recent years, such heroism was manifested again, particularly in the defense of Bataan against the Japanese invaders. The last stand of the Filipino-American forces at Corregidor was, for the old man, "a happy reminder of the glorious and deathless epoch of Philippine history." In other words, the struggle against the Japanese brought him back to the time of the struggle against Spain, which was to him not just a glorious epoch but "deathless" — meaning that it was ongoing, to be repeated endlessly. Bataan was "a solemn *reaffirmation* of man's struggle to be free," a reaffirmation of the ethos of 1896.

The "deathless" epoch of the revolution was about "the men, crude in their learning yet pure and undaunted in their aims, who left family and home to pursue the illusive ideal of freedom, not for themselves but for the coming generations who were their fear and faith and hope." The old man recalled Andres Bonifacio while looking back "through the mellowing pathos of distance to the beginnings of the vast underground movement that sustained men in their quest for a fuller life."

Towards the end of the hour-long interview, as Agoncillo was about to take leave, he asked the old man, "If I were to sum up Andres Bonifacio, what do you think I should say?" "The old

man gazed at his feet for a moment and then slowly raised his head. ‘Tell the whole world,’ came his ringing answer — ‘tell all the world that he was a noble plebeian.’”

The connection between past and present, between the revolution of 1896 and the defense of Bataan and Corregidor, is thus made not by Agoncillo himself but by an ageing veteran of 1896, who sees in both episodes a continuity that stems from the notion of a “deathless epoch” — the continuing revolution of 1896. Andres Bonifacio, the “noble plebeian” in the veteran’s words, represents the countless revolutionaries, “crude in learning yet pure and undaunted in their aims,” who have since 1896 continued this pursuit for the elusive ideal of freedom.

The reader of the book in the late 1940s — if it had been allowed publication then — would have asked himself if the “deathless epoch” of 1896 was in fact being repeated in the events of the Huk rebellion. Could this crisis be another manifestation of this “vast underground movement” that nurtured the rebellion against Spain and the resistance to Japan? The discourse that suffuses Agoncillo’s book — the repeated references to the mounting agrarian crisis under Spanish rule, the betrayal of the revolution by the well-to-do and educated classes, the hesitance of Rizal to support the armed struggle in contrast to the determination of the “militant” Bonifacio — speaks just as much to the political crisis of 1945–47 as it does to the crisis of 1895–97.

In the 1948 foreword to prizewinning manuscript, Agoncillo emphasizes that the book is more about the Katipunan than its founder, Bonifacio: “In dealing with Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan, I have laid more emphasis on the latter than on its founder and organizer.” In the first place, he acknowledges the dearth of biographical information on Bonifacio, which he sought to rectify by interviewing surviving relatives, comrades, and friends of Bonifacio. The second reason he gives for the emphasis on the movement rather than its founder is because of his belief that “Bonifacio can best be seen and appreciated against the backdrop of the revolutionary society. He could not have been greater than the Katipunan. Nor could he have risen above it.” Therefore, “to understand him, one must understand the Katipunan. He looms great because of the society.”

Agoncillo’s apologetic tone in justifying the book’s focus on the Katipunan rather than its founder can largely be explained by the expectations of his imagined readership. Philippine history was being conveyed in the schools and in public discourse largely through the lives and words of the “great men” in history, among whom Rizal stood head and shoulders above owing to the multitude of writings by and about him. In contrast, Bonifacio had left behind precious few writings, all in Tagalog, and since his death in 1897 there hadn’t appeared a proper biography of him. But there is another angle to this. Agoncillo’s focus on the society rather than its founder had the effect, very likely intended, of highlighting the importance of an organized movement run by a vanguard of individuals sworn to achieving the party’s goals through violent means, if necessary. What was the use of Rizal’s visionary words if they were not translated into action? — this theme is repeated again and again in the book. The language of Capadocia, Taruc, and the mysterious author of the *The Peasant War in the Philippines* (1946) reappears,

albeit in more scholarly fashion, in *The Revolt of the Masses*. In framing the story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan in terms of an organized movement drawn from the masses that is betrayed by the educated and propertied class, Agoncillo was providing a historical lineage to the Huk rebellion.

