supposedly traditional rites of circumcision, or of a revolution not only unfinished but unresolved, steeped in acts both courageous and criminal. They draw one to think of impure origins and foreign genealogies, of national selves ineluctably inhabited by foreign others.

Although I did not intend it, this book shares an affinity with at least this aspect of Joaquin’s project. Part of my father’s generation who came of age during and immediately after the Japanese occupation, Joaquin writes and lives in Manila, whereas I write across the very Pacific once traversed by the Spanish galleons. Yet we find ourselves sharing a familiar predicament. For him, it entails thinking of Filipino as “an identity in progress”; for me, it is the name of a history that, coming from the outside, continues to arrive from the future. The difference may not be so great. In either case, the task is one of historicizing the uncertainty of such names and namings, thereby momentarily interrupting the workings of colonial and national lobotomies. It should be clear, though, that the effects of such interruptions can never be fully determined. Standing on the threshold of a revolutionary epoch, the national hero Jose Rizal had sought to contemplate a cure for his diseased country by tearing away the veil that hid the “social cancer” of la patria in his novel Noli me Tangere. Our situation is of course different. For in these postcentennial (and arguably counterrevolutionary) times, we can hope at the very least to approach the sense of vertigo—epistemological and comparative—that comes with apprehending las islas Filipinas and Filipinos as they slip in and out of various attempts to master and comprehend them.

White Love

Census and Melodrama in the
U.S. Colonization of the Philippines

Arriving in Manila in March 1899, Dean C. Worcester, professor of zoology at the University of Michigan and member of the Schurman Commission appointed by President McKinley to investigate conditions in the Philippines, tells of witnessing the signs of war between the United States and the Filipino forces led by Emilio Aguinaldo. Worcester describes how he walked toward the Filipino trenches after one such battle, “counting the dead and wounded, as I had heard wild stories of tremendous slaughter and wanted to see just how much damage the fire of our troops had really done.”1 Wishing to discredit the claims made by anti-imperialists in the United States regarding the severity of the Filipino-American War,2 Worcester conceives of the dead bodies of “insurgents” as objects to be counted and data for official sources of information. To do so, he erases the particularity of those bodies, as the task of counting replaces the ritual of mourning. The extent of the erasure of the Filipino dead becomes even more stunning at the conclusion of Worcester’s story when he talks not about the dead at all but the wounded: “At the time we visited the Insurgent trenches, not all our own killed and wounded had been removed, yet every wounded Insurgent whom we found had a United States canteen of water at his side, obviously left by some kindly American soldiers. Not a few of the injured had been furnished hard tack as well. All were ultimately taken to Manila and there given the best care by surgeons” (ibid.).3
**Benevolent Bondage**  For Worcester, colonial warfare was not meant to conquer and exterminate the native populace. It was instead a kind of police action that would quell the disorder on the islands caused by the stirrings of deluded peasants and workers led by a gang of ambitious, mixed-blood Filipinos. These Filipino leaders, beginning with the Chinese-mestizo Aguinaldo, were illegitimate representatives of the Filipino people. Indeed, there were no Filipino people as such, only a heterogeneous collection of imperfectly civilized tribes and “wild men” speaking a bewildering variety of languages, bereft of a common culture and subject to impulsive and irrational behavior (Worcester, 2: 921–22, 938).

Given this putative absence of a Filipino nation, the U.S. presence in the archipelago could not be construed as usurping another people’s sovereignty. Intervention was understood, in official accounts, as an altruistic act motivated by America concern for the natives’ welfare on the part of the United States. U.S. troops did not shoot Filipinos to kill them but to save them from killing one another. Hence, in the Senate hearings of 1901, David Prescott Barrows, head of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes who would go on to run the colonial public school system before becoming professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, could state that the U.S. practice of administering the water cure—forcing water down prisoners’ bodies to compel them to talk—could not possibly have harmed Filipinos; and that they willingly abandoned their homes and sought U.S. protection in concentration camps at the height of the war in order to lead easier, more secure lives. William Howard Taft similarly claimed that there were Filipinos “who . . . said they would not say anything unless they were tortured” and that “there never was a war conducted, whether against inferior races or not, in which there was more compassion and more restraint and more generosity [than this war against the Filipinos].” Secretary of War Elihu Root could only concur a year later, praising the “splendid virile energy . . . accompanied by self-control, patience, [and] magnanimity” on the part of the U.S. troops. In spite of thousands of Filipino deaths resulting from artillery fire, disease, and famine, as well as considerable ecological havoc, the war was “characterized by humanity and kindness to the prisoner and non-combatant.” For in the end, the war had been a valuable learning experience for the Filipinos, a real “blessing,” as Barrows would write in 1901 in his diary, “for without it the Filipinos would never have recognized their own weaknesses; without it we would never have done our work thoroughly.”

