

## Living the Postcolonial; Thinking it Neo-colonial; Calling it Cultural Cooperation between Spain and the Philippines

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My personal experience in the Philippines, working for the Embassy of Spain, organising and promoting Spanish events in the Philippines, felt like living the postcolonial. In 2005, I landed in a newly-created post as a cultural assistant, which followed an attempt from the Spanish government to boost cultural relationships with the Philippines, as part of a wider political strategy of increasing its visibility in Asia. As a passionate (and naive) arts advocate, I was convinced that cultural promotion in this transnational context was simply about supporting the arts and enabling links between artists. At the outset, I believed that intercultural exchanges followed the kind of utopian encounters that reached what Rustom Bharucha refers to as the “point zero” (35). This understanding is based on the assumption that, in intercultural encounters, “there is a total erasure of the participant’s ethnicities in favour of their universal human identities, creativities, and potentialities” (35). However, as Bharucha explains, this is a naive idea as “the interculturalist’s universality is a kind of mask that disguises his/her ‘real’ ethnocentricity” (37).

At first, I did not identify the politics at work which were disguised under the official heading of cultural exchange. I also failed to recognise that, regardless of the artist’s autonomy, some extra baggage was always there: that of the artist’s ethnocentricity, and that of those organisations which made the encounter possible. The Embassy of Spain in the Philippines and the Manila branch of the *Instituto Cervantes*, the Spanish official cultural centre, set the rules and the framework in which those cultural encounters took place. Very soon I realised that cultural politics were involved in this situation, and that (post-)colonial discourses were at the core of Spain’s cultural actions in the Philippines. These discourses stemmed from a colonial relationship between both countries, which bound them together from 1565 to 1898.

Even up to the present day, Spanish cultural actions in the Philippines, organised by the Embassy and the *Instituto Cervantes*, follow a series of political objectives in the fields of culture and the arts that guide and inform Spain’s self-promotion and cultural exchange in Asia in general, and the Philippines in particular. These cultural policies are

relatively recent. In 2000, the Spanish central government launched a new set of foreign affair policies towards countries in Asia and the Pacific, published as *Plan Marco Asia-Pacífico 2000-04* (Spain, *Plan Marco*). The major objectives of this plan were to tackle the lack of a unified policy towards this area, as well as to boost cultural and diplomatic relationships with countries located in Asia and the Pacific. The *Plan Marco* was followed by the *Plan Asia 2005-08* (Spain, *Plan de Acción*), and the *Plan Asia- Pacífico 3: 2009-12* (Spain, *Plan 3*), both of these much more ambitious in terms of objectives and resources. This legal framework is particularly relevant in the case of the Spanish-Philippine cultural relationships, as the Philippines was listed as a priority for Spanish foreign affairs in the *Plan Asia 2005-08* (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 121). Furthermore, the subsequent *Plan 3* explains that bilateral political relations increased since 2005, and it was the Spanish Government's intention to deepen these relationships (Spain, *Plan 3* 41).

The Philippines was chosen as a priority for Spain to increase its presence in the region largely because of the countries' colonial relationship that lasted over three hundred years. In the period 2000-2010, Spain steadily increased expenditure on cultural activities in the Philippines. Even when, in 2009, the economic climate was already clouding over in Spain, the 2009 plan still considered an increase in arts funding (Spain, *Plan 3* 43). Since 2000, Spain's cultural policies in the Philippines have focused on the promotion of Spanish culture, through a range of cultural actions, including the establishment of links with local artists. In many cases, the approach to this "cultural exchange" followed by Spain has been the (re)production and representation of the shared colonial history through exhibitions and other cultural activities.