The Revolt of the Masses could have immediately been disseminated, but its publication had to wait eight years, until 1956. Overtly the problem in 1949 was a protest lodged by General Aguinaldo against the prizewinning manuscript. Misinformed by provocateurs about its contents (which, being in English, he had not read), the General had allegedly complained about it to Malacañang and President Quirino took action to bar its publication [Ocampo 1995: 45, 81].¹⁴⁾ But a more serious obstacle stemmed from Agoncillo's use of the notion of "class" to organize his narrative about the revolt of the masses' betrayal by the "middle class," thus aligning his work with proscribed texts such as *The Peasant War in the Philippines*.¹⁵⁾ The intervention of the shadowy Congressional Committee on Un-Filipino Activities (CUFA) was behind the suppression of the book.

On April 30, 1948 the House of Representatives adopted Resolution 42 authorizing the appointment of a special committee of seven to investigate the peace and order problem and the "extent, character, and objectives of communist propaganda activities." Congress was concerned that such "subversive and un-Filipino" propaganda, instigated from the outside as well as domestically, attacked the basic principles of government as framed by the Constitution. The appointment of the committee was postponed in deference to the amnesty proclamation of June 25 aimed at attracting officials and members of the Hukbalahap and PKM back to the government fold. The CUFA, chaired by Representative Cornelio Villareal of Capiz, finally went into action on October 8. Included in its roster of seven was the Representative from Zambales and future President, Ramon Magsaysay.¹⁶⁾

The CUFA recognized that the country was in the midst of an ideological war and claimed that its function would be to enable the Filipino people, through its Representatives, "to enter the ideological struggle and act according to the accepted tenets and procedures of truth and fair play." Its first report, published in 1949, slams the Communists' "queer analysis of reality" for its potential to do "irreparable damage to our society." This is because such ideas "flash on the mind like bright lights" and stay on until one takes a closer look and finds nothing of

14) Aguinaldo also complained that Agoncillo's entry won first place because of a partisan board of judges, and that some of the sources used for the book were flawed; Milagros C. Guerrero, "Re-reading Agoncillo," lecture delivered in March 2003. Apparently still unpublished, this 2003 piece by Guerrero, a former co-author of Agoncillo, contains interesting and useful details about her mentor's career and writings, including the sharp criticisms attracted by *Revolt of the Masses*.

15) Agoncillo mentioned to interviewer Ambeth Ocampo that the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) had some involvement in the suppression of the book manuscript, but that a certain Captain Jarlego pronounced it as "not communistic" and gave it his approval [Ocampo 1995: 81]. There is more to this than meets the eye, however.

16) CUFA, *General Report on Communism and the Communist Party* [1949] (approved for publication on Feb. 28, 1949).

substance. Their logic assaults us “with a drive so sharp it pierces any ordinary reasoning.” The Communists can “camouflage” their “irrational minds” and pose as discoverers of “the secret of creation.” They have thus succeeded in “enticing a reluctant audience” like the members of the Party, the Hukbalahap, and their front organizations (among which was the Newspaperman’s Guild).

The 1949 report devotes quite a bit of space to a discussion of history and revolution, understandably so, given the new nation-state’s moorings in contested narratives of the Revolution and its aftermath. Taking exception to the Communists’ claim that “the written history of all existing society is the history of economic class struggles,” the Committee tries to debunk the theory of social contradictions that inevitably lead to conflict. Contradictions undeniably exist, but like the two sides of a coin they “do not oppose each other to mutual destruction.” Contradictions constitute the wholeness of Man and of society, and so “to destroy those contradictions, which the Communists are trying to do, is to destroy Man and society itself.” After this preamble, the discussion shifts to Philippine history and the Revolution of 1896.

Apparently, members of the CUFA were able to meet with Mariano Balgos, general secretary of the Communist Party. This may have taken place during the general amnesty from June to mid-August. Balgos is said to have presented to the Committee a statement of the “doctrines” of his party, its constitution, and its by-laws. The Committee treated Balgos as a simple mouthpiece of the Communist Party, and the Party’s doctrines as derivative of the works of Marx and Engels. Balgos is said to have confirmed that the Manifesto of the Communist Party — a little book packed with “mental poison” — was an “authoritative source” of the Filipino Communists’ views.