Indeed, U.S. colonialism in the Philippines was rhetorically driven by what President McKinley had referred to as “benevolent assimilation,” whereby the “earnest and paramount aim” of the colonizer was that of “win[ning] the confidence, respect and affection” of the colonized. Colonialization as assimilation was deemed a moral imperative, as wayward native children cut off from their Spanish fathers and desired by other European powers would now be adopted and protected by the compassionate embrace of the United States. As a father is bound to guide his son, the United States was charged with the development of native others. Neither exploitative nor enslaving, colonization entailed the cultivation of “the felicity and perfection of the Philippine people” through the “uninterrupted devotion” to those “noble ideals which constitute the higher civilization of mankind.” Because colonization is about civilizing love and the love of civilization, it must be absolutely distinct from the disruptive criminality of conquest. The allegory of benevolent assimilation effaces the violence of conquest by construing colonial rule as the most precious gift that “the most civilized people” can render to those still caught in a state of barbarous disorder.

But instead of returning their love, Filipino “insurgents” seemed intent on making war. “Why these hostilities?” the Schurman Commission asked. “What do the best Filipinos want?” By demanding recognition of the independence that they had just wrested from Spain, Filipinos appeared to have “misinterpreted” the “pure aims and purposes of the American government and people,” and thus, were attacking U.S. forces. In resisting, the Filipinos were being unreasonable. As with errant children, they needed to be disciplined, according to McKinley, “with firmness if need be, but without severity so far as may be possible.” A crucial part of the “high mission” of colonization, then, was the need to “maintain the strong arm of authority to repress disturbances and to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessing of a good and stable government upon the people of the Philippine Islands under the free flag of the United States.”

A certain kind of violence underwrote the allegory of benevolent assimilation. The measured use of force was deemed consistent with the
tutelary aim of colonization: making native inhabitants desire what colonial authority desired for them. The mandate to institute “democratic aspirations, sentiments, and ideals” brought with it the need to enforce discipline and constant surveillance among the Filipinos. Filipinos were called on to accept the “supremacy of the United States . . . and those who resist it can accomplish no end other than [their] own ruin.”

What may seem like a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the colonial enterprise was due to assumptions regarding the aptitude of Filipinos. They lacked “the experience possessed by us”—namely, that of “self-government”—and by implication, the self-consciousness that marks a people’s readiness for independence (Worcester, 2981–88). Filipinos, as Taft observed, were “in a hopeless condition of ignorance . . . subject, like the waves of the sea, to the influence of the moment . . . .” As with children, they were highly impressionable, unable to reflect on their own conditions, and capable only of mimicking the actions of those they perceived to be above them. In their present state, Taft asserted, they cannot possess themselves; they can only be possessed by others. This situation made it all the more imperative for the United States to intervene. For only after the natives “have been elevated and taught the dignity of labor . . . and self-restraint” can they be allowed to decide their own future.

The allegory of benevolent assimilation thus foresaw the possibility, if not the inevitability, of colonialism’s end. But equally important, it also insisted on defining and delimiting the means to that end. While colonial rule may be a transitional stage of self-rule, the self that rules itself can only emerge by way of an intimate relationship with a colonial master who sets the standards and practices of discipline to mold the conduct of the colonial subject. In other words, the culmination of colonial rule, self-government, can be achieved only when the subject has learned to colonize itself. As Woodrow Wilson wrote with reference to the Philippines,

Self-government is a form of character. It follows upon the long discipline which gives a people self-possession, self-mastery, and the habit of order and peace . . . the steadiness of self-control and political mastery. And these things cannot be had without long discipline . . . . No people can be “given” the self-control of maturity. Only a long apprenticeship of obedience can secure them the precious possession.

Made up of disparate characteristics, Filipinos lacked the “character” with which to control themselves, thereby requiring “a long apprenticeship.” In this way can benevolent assimilation indefinitely defer its own completion, in that the condition for self-rule, self-mastery, can be made identical to the workings of colonial rule, the mastery of the other that resides within the boundaries of the self. White love holds out the promise of fathering, as it were, a “civilized people” capable in time of asserting its own character. But it also demands the indefinite submission to a program of discipline and reformation requiring the constant supervision of a sovereign master.