Capitalising on the historical connections, arts funding has been available to selected local artists. The funded projects have been those with "Hispanic themes," keeping in line with Spanish objectives to increase Spain's visibility in the Philippines. In this environment, some kind of post-colonial relationship has been established by Spain, as the Spanish government is utilising the ex-colonial relationship as a base for current cultural promotion. In this context, I agree with John McLeod when he reminds us that consequences of colonialism are still current "and still have the capacity to exert 'pressures' today" (4). Some of these pressures are described in this article, arguing for a postcolonial reading of the situation analysed. My understanding of postcolonialism relates to the processes of analysis and critique of the ways in which particular knowledge systems, such as Western systems, have become hegemonic (Sharp). In this specific analysis, I argue that those Spanish knowledge systems, embedded in cultural policy, have helped to unbalance the present situation, echoing a past colonial relationship between the Philippines and Spain.

Even though postcolonial theories have been recently questioned and described as "an exhausted paradigm" (Wilson et al. 1), new research stresses the many new directions that the discipline is taking, including

global and transnational studies (ibid), as well as critiques of recent neo-colonial relationships (Hiddleston). This neo-imperialist critique has been widely studied by Filipino scholars. Fernando Zialcita asserts that the “Philippines has been dominated by foreign powers, and continues to be so today, particularly by the US” (19), and Sionil José affirms that “colonialism dies hard –it persists in actual forces of domination, control” (176-177). It is in this line of thinking that Priscelina Patajo-Legasto, one of the leading Filipino scholars in cultural studies, argues for a definition of Philippine studies as “an inquiry about the Philippines and Filipinos...to liberate ourselves [Filipinos] from the legacies of Spanish and American colonialist discourses and the continuing power of Western hegemony, that have metamorphosed into discourses of globalization” (xxiii).

This understanding is proof of the importance and currency that postcolonial critiques have in the Philippines, and they should be considered in this particular analysis. However, a postcolonial framework is not enough to explain the many different variables that occur in this case of transnational cultural promotion. The links between cultural promotion and specific political objectives call for the use of an interdisciplinary analytical approach. A key concept here is that of symbolic power that, as I argue, is at work in the field of cultural exchange.

An extreme example of this symbolic power is the understanding of Spanish cultural promotion as “cultural pressure” by some of the key players in Spanish actions in the Philippines. For instance, Spanish diplomat Delfin Colomé, who was the Ambassador of Spain in the Philippines (1997-2000), expressed that

[b]y means of an impressive cultural programme, Spain presented in the Philippines more than a hundred activities throughout 1998, in what turned out to be the greatest cultural pressure ever exerted by any other country in the islands. (Colomé 10)

This cultural pressure has led to a Spanish discourse that links a Spanish historical past in the Philippines with Spain’s relatively recent intentions to gain political relevance in Asia.

This Spanish symbolic power can be identified, not only in the conscious decision to represent other cultures (such as the Philippines’ culture) through exhibitions (Lidchi), but also in the accumulation of several kinds of capital, including funding, recognition, prestige, and authority (Bourdieu, *Field*) when Spanish cultural activities enter the field of Philippine local arts.

In order to analyse this situation, this article focuses on the discourse concerning the Philippines in the Spanish *Plan Asia 2005-08* (Spain, *Plan de Acción*), as an example of recent transnational policies. Contextualising this, a particular case study is presented: the 2006 exhibition entitled *The Colonial Imaginary; Photography in the Philippines during the Spanish Period (1860-1898)*. This exhibit was envisioned and organised from Spain (by Spanish curators) to be transferred to, and displayed in, several

Philippine arts institutions, including the National Museum of the Philippines. *The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition is particularly relevant, as it was one of the events chosen by Spain to boost relationships with the Philippines during the celebrations of the Year of the Philippines and Spain, in 2006.

In this article, I argue that Spanish cultural promotion in the Philippines since 2000, which has followed the objectives of Spain's foreign affairs policies towards Asia, can be linked to a post-colonial reality. Furthermore, it has created a web of cultural encounters, some of which are uneven, and can be discussed in terms of postcolonialism (and perceived as neo-colonialism), based on a historical relationship that brings a historical (colonial) power relationship to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

### A Web of Power Relations: Discourses about the Philippines in Spanish International Cooperation Policies

A major aspect of Spanish Foreign Affairs policies is the establishment of bilateral relationships with certain countries through the expenditure on projects that help those countries develop in different areas; such as education, alleviation of poverty, and recovery from natural disasters.