What the CUFA failed to note, in its desire to highlight the foreignness of Communism, was that Mariano Balgos was a contemporary bearer of the “deathless epoch” of 1896. His father was a veteran of the Katipunan, “an active supporter of Bonifacio against Aguinaldo” according to Taruc, who later became a follower of the pro-Japanese Ricarte in the *Asociacion de Veteranos*. Mariano himself worked as a typesetter and was active in the Union of Printers. Most telling is his 1920s posts as Secretary of a local chapel of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) and Minister in the *Iglesia Rizalina* church. In 1927 he joined the *Kapatiran ng mga Anak Pawi* (Brotherhood of Toilers) and when the war broke out gravitated to the Huk army where he became Taruc’s Chief of Staff [Taruc [1949] 1953: 90–92].

When Balgos faced the CUFA in late 1948, then, he was a spokesman, not just of a modern Communist Party, but also of a domestic tradition of revolt in which he could trace his own lineage to Bonifacio’s Katipunan. One senses that the CUFA knew this, for they were at great pains to demonstrate that they — Villareal, Magsaysay, and the rest — and not Balgos and his fellow travelers, were the authentic bearers of the Filipino revolutionary tradition.

“Certainly the history of the Philippines is not the history of class struggles,” the CUFA report thunders. Although the CUFA makes no mention of Agoncillo’s book manuscript, it would certainly have been one of the “subtle attempts to insinuate the class struggle angle” into books about Philippine social and political development, and particularly the Philippine

Revolution. Rizal is considered a “bourgeois” intellectual and Bonifacio a “proletarian” revolutionary — “No crueller insult had been heaped upon the memory of these men!” Particularly galling to the CUFA is the suggestion that Rizal was not quite the universal hero after all, since he “thought and acted only at the behest of a social class.” Furthermore, to say that the “compelling motive” of Bonifacio was to liberate the proletariat is to “distort his revolutionary legacy” to the country [Congressional Committee on Un-Filipino Activities 1949: 28–29].

“Marx and Mr. Balgos speak of revolution and use of force, which mean one and the same thing — armed force.” Here the CUFA pushes Balgos onto the side of the foreign — Marx. But it does not condemn armed revolution per se. The Committee “believes in the validity of revolution as an instrument in the preservation of the people’s freedoms.” It is compelled to take a seemingly radical stance because of Philippine history, because “we would be desecrating the glorious revolutionary tradition of this country if we did not.” The Revolution of 1896 is foundational to the CUFA’s vision of the nation as well as Balgos’. It then becomes a question of whose revolution is legitimate.

The CUFA ultimately falls back on the “Free World” argument that revolution is waged “for the purpose of upholding and protecting the principles and the eternal truths over which freedom rests.” If the representatives of the people who are in Congress were to consider “present realities,” then the “right to revolt” is on our side and not the Communists’. The latter threaten our freedoms, so we are entitled to defend them. The “spontaneous reaction” of volunteer guerrillas and the “natural heroism” of the Army’s troopers in their armed campaigns against the “dissidents,” are manifestations of “our revolutionary heritage” and constitute a “legitimate Filipino revolution.”

In the light of the CUFA’s condemnation of what it considered to be illegitimate readings of the Revolution’s history, we can readily imagine how it would have reacted to this statement on page 115 of *The Revolt of the Masses*: “For the Katipunan, together with its offspring, the Revolution, was fundamentally a mass-idea based on utopian socialism. The rich element, which had everything to lose and practically nothing to gain personally, generally was not unaware of the hostility of the society towards the wealthy, the landlords in general, including the friar-suzerain.” In fact an early review of the book bluntly states that “it fits the ideological and tactical orientation of the Communist Party, and is calculated to create the misleading belief in the public mind that the present subversive struggle is merely a continuation of the historical revolutionary struggle of Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan [Hernandez and Del Rosario 1956].¹⁷⁾ Critics Jose Hernandez and Simeon del Rosario demonstrate that the original (1948) manuscript was closely aligned with the Huk cause. For example, it utilized more pronouncedly Marxist language such as “proletariat” instead of the term “masses” that appears in the toned-down 1956 version. Interestingly, they also draw sinister parallels between Agoncillo’s

17) Guerrero also draws out some implications of this review in her 2003 essay that is broadly critical of Agoncillo’s ideological biases.

unpublished manuscript and the writings of Huk leaders Taruc and Balgos.¹⁸⁾ The prize-winning manuscript must have been considered dangerous, its publication proscribed because the reader would not have failed to connect the Katipunan to the HMB (*Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* — People's Liberation Army), the wealthy landlords of the past to the exact same ones today, and the (Spanish) friar suzerains to the American suzerains in a supposedly independent nation.