Conjoining love and discipline, benevolent assimilation was meant to ennoble the colonizer as it liberated the colonized. What secured this link between an ideology of benevolence and the repressive-productive institutions of discipline? How was it possible to sustain the fiction, fostered by U.S. official discourse and eventually accepted with varying degrees of alacrity by Filipino collaborators, that colonial rule amounted to democratic tutelage? How did white love and native subjugation become mutually reinforcing?

I want to suggest that the link between benevolence and discipline was made possible through representational practices that recast Filipino appearances. The re-formation of natives as colonial subjects required that they become visible and therefore accessible to those charged with their supervision. Through continuous and discrete observations, the targets of benevolent assimilation could be identified, apprehended, and delivered for democratic tutelage. Whether it was in the areas of public order or public health, education or elections, incarceration or commerce, such supervision sustained the articulation of colonial rule at both the ideological and practical level. By rendering visible the subjects of colonization in particular ways, colonial supervision amounted to a powerful form of surveillance, setting the limits of colonial identities within the borders of the state.

This is not to imply that the circuits linking supervision, representation, and control were perfectly insulated, making the colonial state all powerful and unchallenged. Indeed, recent scholarship has shown the
extent to which U.S. colonial rule, like its Spanish predecessor, was constantly compromised by forces and events it could not control, much less comprehend. The very agents of the state were often divided in their personal loyalties and ideological inclinations. U.S. military and civilian officials, for example, were clearly at odds over the appropriate techniques of conquest and colonization owing to their varying appraisals of Filipino capacities, just as the colonial government was subject to the vagaries of policy shifts among elected officials in the metropole. Similarly, differences existed among Filipino collaborators in terms of their earlier involvement with the revolution as well as their personal and political ties with colonial patrons. Collaboration was fraught with disagreements over legislation, taxation, budgets, and racially tinged debates regarding Filipino fitness for self-rule. Equally significant, class conflicts pitted colonial authorities, U.S. and Filipino elites alike, against peasant and workers’ groups, at times erupting into local revolts that were brutally suppressed. Nonetheless, an examination of the rhetoric of colonial rule suggests the existence of a dominant desire informing the state: that of creating a continuum between an ideology of benevolence, disciplinary practices, and networks of supervision—in short, a desire to consolidate the relay between knowledge and power. My interest here lies in inquiring about the formation of this colonial desire and the limits to its institutionalization.

In the early period of U.S. rule, one of the most instructive documents of the colonial wish to establish total and continuous supervision for the sake of tutelage was the four-volume Census of the Philippine Islands, begun in 1903 and published in 1905. In what follows, I want to consider the various ways in which the census functioned as an apparatus for producing a colonial order coextensive with the representation of its subjects. It is important to stress, however, that the census’s salience as a discursive practice can best be understood within the larger context of the Filipino-American War. As such, I attempt in the latter part of this chapter to link the census with one of the most popular forms of nationalist expressions among Filipinos during this period: vernacular plays whose performances were deemed seditious and ultimately banned by the colonial regime.

Historically coincident with the taking of the colonial census, performances of the nationalist dramas between 1899–1905 sought to contest the means with which to delineate and authorize the difference between Filipino and North American—and as I shall suggest, between men and women—at a time of catastrophic changes when a U.S. colonial state was yet to be stabilized amid the ruins of Spanish imperial hegemony and the collective memory of Filipino revolutionary victory over Spain. Seen in their historical conjuncture, both the census and plays were struggles over the representation of the Philippines growing out of the violence of nationalist revolution and imperialist intervention.

Surveying Subjects Census reports are curious texts. They contain no single author, for standing behind them is not a person but a state apparatus made up of a veritable army of enumerators, clerks, and statisticians managed by a hierarchy of supervisors and directors. It is not, therefore, the case that a census has no author but that the bureaucratic nature of its writing renders its authorship and authority dispersed and anonymous. Consequently, while the workings and results of census reports are never completely visible to an individual, censuses can claim to see everything that can be individuated, that is, counted, tabulated, and classified. No single reader can exhaust the entirety of a census report, just as no single reading can comprehend its meaning insofar as its myriad tables and graphs of statistical data escape total recall. Compiled in a mechanical fashion, census reports exceed narrative synopsis. The power—that is to say, the persuasiveness—of a census to convey what appears to be an objective representation of the world derives, in part, from its remarkable capacity to picture in quantitative terms the totality of the world’s multiplicity. Thus the value of census reports to the colonial (and to any modern) state: they represent the state’s ability to represent, and so govern itself. In enumerating and classifying the resources and population of the state, censuses render visible the entire field of colonial intervention.