This "cooperation for development" (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 126) is one of the political strategies for Spain to follow in Asia for the period discussed (2005-2008). In the 2005 Spanish policies towards Asia, the Philippines is included in the particular category of "priority countries" (ibid 126-127). Countries in this category become recipients of Spanish funds and resources for the duration of the policy. However, this idea was not new in 2005, as "the Philippine case is already sufficiently established and ... absorbed approximately 50% of AECI's cooperation in the region" (ibid 52). *AECI (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional)* is the official Spanish institution in charge of implementing the different programmes for international cooperation. The focus on cooperation for development became clearer in 2008, when the agency changed its name to *AECID*, which stands for *Agencia Española de Cooperación y Desarrollo* (Spanish Agency for Cooperation and Development). In the Philippines, the Manila branch of the AECID is well established, and it has been administering a great many Spanish projects for cooperation in the Philippines since 1992.

Therefore, an important aspect of the Spanish-Philippine official relationships has traditionally been a continuous influx of Spanish resources into the country, channelled by Spanish institutions in the Philippines. Behind this humanitarian assistance, there is an agenda of pursuing particular interests. The Spanish 2005 plan explains that the consideration of the Philippines as a priority for Spanish cooperation in Asia "is due, mostly, to the historical links and existent affinities, but it

achieves a growing relevance by the important role that it can play in the fight against international terrorism and irregular migration” (ibid 126).

Spanish cooperation, therefore, is not entirely philanthropic, as it pursues particular objectives that are expected from the Philippines. However, let us think of the possibility of considering Spanish expenditure on the Philippines as a “gift” in the way that it is “not expected” to be returned as such, as outlined in the Spanish policies (ibid 129). The fact that Spanish official policies for cooperation in Asia position the Philippines in a situation of “recipient” of Spanish funds (“in need” of that help) has established a particular relationship endowed with symbolic power. This movement of funds and intentions (the act of “giving”) is taking place in the realm of the “economy of symbolic goods” which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, “is opposed to the equivalent exchanges of the economic economy as long as its basis is not a calculating subject, but rather an agent socially disposed to enter, without intention or calculation, into the game of exchange” (*Practical* 98).

On the other hand, even when the act of giving is motivated by “good intentions,” there is an expectation by the awarding party of some kind of gratitude. In the Philippine context, this gratitude was expressed in the diplomatic encounter of the *Fifth Bilateral Commission*, a forum for the discussion of the political relationships between Spain and the Philippines. The forum’s proceedings state the following: “The Philippine Government acknowledges the important contribution from Official Aid for Development and expresses their gratitude for the important and growing help that the Spanish Government, through the AECI, has provided the Philippines” (Spain, *Anexos* 3).

In the Philippines, expressing gratitude for provided assistance is also followed by an expression of debt, as one of the pillars of relationships among Filipino society (Jocano). This idea is commonly known in the country as “*utang-na-loob*,” a Tagalog expression that means “debt of gratitude.” This debt is “need-oriented and is established when the interaction sought after is done voluntarily, as in giving assistance in time of need or in the name of friendship. *Utang-na-loob* involves reciprocity – exchange of gifts, services, and goodwill (ibid 71).

Once this power relationship has been established, the Philippine government will have to reciprocate somehow the help given by Spain, creating a relation of dependency that can result in “colonialism of compassion” (Hyndman). Furthermore, as Bourdieu points out, “[t]he acknowledgment of debt becomes recognition, a durable *feeling* toward the author of the generous act” (*Practical* 102). This in turn would help the achievement of Spanish objectives, as set in the 2005 policies, such as becoming more visible in Asia by utilising the Philippine connection as a door into the continent, as well as an ally for any particular actions, such as Spanish cultural promotion in Asia.