When HMB organizers William and Celia Pomeroy were captured in 1952 they revealed some associates who were Communist sympathizers “in that they believe in the objectives and program of the Communist Party but do not subscribe to the methods used.” Among those mentioned were Leopoldo Yabes and Teodoro Agoncillo.¹⁹⁾ It was also discovered that Agoncillo had sheltered the Communist Party leader Jesus Lava during the arrests of 1950 that eventually led to the defeat of the Huk rebels [Dalisay 1999: 98]. In the light of Agoncillo's pronounced intervention in the “history wars” of the 1940s, the following sidelight from 1950 arrests now makes sense. Jose Dalisay, in his book on the Lava family, recounts how Huk leaders up in the mountains were listening over the radio to a judge pronouncing sentence on their arrested comrades in Manila:

The judge's voice comes faintly over the distance, reading a prepared statement. He has not prepared it himself, we know. His voice is strained and he stumbles a bit, as if he were unfamiliar with the text. He is saying that the Huk revolution is not a true Filipino revolution; that it is not like the revolution of 1896 or like all of the hundred revolts of Filipinos against colonial domination. He says that the Huk leaders are not nationalists, that they are agents of a foreign power who are taking advantage of the people and are betraying them into alien hands. So says the judge, reading the statement that has been coured through (or prepared by) the American JUSMAG.... [*ibid.*: 120]²⁰⁾

The Revolt of the Masses, 1956

By 1955, Agoncillo's book manuscript had received General Aguinaldo's blessing and its launch as a special issue of the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, a faculty journal of the University of the Philippines' College of Liberal Arts, was scheduled for Bonifacio Day in November of that year. Agoncillo rightly claims that it was President Magsaysay who attempted to block the book's publication. Magsaysay halted its printing in 1955 for being

18) Comparisons were made with Taruc's *Born of the People* [1953] and a 1948 piece by Mariano Balgos titled *Ano ang Komunismo?* (What is Communism?)

19) Republic of the Philippines, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), “The Communist Education and Propaganda Effort in the Philippines,” [1964: 281]. NICA was the predecessor of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), formed by President Marcos during Martial Law.

20) JUSMAG is the acronym for “Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group,” established by treaty on March 21, 1947 to provide for a contingent of U. S. military advisers to aid the Philippine military in counter-insurgency operations. The word “advisory” has recently been changed to “assistance.”

“controversial.” When printing went ahead, anyway, Magsaysay stepped in to suspend publication on February 4, 1956. Apparently the powerful Catholic Education Association of the Philippines had intervened. Furthermore, the Catholic newspaper *The Sentinel* had raised an outcry over government money being used to finance “an outspokenly anti-Catholic book.” The matter was brought before the Supreme Court, which in the end upheld publication of the book. Magsaysay then formed a palace committee that decided to allow 20,000 copies to be printed in 1956.²¹⁾

What historians and biographers have overlooked thus far in trying to explain Magsaysay's hostility towards Agoncillo's manuscript long after its suppression by the CUFA in 1949 is the fact that Magsaysay himself had aspired to Bonifacio status in his successful bid for the presidency. As Defense Secretary, Magsaysay had spearheaded the crushing of the Huk rebellion by 1952. This triumph, accompanied as it was by civic action programs designed to wean peasant support from the rebels, was bound to attract the attention of many. Newspapers and radio commentators began to proclaim him as the “man of the masses,” the “only redeeming feature of the Quirino administration” [Coquia 1955: 32]. Somewhere along the line a connection between Magsaysay and Bonifacio was imagined. Instead of denigrating Bonifacio, why not appropriate him instead? This aspiration towards identification with the national hero second only to Rizal would have been undermined by Agoncillo's radical take on the historical Bonifacio that, as we saw earlier, aligned him and his secret society with Magsaysay's arch-enemies, the Huks.