As the first Philippine census under U.S. rule, the 1905 report was conceived as both a confirmation of and means for consolidating the "pacification of the archipelago." The Congressional Act of 1902 made the cessation of the "insurrection" a precondition for conducting the census. The creation of a Census bureau under the direction of General Joseph P. Sanger (who had supervised earlier census reports for Puerto Rico and Cuba) was a way of officially asserting that the war was over. It
was left to the victor to make an inventory of its new possessions. One reason for doing so was to set the conditions for holding elections within two years of the census’s publication for Filipino representatives to the colonial legislature, to be known as the Philippine Assembly. Such a legislature was designed to consolidate the practice of Filipino collaboration, thereby rendering more efficient and cost effective the running of the colonial state while containing all remaining nationalist challenges to U.S. hegemony. Collaboration was seen as an index of the success of tutelage, the measure of the Filipino’s recognition of their subordination to and desire for white authority. “The taking of the census,” Governor-General Taft wrote, “will therefore form a test of the capacity of the Filipinos to discharge a most important function of government. . . . The census is to be taken solely for the benefit of the Filipino people . . . [and] they should lend their unanimous support to the successful taking of the census” (Census, 1:20).

Calling for Filipino collaboration both as local supervisors and enumerators, the census would serve as a kind of test of Filipinos’ ability to perform a task. Discipline was called for by the census: that was why it could serve both the practical and ideological route to self-government in the future. As an instrument of white love, it was meant to give Filipinos an opportunity to perform before the solicitous gaze of U.S. tutors. The census would be an exercise, as it were, in character building, where the capacity to count was coterminal with the ability to be accountable to a colonial hierarchy. Not only would the census provide the empirical grounds for shaping the direction of colonial legislation and facilitating the influx of U.S. capital investments in the archipelago; as with the colonial legislature, it would also function as a stage on which Filipinos were to be represented as well as represent themselves as subjects of a colonial order: disciplined agents actively assuming their role in their own subjugation and maturation.

The U.S. project of a centrally organized and nationally coordinated census superseded that of the Spanish state’s. For its census data, the Spanish colonial regime had relied mainly on the irregular and far-from-comprehensive records kept by parish priests on their local flocks. In addition, Spanish efforts at more systematic census gathering met with enormous resistance from the people inasmuch as they were geared primarily for the levying of taxes and conscription of labor (Census, 1:13). The U.S. census of the Philippines, by contrast, was supposed to elevate rather than exploit the populace. The groundwork had been prepared by a number of U.S. surveys between June 1898 and 1903. In the face of ignorance about the archipelago in the United States, such surveys were charged with collecting facts on the Philippines as well as encouraging collaboration from native informants. The most important of these were the Philippine Commissions of 1899 and 1900 presided over by academic experts and the Ethnological Surveys carried out by such anthropologists as David Barrows, Dean C. Worcester, and Albert Jenks between 1900 and 1905. These surveys produced voluminous reports on the conditions of the country, generously illustrated with photographs of native scenes and types. As Paul Kramer has shown, the American project of amassing what was considered scientific knowledge was dependent not only on progressivist notions of expertise but also on an already existing body of Spanish colonial writings on the Philippines. Even more significant, these surveys would not have been possible without the active collaboration of natives, especially local elites, as indispensable sources of support and information. Published and reprinted, cited widely in newspapers, congressional testimonies, schoolbooks, and scholarly studies, such surveys established the basis for a kind of colonial common sense in the interest of countering revolutionary expectations.

The Census Bureau followed existing practice, laying great stress on seeking Filipino cooperation in order to neutralize whatever local resistances still existed in the country. Conducting the census, then, was of a piece with U.S. attempts at co-opting Filipinos of all classes, thereby consolidating a counterrevolutionary nationalism that had emerged as early as 1898. With appointments to the colonial judiciary beginning in 1899, the establishment of the Philippine Scouts (1901), and the election by limited suffrage of municipal officials (1905) and, later, representatives to the Philippine Assembly (1907), Filipinos were drawn into a pattern of collaboration with the colonial state. There were practical and pedagogical reasons for Filipinos, particularly members of the provincial and municipal elites, to be used as census personnel. To do so was, as Census Chief General Sanger put it, “to identify them with the census and to test their capacity to perform duties never undertaken before, and which in this country are supposed to require at least average
intelligence" (Census, 1:13). Altogether, 7,502 Filipinos were employed, 40 of whom were women. Like the surrendering insurgents, local supervisors and enumerators were required to take an oath of allegiance to the government of the United States; they also received instructions on how to manage the canvassing of their districts. To supplement the ranks of U.S. and Filipino supervisors, the Census Bureau pressed into service all provincial and municipal officials as well as U.S. army officers and the Philippine Constabulary (Census, 1:16, 18–19, 36).