## Spanish Cultural Policy as Symbolic Capital

Two of the major areas on which the 2005 plan focuses are education and culture (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 89). Both culture and education are perceived as a means of creating links between Spain and countries in Asia. Lloyd Rudolph explains that “[c]ultural policy encompasses efforts by states to articulate and define national identity and a public philosophy” (6). If this is true of national cultural policy, then Spanish cultural actions in Asia can be described as a way of promoting a certain national flavour or “identity,” an idea stated in the 2005 policies (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 153-159). The problem, however, is to give an exact definition of what “Spanish identity” entails, a difficulty that has been stressed by researchers on cultural policy. In relation to European policies, Chris Shore explains that “[r]ecent writings on European identity and culture highlight the pervasive lack of clarity behind what people actually mean by terms such as ‘cultural identity’ and ‘national culture’” (782). To bring some clarity to this area, I have examined two major elements in the 2005 plan. Firstly, the self-image that Spain is promoting in Asia and secondly, the particular areas in which Spain is interested, in relation to cultural cooperation with the region in general, and with the Philippines in particular.

When discussing the promotion of national cultures across borders, one of the first difficulties to be encountered is to define, for instance, what “Spanish culture” entails. This is extremely important in Spain, a country where it is common to hear political discussions about the relatively problematic idea of a “united Spain.” In this context it is worth noting the many variables at play when Spanish official institutions promote “Spanish culture” abroad. First, it is important to consider the ideology of the particular government involved in cultural promotion. The right-wing government that was in power in Spain from 1996 to 2004, for instance, utilised cultural promotion to amplify Spain’s international projection, not only to Asia, but also to the US, and Latin America. Much of this projection was influenced by accounts of Empire (Balfour 2007).

Moreover, in a 2002 study on Spanish attempts to export a particular national image, Javier Noya explains that “the country’s image has become a question and -in many cases- a State policy” (1). A particular Spanish image has been defined and utilised in foreign affair policies since the early nineties (Noya 4), when the country attained international exposure thanks to the International Exhibition in Seville and the Olympic Games in Barcelona (both in 1992). It was then that the project *Marca España* (*Spain Brand*) was conceived and became part of Spanish foreign affair policies. Noya concluded that

[d]espite the proliferation of actors and public institutions, and with the exception of the *Instituto Cervantes* and the SEEI [State Society for International Exhibitions], clearly current Spanish policies have continuity in an orientation that feeds the image of a culture oriented towards the past, elitist, monolithic and humanistic. (7)

On the other hand, the Socialist Party that ruled in Spain from 2004 to 2011 changed the focus of Spanish cultural promotion overseas. The 2005 policies still utilise symbolic tools as a way to reach commercial targets in Asia (promoting tourism and trading) as well as to improve political relationships. However, the definition found in the 2005 plan is that of Spain as a country that is: relevant in world politics; innovative; rich in tradition; prestigious; trustworthy; fun; and excellent in sports (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 153-158).

Following Bourdieu's concepts, in all of these cases, when offering a definition of "Spain" or "Spanish culture," there is an intention of "occupying a given position in social space" (*Distinction* 466), and being "distinctive" by promoting a particular image connected to ideas of international relevance and prestige. This sought distinction, and the consequent intention to occupy a relevant space in the global context, becomes even clearer in the legal text, which defines Spain as a European country. This is referred to as a strategic tool in Spanish-Asian political relations. The 2005 plan expresses the following: "In the case of our [Spanish] relationships with Asia, the membership to the EU is already a relevant factor which allows us [Spain] to articulate a greater presence in the existing forums and take advantage of the Union's instruments to further a bilateral strategy" (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 167).