As early as August 1952, Leon Maria Guerrero, a legal counsel in the Senate and a close confidante of now-Senator Laurel, was reported to have visited Magsaysay at his office with an invitation to meet with the Senator. Guerrero's friendship with Laurel stemmed from the Japanese occupation, when he agreed to serve in Laurel's government and was posted to Tokyo as First Secretary of the Philippine Embassy. Guerrero was also a part-time historian whose prize-winning biography of Rizal and translation of the hero's novels would appear in print a decade later.

The mysterious invitation suggests that Guerrero and his friends had identified Magsaysay as the ideal candidate — short of Laurel himself who refused to run this time — to pit against the faltering Quirino in the 1953 elections [*ibid.*: 31, 226]. Magsaysay politely declined the invitation. Laurel was, after all, the most vigorous critic of his “boss,” Quirino. To top it all, the names of Laurel and his associate, Recto, had been discovered in captured documents of the Huks. Rumors were rife that these two politicians together with Judge Jesus Barrera would be arrested as Communist sympathizers on Magsaysay's orders. But Guerrero's failed visit was

21) “Stop Publication of Agoncillo book on A. Bonifacio,” *Manila Chronicle*, Jan. 28, 1956; “Agoncillo case,” *Manila Chronicle*, Feb. 9, 1956; Carmencita H. Acosta, *The Life of Rufino Cardinal Santos* [1973: 78]; Ocampo [1995: 8]. In Ocampo's 1995 book there is a reprint of an interview of Agoncillo conducted at the Solidaridad Publishing House in March 1976, where further details on the controversy over the book's publication can be found on pp. 182-183.

just the beginning of a patient courtship. Others would come along, such as Senator Lorenzo Tañada of the Citizens Party (allies of the Nacionalistas since the 1951 elections) and Laurel himself, to woo the Defense Secretary — a Liberal Party stalwart — to the Nacionalista camp. Laurel argued that Magsaysay's candidacy would make for a more peaceful change of leadership and that only a Magsaysay could unite the fractured nation.

Magsaysay's public defection to the Nacionalistas was staged on March 9, 1953, Laurel's 62nd birthday. The annual birthday party at the Laurel residence became a huge political rally when the celebrant announced Magsaysay's affiliation with the Nacionalista Party before some 2,000 party leaders in attendance and thousands more listening to the radio broadcasts of the event. Laurel explained to the crowd that the times in which they lived could be compared to the crisis that led to the Revolution of 1896. He urged the crowd to lend a hand in bringing about change; to lead them "What we need is a Bonifacio with a soul that is truly sincere and patriotic... [and] that new Bonifacio we find in Magsaysay" [*Manila Times*, March 10, 1953; Coquia 1955: 45]. Laurel admitted that Magsaysay was of limited educational background (at one point Magsaysay worked as a foreman in a bus company) but, Laurel emphasized, at least Magsaysay was dedicated and honest, unlike Quirino. The comparison with Bonifacio, the warehouseman of limited education, was apt — or so it would have seemed to the enthusiastic audience.

Laurel ended his speech with the assurance that he himself would answer for Magsaysay's failings as President, and that "Magsaysay will serve our best interests fruitfully and well" [Abueva 1971: 236]. Whose best interests? The U. S., to be sure, after pumping in funds and image-building expertise, expected a Magsaysay victory to further their "Free World" interests. The Church, still smarting from the religious instruction controversy, cast its lot with Magsaysay, contributing millions of Catholic votes. The famous song hit of the time, *Mambo Magsaysay*, was composed by Catholic Action stalwart, Raul Manglapus. Laurel and Recto, for their part, expected to work through Magsaysay in order to further their anticolonial nationalist aims. Recto, keynote speaker in the Nacionalista Party's March convention, declared that the 1953 election would witness "the victory of national dignity and self-reliance, and of an enlightened patriotism, over the weaklings, the sycophants, and the mendicants, who, to extricate the nation from misery they have brought about, have surrendered [the] political sovereignty and economic independence ... of the Filipino nation to exploiters and oppressors" [Coquia 1955: 62].

In this climate of popular acclamation for the new "man of the masses," Quirino was placed on the defensive. Rather than attack the man's honesty and past performance as Defense Secretary, he attacked the "unholy alliances" that had catapulted him to prominence. Quirino insisted that the inexperienced and immature Magsaysay was nothing but a puppet of both the Americans and the old politicians suspected of links with Communists. To top it all, Quirino added, these politicians were once puppets of the Japanese. In contrast to the opportunistic and directionless Magsaysay, Quirino pictured himself as a model of consistency, who had worked against great odds to rebuild the nation from the ashes of World War II.