The gathering of census data was an enormous undertaking involving the mobilization of a vast army of clerks in the colonial capital and the deployment of enumerators across as much of the archipelago as possible. Although President Theodore Roosevelt had declared the Filipino-American War officially at an end by July 1902, guerrilla resistance continued in many parts of the country. In provinces such as Albay, Sorsogon, Bulacan, and Rizal, census takers were challenged by the guerrillas, now referred to under the criminal sign of "ladrones," or bandits, by the colonial government. The enumeration of the population necessitated their pacification. Constabulary forces often intervened to suppress the guerrillas and secure the areas to be canvassed. In parts of Mindanao, a "show of force" by the colonial army was usually required to gain access to sources of local information, while in other parts of the country, local elites were pressed into providing information on and arranging for the surrender of local ladrones (Census, 1:22–23).

The census thus illustrates the indispensable link between the policing of colonial borders and annexation of local populations into the space of colonial knowledge. Census workers, white and native alike, labored under the watchful eyes of a hierarchy of supervisors even as they kept their eyes out for alleged insurgents. They surveyed the population and were themselves surveyed by the state. In this sense, the census functioned as a machine for totalizing observation. Through the collection and classification of statistical data, it kept watch over the population, mapping their social location and transcribing them as discrete objects of information and re-formation. And through the bureaucratization of supervision underwritten by the organized deployment of violence, the census differentially disciplined those who managed as well as those who were targeted by its operations.

In order to better understand the manner in which supervision promotes assimilation—that is, how it lays the circuits that run between benevolence and discipline—I want to look in more detail at the mechanisms for gathering census data. Two forms were utilized: a schedule for enumerating and classifying people in a given area, and a keyboarded punch card for identifying each individual in relation to a set of categories indicated in the schedule. One served as an index for the other. Where the schedule sheets were designed to divide and distribute a person's identity into a series of delimited categories, the punch cards were meant to reconstitute him or her as the referent of a specific set of signs (Census, 2:9–14).

The schedule sheet was written in Spanish for the sake of Filipino enumerators unfamiliar with English. A facsimile of the schedule in English translation appears in the census report (fig. 1). The schedule consists of a series of vertically arranged categories such as "Location," "Name," "Relationship," "Personal Description," "Race," "Age," "Sex," "Marital Status," "Occupation," and so forth for the supposedly civilized (that is, Christian) population and a simpler, more abbreviated series for those deemed wild (that is, non-Christian). Enumerated on the sheet, one can imagine one's existence flattened and neatly spread out as a set of numbers across a table. It is as if becoming a subject of the colonial state entailed taking on a different kind of particularity. Plotted on a grid, one's identity becomes sheer surface and extension, abstracted from any historical specificity. Put differently, the census schedule projects a skewed profile of colonial society by divorcing identity from biography. Where biography entails the articulation of the subject as an agent of its own history, the schedule positions its subjects as a series of aggregates locatable on a table of isolated and equivalent values.

Through the schedule, the census sought to transcribe the person into a series of numbers grafted onto a closed set of categories. In tabulating the results of the schedule, however, the census also attempted to reconstitute the subject as an individuated, and therefore retrievable, item within the vast repositories of the colonial archive. This was done through what amounted to a massive filing system in the form of keyboarded punch cards designed to tabulate population tables—similar to the cards used in 1900 for the twelfth U.S. census. Each card contained an array of numbers and letters that corresponded to the data on the
schedule sheets. In addition, a numbering system tied the cards to the name of a specific person and the area where she or he was counted (fig. 2). By punching the appropriate holes—say, "B" for blanco (white), "M" for moreno (brown), "A" for amarillo (yellow), "V" for varon (male), "H" for hembra (female), etc.—the cards functioned to index a range of information regarding an individual's race, sex, age, occupation, and so on. "By means of the gang punched holes and numbers," declared the census, "any one of the approximately 7,000,000 cards corresponding to the population of the Philippines could be identified and the correctness of the punching verified" (Census, 2:13).