Following this idea, Spain periodically participates in many events that the European Commission office in Manila organises in the Philippines, such as *Cine Europa*, a yearly European film festival, or the May celebrations known as *Europe Month*. These activities follow the EU's objective of constructing and promoting awareness of some kind of "European identity" which, in turn, is opposed to a 'non-European other'. This task has been part of the European Commission's cultural policy since the mid-80s (Shore). Adding the European dimension to Spanish foreign policies can be understood as a means for Spain to raise its international profile, and align itself with a "European identity," which is more relevant in Asia than the idea of Spain by itself. This strategy helps Spain achieve the objective of positioning itself "on the cultural map of one of the areas with the highest capacity of growth in cultural and leisure industries" (Spain, *Plan de Acción* 143). The economic relevance of cultural industries in Asia is therefore perceived as a strategic advantage for Spanish promotion. The 2005 plan establishes particular examples of proposed actions in cultural events such as: "festivals, book fairs, biennales of art, and architecture, promotion of fashion and design" (ibid 149), and it emphasises that "in the whole of Asia it is worth taking advantage of the impact of our [Spanish] contemporary creations" (ibid 144).

Although a contemporary approach is sought in cultural actions, there is also a deep interest in commemorating selected figures from the Spanish past, such as writer Miguel de Cervantes, San Francisco Javier, a Spanish missionary who preached in Asia in the sixteenth century and Luis Vázquez

de Torres and Pedro Fernández de Quirós, both Spanish explorers who sailed the Pacific in the seventeenth century. Spain is therefore utilising large amounts of symbolic capital related to a historic past to establish its position in the region.

Regarding the Philippines in particular, cultural products are perceived by Spain as both a promotional tool, and an instrument for the development of Philippine cultural industries. Through the existence of several Spanish institutions in the Philippines, a web of power relationships has been put into place. In this context, the major institutions are the *Technical Office for Cooperation* (AECID), which manages developmental projects, the *Instituto Cervantes*, which promotes Spanish language and culture, and the Embassy of Spain in Manila, which handles diplomatic relationships. Even though these institutions are independent from each other, during the period analysed in this article, there was a synergy between the AECID, the Cultural Attaché in the Embassy and the *Instituto Cervantes*, which meant that cultural actions organised by them were unified under the umbrella of “Spanish cultural activities.”

Spanish funds are spent by Spanish institutions in the Philippines on either Spanish or Filipino cultural expertise, such as artists, cultural workers and art works. These exchanges can be seen in the economic realm, as they follow an exchange of services in the context of the cultural industries. However, the product of those economic exchanges is, most of the time, offered for free to the Filipino audiences: a direct economic return is not expected. The main objective, in these cases, is to create popular activities, in order to raise awareness of Spain in the Philippines. Moreover, it is expected to influence Filipino perception of Spain as a distinctive nation. In this regard, cultural policy has become constructive or, in Lloyd Rudolph’s words, constitutive as the arts have had the “capacity to create and inculcate metaphors of reality, languages for meaning and beauty that shape a nation’s world-view and identity” (12).

Once a cultural activity is organised, it becomes part of a general cultural menu including local cultural activities, generating direct competition. A field of power has been established. Bourdieu describes this field as “[t]he space of the relations of force between the different kinds of capital or, more precisely, between the agents who possess a sufficient amount of one of the different kinds of capital to be in a position to dominate the corresponding field” (*Practical* 34).

This tension is exacerbated by Spain offering free cultural events. Spain is positioning its cultural products in the realm of the symbolic exchanges, and “symbolic acts always assume acts of knowledge and recognition, cognitive acts on the part of their recipients. For a symbolic exchange to function, the two parties must have identical categories of perception and appreciation” (ibid 100).

In this context, the effects that the Spanish cultural activity might have could be very different from those expected, as those categories of perception and appreciation vary considerably across cultures and communities. In spite of this, there is no doubt that by offering free

Spanish cultural events, the Spanish institutions are fulfilling the requirements of its cultural policies. This, in turn, is influencing Filipino perceptions of Spain and “Spanish culture” as distinctive and, at the same time, easily accessible.