Magsaysay, on the other hand, threatened renewed destruction. Quirino repeated the allegations of the CUFA, now chaired by Liberal Congressman Tito Tizon, that Magsaysay not only had allied himself with the pro-communists Laurel and Recto, but was also in effect fomenting violent revolution. Secretary of Justice Oscar Castelo even declared in a rally, "I will stake my life and do my utmost to stop the victory of Jose P. Laurel and Claro M. Recto, both of them black souls and communists, dangerous to this country. If Ramon Magsaysay wins in this election, Laurel and Recto will rule the country and communism will rise" [*ibid.*: 177-178].

Castelo actually had a point. One effect of hooking the present onto a revered past, as Laurel had done in comparing the 1953 crisis to 1896 and introducing the new Bonifacio, is that a powerful narrative line begins to reorient the present, making possible what previously could not even be imagined. Magsaysay's potential for becoming another Bonifacio was welcomed by numerous nationalist intellectuals and labor leaders. They seemed to forget that this new Bonifacio was the same American-made Magsaysay who had crushed the Huk rebellion. They were mesmerized by the return of the hero of 1896, just as the spectators at the 1943 Independence Day ceremony, performed in the shadow of the Japanese military administration, were overpowered by the symbols of the Revolution and wept.

With a view to consolidating student support for Magsaysay, the leaders of the major student organizations — Student Catholic Action of the Philippines (SCAP), College Editors' Guild (CEG) and Conference Delegates Association (CONDA) — decided to form a confederation called National Student Movement for Democracy (NASTUM). The NASTUM was envisioned as a mass organization at the student level. It was a movement, moreover, that attempted to forge its roots in the 1880s. As one organizer put it, "the different student organizations, given a leadership of vision and responsibility, can be forged into the Propaganda Movement of the present. The CEG, composed as it is of youthful writers from some 70 learning centers all over the country, can provide the new Propaganda Movement the necessary theoretical force" [Republic of the Philippines, National Coordinating Agency 1964: 265].

The Andres Bonifacio in Ramon Magsaysay was never more evident, if at all, than during the lead-up to the November 10 elections. Organized labor groups certainly recognized that this presidential candidate, unlike any other, had worked with his hands as a garage mechanic and foreman. He was one of them and would understand their problems. Vicente Arniago and Vicente Rafael, president and general counsel, respectively, of the Philippine Association of Free Labor Unions (PAFLU), "expressed a hopeful outlook in a new administration that would henceforth bring progressive measures to laborers" [*Manila Times*, Nov. 12, 1953; Coquia 1955: 214].

As for the nation's rural majority, Magsaysay's campaign style of direct, face-to-face interaction with the masses, largely bypassing traditional local politicians, or leaders, brought them into contact with a future head of state with whom they could relate personally. Touring the countryside, he appeared to the masses to be like one of them. He listened patiently to their

everyday problems, promising solutions if he were elected.²²⁾ Magsaysay was perhaps not so much a new Bonifacio as he was the new Redeemer. Much has been told and written about the magic he wrought among ordinary Filipinos. In time a multitude of little stories would become a mythology, creating a larger than life President — a hero of the present, in effect. As long as this effect was sustained, much of the nation held together.

On December 30, 1953, the anniversary of Rizal's death, President-elect Magsaysay delivered his inaugural address before a crowd of half a million, roughly similar in size to Laurel's inauguration a decade ago and at the same spot where Rizal was executed — the Luneta. The brief, 25-minute, speech had been drafted by Senator-elect Emmanuel Pelaez and Leon Maria Guerrero, now a partner in Recto's law firm. Magsaysay did not pursue Laurel's vigorous parallels with the time of 1896 or the new Bonifacio — indicative, perhaps, of the Bonifacio image's volatility, or the Rizalian proclivities of his speechwriters, both outstanding alumni of the Ateneo de Manila:

We have a glorious past. Now we must build a future worthy of that past.

It is significant that we begin on this day and on this ground hallowed by the supreme sacrifice of Jose Rizal. We can find no finer example of dedication to country to light our way.