An even more complex issue arises when the cultural activities organised by Spanish institutions relates to the revision and representation of a shared colonial past. On these occasions, it can be argued that the underlying objective is to present particular historical knowledge, through selected narratives, to be disseminated in the Philippines. This is the case of *The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition, a collection of photographs taken in the islands in the nineteenth century, which were selected and organised by Spanish institutions to be displayed in the National Museum of the Philippines in 2006. This exhibition is particularly resonant for me, as I had a specific participatory role during its implementation in the Philippines.

### Capitalising on the Colonial Past: the *Colonial Imaginary* Exhibition

By November 2006, I had already completed a whole year assisting in the organisation of cultural events in the Philippines. It was around that time that I became involved in the newly arrived exhibition about colonial photography. The following words are my personal account of the events that surrounded the opening of *The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition in Manila. This project that was organised by Spanish Institutions *SEACEX* (State Society for External Cultural Action) and *Casa Asia* (Asia House), in partnership with the National Museum of the Philippines in 2006:

Manila. November, 2006. I have to go to the National Museum of the Philippines. In two days, the Colonial Imaginary Exhibition will open. I have been told to go to the museum to make sure that everything is working to schedule. I can sense that there is a feeling of mistrust: “They say that the pictures are already up on the walls, but please, go and check,” I am told. When I arrive at the Museum, I am greeted and told that there was no need for me to come, that everything is going very well. I can’t help but feeling out of place and somehow embarrassed while I’m thinking: shouldn’t we trust our Filipino counterparts? What am I doing here? “Can I have a look at the exhibition gallery anyway?” I asked. Minutes later, in the gallery, I can see that things are happening but the photos are not on the walls. I am told that they decided to give a fresh coat of paint to the gallery before hanging the pictures. “Can I help in any way?” I say, “The captions! There are so many!” I am told. Minutes later, I am in an office, helping print the captions. The assistant is very busy and worried: “I have to finish these captions... type, print and hang them... We can’t open without the captions!” she says. The evening closes as more than a hundred captions are printed... When I arrived at the official opening, I could not believe my eyes. What the day before seemed like a Herculean task to me, was all done and finished. Everything was in order, everything happened as planned. I was relieved but I also felt unease; was it really necessary for me to be there the days before?

This account serves not only to reflect on my personal experiences, but also to illustrate several aspects of the tensions in Philippine-Spanish

intercultural projects. The Spanish government decided to organise an exhibition and liaise with the National Museum of the Philippines. A Spanish-led discourse was created to be organised by a Philippine institution, and transferred to the Philippines. Therefore, there was a need from the Spanish side to be in complete control and “check” that everything was working as planned. The exhibition had to be ready and comply with the standards that were envisioned from Spain. The National Museum, on the other hand, was aware that they were hosting a foreign event related to a Philippine past; there was worry about the delivery of it.

Setting up an exhibition is always an intense experience, but when two diplomatic forces are involved, there is even more pressure. The organisation and delivery of the cultural activity will be analysed afterwards by official institutions and reports will be written about it. Both countries will be tested by themselves and by each other. The official cultural event becomes less about the arts and more about diplomatic relationships. It becomes a useful tool to achieve official objectives, an idea that is expressed in the introduction of the exhibition catalogue in the following statement: “The cultural relationship with the Philippines is an essential episode in Spain’s projection abroad; the common past of the two countries is the basis for inspiring projects and programmes of international cultural cooperation” (Alvina et al. 210).

*The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition is an example of these cultural actions, but Spain has organised many others with Philippine themes since 2000, such as *The Philippines, a Century Ago* (Metropolitan Museum of Manila, 2000), or *The Philippines, Door to the Orient: From Legázpi to Malaspina* (Museum of San Sebastián in Spain, and National Museum of the Philippines, 2004). In the context of recent Philippine studies, these exhibitions can be understood as postcolonial, as defined by Patajo-Legasto as “a position produced by being constructed or represented as Europe or America’s ‘ontological Other’” (*Discourses* 8). This idea is clear in recent Spanish exhibitions about the Philippines, since the Philippines is portrayed as both linked to Spain and, at the same time, an “other” (Díaz Rodríguez, *An Imperial*). This is not singular to (although perhaps most visible in) colonial exhibitions. It is enacted within the practices of representation, by selecting materials and presenting them in a particular way. As Ivan Karp suggests, “the sources of power are derived from the capacity of cultural institutions to classify and define peoples and societies. This is the power to represent: to reproduce structures of belief and experience through which cultural differences are understood” (1 - 2).

Another important issue is that the exhibitions are organised and led by Spanish cultural workers, following directions from Spain’s cultural policy. This can be read as a pattern; an ex-colonial power representing its ex-colony. This representational strategy peaked during the colonial period. In the nineteenth century, the museum and, in turn, the exhibitions were ‘displaying’ and promoting a particular order of things in society, with the power to create and promote particular knowledge (Bennett). For

colonial powers, this meant the production, promotion, and control of a colonial relationship.

Moreover, the objects displayed in those exhibitions were connected to colonial discourses, since ‘the organisation and display of their artefacts are statements of a dominant culture’s capacity to order and interpret the materials of others’ cultures’ (Featherstone 173). Spain has the power to re-utilise and re-read colonial artefacts in order to establish particular representations of the colonial period and make them relevant in the Philippines in 2006. In this case study, the display of photographs serves the purpose of linking both countries through a shared past. The title, *The Colonial Imaginary: Photography in the Philippines from the Spanish Period 1860-1898*, refers to the Philippines in relation to Spain, by including a time frame and specifying that it was a “Spanish period” in the islands. Similarly, the first section of the title refers to Spanish colonialism. However, the negative connotations that word “colonial” has have been counteracted by the inclusion of the term “imaginary,” posing colonialism in the realm of the imagination, of symbolic expression. It is also a reference to the photographer who, in colonial times, had the power to represent in particular ways those in front of the camera. The Philippines is, then, an object of the colonial gaze and Spain has appropriated the power of the imaginary, claiming the ability to produce the Philippines through the selection and arrangement of images in an exhibition.

Another important feature of the Colonial Imaginary exhibition is that it was planned and organised in Spain for a Filipino audience, an effort that could be interpreted as “neo-colonial.” During the official opening at the National Museum, the Spanish speeches stressed the fact that the exhibition was donated to the Philippines; and this was underlined in the local press (Tawid). As previously mentioned, receiving a donation in the Philippine context comes with “utang-na-loob.” Therefore, a symbolic debt was created; the National Museum of the Philippines, as the hosting organisation, had to acknowledge the value of the donation by keeping and promoting the exhibition. The Commissioner of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in the Philippines, Ambeth Ocampo, publicly recognised this fact in an article published in *The Philippine Inquirer*, in which he expressed:

We are glad that Casa Asia, based in Barcelona, has brought to the National Museum in Manila a selection of 19th-century photographs that give us a peek into life in the Philippines toward the end of the Spanish empire. “El imaginario colonial”... is the closest to having a time machine and we hope that these pictures travel around the country so that we would appreciate the wealth of material that remains open to researchers in Spain. (Ocampo)

Through *The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition, a particular Spanish representation of nineteenth-century Philippines was to be kept and transferred in the Philippines. After being displayed at the National

Museum of the Philippines in Manila in 2006-07, the exhibition toured Zamboanga, Bohol, Vigan, Baler and Cebu.