All too often, however, we speak of Rizal — and of Del Pilar, Bonifacio, Mabini, and our host of heroes — as if their work were done, as if today their spirit had ceased to have any meaning or value to our people. The fact is that we need their spirit now more than ever. We need it to complete the work which they began.

We need men of integrity and faith like Rizal and Del Pilar; men of action like Bonifacio; men of inflexible patriotism like Mabini. We need their zeal, their self-reliance, their capacity for work, their devotion to service, their ability to lose themselves in the common cause of building a nation. [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ramon_Magsaysay's_Inaugural_Address (accessed on September 13, 2011); Abueva 1971: 280]

Basically, Magsaysay pledged to fulfill the promises he had made to the people while campaigning among them. The social provisions of the Constitution would become more than just empty promises. "Democracy" would function not just at the polls but also more importantly in the concrete sense of bringing food, shelter, jobs, happiness and security to the people. The latter's "happiness and security are the only foundations on which a strong republic can be built." The multiple references in the speech to "the people" and "the common man"

22) Magsaysay's populist campaign style is described well in Abueva [1971: 253-255]. Clearly this election presages Joseph Estrada's 1997 campaign for the presidency in which he was likewise portrayed as a Bonifacio figure, a man of the masses.

indicate that Magsaysay was about to “reap the whirlwind,” to echo Father de la Costa. Cynics might read this as having the rug pulled out from under the long-time admirers of the historical Bonifacio — the proscribed groups labeled “Communist.” The other side to this, however, is that Magsaysay would henceforth be held to his promises. Hopes would be raised that, if frustrated, might lead to the real Bonifacio's return.

The Bonifacio figured by Magsaysay in his candidacy was soon exorcised in his incumbency. After all, Magsaysay's “masses” were meant to be pacified through benevolent leadership, not encouraged to revolt through reintroducing parallels with the real Bonifacio and the Katipunan. Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* was controversial just by its title alone. When it was finally published in 1956 in defiance of Magsaysay and the Church hierarchy, critics panned it for being Marxist and obsessed with the so-called masses while ignoring the contributions of the middle class to the revolution. It was also attacked for irreverently portraying Rizal as typically middle class in repudiating the Katipunan and refusing to join it. The many criticisms of the book, however, tend to overlook its crucial function in providing an alternative to the official narrative of Philippine history that was shaped and implanted during the formative years of 1943 to 1948, as the nation successively experienced Japanese colonialism, political independence, assertive nationalism, Allied liberation, still another political independence, and, finally, agrarian-socialist rebellion.

Given the accepted view that, owing to historical circumstances since 1896, “revolution” was intrinsic to the national self-definition, Agoncillo's book had the effect of disseminating among the educated public a spirited reading of the Revolution of 1896 that exceeded what the state was heretofore prepared to accept. This new account of Bonifacio and the Katipunan would nicely complement the stipulation of Senate Bill 438, penned and sponsored by leading nationalists (and Japanese “collaborators”) Senators Claro Recto and Jose Laurel, and passed in late 1956, that Rizal's novels would be required reading in all the schools. Rizal, too was being reconfigured for the times [Ileto 2010]. The conditions were being set in place for a new emplotment of Philippine history that would supplant, or at least provide a viable alternative to, the original template that was introduced in the wake of the Filipino-American triumph over Japan.

Postscript

When my Cornell mentor, Professor Wolters, warned me in 1967 against writing like Agoncillo and, together with Professor Hall, encouraged me to emulate the Jesuit historian and arch-Rizalist De la Costa, they were, in effect, drawing an innocent neophyte into the earlier controversies over Rizal and Bonifacio. But why would Wolters, in particular, have cared about the writings of Agoncillo? Having looked more closely into the circumstances behind the writing and publication of *The Revolt of the Masses*, it seems to me that the Cold War proclivities of both Agoncillo and Wolters were behind much of this.

I have long been intrigued by the late-blooming history careers of both Agoncillo and

Wolters. Agoncillo was born in 1912 in Lemery, Batangas province, which was the center of a vast guerrilla movement against the U. S. Army in 1901 and 1902. Wolters was born just three years later (1915) in Reading, England, when England was still lording over a vast empire. Agoncillo was ambivalent toward the Japanese in the Philippines, denouncing its army's atrocities but lauding its support of the vernacular arts and literature as well as the nationalist goals of Laurel's government of 1943. Wolters, on the other hand, was employed as a colonial civil servant whose career took a blow with the Japanese defeat of England's army in Malaya and Singapore. He was detained at Changi prison during the war, while Agoncillo was free to observe the workings of Japanese rule and conduct oral history research on Bonifacio and the Katipunan.