## Representation, Funding and Authority

*The Colonial Imaginary* exhibition is part of the influx of Spanish symbolic capital to the Philippines, transferring particular knowledge. It can also be understood as cultural cooperation, as stated in the 2005 plan, but I would describe it as an uneven intercultural encounter, in which Spain dominates the organisation of cultural activities related to the colonial past. Furthermore, this unevenness is also visible in Spanish arts funding policies in the Philippines. Apart from activities related to the promotion of Spanish culture, Spanish institutions in the Philippines sometimes offer funding to Philippine arts organisations and artists ostensibly promoting cultural cooperation and exchanges. The condition is that the activity has to have some kind of Spanish component to fulfil the objectives of Spanish cultural policies. Funding is offered, for instance, to a theatre company to perform a play if it has a Spanish component such as authorship or themes. This situation establishes a set of power relationships as a Spanish authority in terms of arts funding is created. Examples of this authority include the artists that participated in the 2005 Spanish painting competition, in which they were asked to paint a rendition of *Intramuros* (walled city), which represents the old Manila in the Spanish colonial period.

In a country, such as the Philippines, where there is limited local funding for cultural activities, many artists and companies decide to fit their art works into a foreign agenda, so as to have enough funding. In her study on performing arts in Southeast Asia, Jennifer Lindsay explains that foreign resources are important sources of arts funding in the region, pointing out that the “theatre scene in the Philippines is virtually run on foreign support” (76). However, economic help is not the only reason for applying for foreign arts funding. When Filipino artists are supported by European institutions, they acquire a certain status, and can be perceived as gaining international recognition. This is true, not only about the Spanish cultural centre, the *Instituto Cervantes*, but also about some of the other foreign organisations based in Manila, such as the British Council, the Japan Foundation, the Alliance française and the Goethe Institute, which are active funders of local artists. The different forces at play in this situation are embedded in a field of power, in which some countries have enough resources to establish some kind of authority in the Philippine arts scene.

In the context of the Spanish-Philippine cultural relationships described in this article, and promoted by Spanish official institutions in the Philippines, a conclusion can be reached. Spanish official institutions have enough resources to assure some kind of authority in terms of who,

and what, should be funded in the Philippine arts scene. This is achieved by spending funds on selected projects that promote selected versions of “Spanish culture,” and help raise Spain’s profile in the Philippines. At the same time, by organising periodical exhibitions about the shared colonial past (in both Spain and the Philippines), Spanish institutions have the power to create a particular knowledge about Spain and the Philippines, transmit this knowledge in both Spain and the Philippines, and utilise this to promote Spain in Asia.

My perception of this situation while I was directly involved was that of a one-sided promotion, grazing neo-colonialism. However, after conducting research in 2009 (Díaz Rodríguez, *Spain*), it became clear that finding empirical evidence to assert the existence of neo-colonial relationships was quite problematic, since it was difficult to assess in which ways Spanish cultural promotion was controlling or affecting the Philippines. In many cases, the evidence found that there was also a reinterpretation from Filipinos in the form of critiques or re-evaluation of the cultural activities. This proves Roland Barthes’ thesis, that meaning is never fully closed, and it is always being constructed and reconstructed. The study of this type of critique in connection with the politics of foreign cultural promotion and arts funding in the Philippines opens up a new line of research in Philippine studies. An example of resistance is Filipino National Artist F. Sionil José, who has taken part in many Spanish cultural activities in Manila in recent years. In a newspaper article, he describes a conference on the Spanish friar Andres de Urdaneta organised by the Spanish cultural centre in Manila. In the article, he reminds Filipinos:

History has its uses. For us [Filipinos] who are colonized, it is important that we are freed from it, to use it not to glorify the colonizer, but to remember he was the enemy and could still be - and that from history, we should be able to extract those aspects of it which could bind us, which could lead us to freedom and justice (176).

Sionil José comments directly on a postcolonial understanding of the representation of history, and the context in which historical accounts are discussed. Spanish cultural institutions in the Philippines have enough resources to promote “Spanish culture” in the Philippines, control some representations of the colonial history, and establish an authority in the local arts scene in the name of “cultural exchange.” Filipinos have the agency to challenge and contest Spanish accounts, and voice their discontent with a contemporary situation that can be traced back to the uneven relationship supported by the colonial enterprise.

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