Agoncillo, as we have seen, sympathized with the communist-led Huk rebellion of the late 1940s and 1950s. He was under surveillance for pro-CPP activities in 1950s. Wolters, in contrast, after liberation became District Officer in the anti-communist campaign in Malaya. He rose to the position of Director of Psychological Warfare in 1955.

Although both Agoncillo and Wolters had had a longstanding interest in historical studies since their formative years at the University of the Philippines and Oxford, both came late to the history profession. Agoncillo joined the History Department of the UP in 1958 at age 45 and retired in 1978. Wolters quit the Malayan Civil Service and returned to England to join the PhD program at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London, in 1957. He joined the Cornell History Department in 1964 at the age of 49 and retired in 1979.

Agoncillo and Wolters were, therefore, contemporaries. When I first encountered them both, *at the same time*, in late 1967 I can now see in hindsight that they represented two sides of the Cold War that were pulling me in separate directions. It is clear from my reflections in this essay that Agoncillo spoke directly to the issues of colonialism, empire, nationalism, decolonization, and revolution. Wolters, in contrast, not only refrained from talking about such political issues but also devoted himself to writing about early Southeast Asia, reaching as far back as the times of Srivijaya and Angkor.

Wolters rarely, if ever, spoke to his students about his previous career; I never really understood his involvement in the Malayan Emergency until the obituaries that appeared upon his death in 2000. It has since become clear that Wolters' stint as District Officer during the Malayan Emergency taught him much about the "cult of the outlaw" embodied by Communist leaders such as Chin Peng, which appealed to the young Chinese masses. It was his job to seek ways to undermine this appeal. Agoncillo, on the other hand, was caught up in the movement for full independence after the liberation from Japanese rule. He strove to provide historical legitimacy to the Communist-led Huk rebellion that ensued after the "betrayal" of the masses by the propertied class and their American patrons.

Wolters keenly observed the influence of the *penghulu* (village chief) among the rural Malays and the elaborate court rituals of the Sultan of Perak. With these new insights, he was able to establish a "concept of service" that explained the relationship between the "man of prowess" and his clients. Agoncillo, meanwhile, sought to understand and document the

relationship of figures like Rizal and Bonifacio to the ordinary people who joined the Revolution. He wrote with passion about the rejection and eventual execution of the “plebeian” Bonifacio by the local aristocracy of Cavite province, while Wolters was figuring out the need for the Malay ruler to gather political intelligence in order to anticipate or pre-empt any potential threats. Wolters’ concern with the political survival of the Malay ruling class, and his interest in their use of subterfuge and intelligence, could very well reflect his previous counter-insurgency experience in Malaya.²³⁾

At the end of the day, the question remains: What is the point of contrasting the careers of Agoncillo and Wolters? So what if they represent opposing perspectives in the Cold War? Since my own career as a scholar has been profoundly shaped by both, the question is not a moot one to me. Wolters’ warning that I should not write like Agoncillo was quite likely just a psychological ploy to make me a more careful historian, for he never actually prevented me from emulating Agoncillo in the end. His “warning,” nevertheless, reflects the state of the field of Southeast Asian Studies not just in the 1960s but even up to today. Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses* was never considered an important reading in the field. Reviews of the book in Western journals were largely negative; as I recall, Agoncillo was grouped together with the likes of Maung Htin Aung and Syed Hussein Alatas — nationalists, activists, polemicists, but certainly not “real” historians as the guardians of the discipline would have it. If we in this post-imperial age can begin to understand, say, Agoncillo and Wolters as two sides of the same coin, perhaps the history of the field of studies can be rewritten and a book like *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* can take its rightful place as a classic in Southeast Asian history.

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23) Apart from my personal acquaintance with Wolters from 1967 up to his death in 2000, my information about him comes from Hooker [2001: 1–18]. Additional information can be gleaned from Milner [2000]. The most thorough and insightful biographical account to date is Craig Reynolds’ *Early Southeast Asia: Selected Essays* [2008: 1–38].

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