The cards moved in the opposite but complementary direction to the schedules, citing an individual as a possessor of a range of qualities rather than a collection of numbers attached to a set of categories. The schedule itemized an individual's characteristics, whereas the card individualized the items on the schedule. In this sense, the census worked like an archive, cross-referencing characters with characteristics. On the one hand, it attempted to constitute a population by enumerating the totality of heterogeneous peoples and recording them onto a grid of reified categories. On the other hand, the census sought to affix to each member of the population an essentialized, regulated, and therefore retrievable identity. As Benedict Anderson has remarked, "The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one and only one extremely clear place."  

The census could serve as an infinitely expandable repository for accumulating all that could be quantified and empirically known in the colony to the extent that it provided the grammar for classifying its objects of knowledge as subjects of a colonial order. As with the practice

Fig. 2. Keyboard punch card (Census of the Philippine Islands, 1903)
of enumeration, this grammar of classification was far from disinterested. Rather, it was crucial in imaging the terms of colonial society as, above all, a racial hierarchy.

Recoding Race White love for “little brown brothers,” as Taft referred to Filipinos, was predicated on white supremacy enforced through practices of discipline and maintained by a network of supervision. General Sanger in his introduction to the census of 1903 remarked how Filipinos would, in the course of time, become good citizens in that some of them had already proved themselves to be “excellent soldiers” capable of following the orders of their white officers. Similarly, census workers under white supervision had shown the natives’ potential for performing complex state functions. With appropriate training, there was no reason why the rest of the population could not become a disciplined people. As Sanger contends,

Under the guidance of a free, just and generous government, the establishment of more rapid and frequent means of communication, whereby they could be brought into more frequent contact with each other, and with the general spread of education, the tribal distinctions which now exist will gradually disappear and the Filipino will become a numerous and homogeneous English-speaking race, exceeding in intelligence and capacity all other peoples of the tropics. (Census, 1:40)

Encapsulating the benevolent-disciplinary trajectory of colonial policy in general and the census in particular, Sanger reiterates the possibility, indeed the desirability, of molding colonial subjects into a single people, here conceived of as a “homogeneous English-speaking race.” Predictably, homogenization can only come after a process of tutelage, one aimed at superseding if not suppressing existing “tribal distinctions.” To do so, however, the general outlines of those distinctions need to be surveyed and accounted for. In order to transform the native races into a people, their differences had to be produced and reassembled.

The population tables of the census divide the inhabitants of the Philippines into roughly twenty-five linguistic groups, distinguishing at least five skin colors ranging from “white” to “black,” and where relevant, types of “citizenship” and locations of birth. These seemingly incommensurable groupings were then reduced into two broad categories: “civilized” and “wild.” Their differences initially had less to do with their material culture than their religious characteristics. Those labeled civilized were seen to adhere to a common Christian culture, while those marked wild were either Muslims or subscribed to animism, both clearly outside the Christian order. The former, comprising the majority of the archipelago’s inhabitants, owed their civilized state, the census assumed, to the effects of Spanish rule. The latter—whether “pagan” headhunters in the mountains, nomadic forest dwellers, or Muslim peoples in the south—had steadfastly resisted Spanish conquest and were thought to live in “stages between almost complete savagery and dawning civilization” (Census, 1:22–23).

It is important to note, though, that the distinction between civilized and wild peoples is regarded in the census as relative and transitional. Wild peoples owed their “barbarous” state to the historical failure of Spain to conquer them, a condition that a more vigorous U.S. regime would remedy. Indeed, colonial accounts, especially those of Worcester’s, are filled with glowing reports regarding the “wild men” as ideal colonial subjects. Because they were free from the so-called corrupting influence of Catholic Spain and lowland mestizo elites, wild men were seen to be far more receptive to the firm, straight-talking, tough love of white men. Hence could wild men be more easily disciplined through such tasks as massive road constructions that would link the lowlands with the mountains, mining explorations for U.S.-owned companies, North American–style athletic competitions staged for visiting colonial dignitaries, and the policing of the wild country from warring tribes to secure the safety of colonial hill stations and outposts. Wild men were ripe candidates for tutelage to the extent that they seemed most susceptible to subjugation.23

Conversely, so-called civilized Filipinos were more recalcitrant, even resistant, to the call of benevolent assimilation. As “insurgents” fighting to assert their sovereignty after having defeated the Spanish army, declared a republic, framed a constitution, organized a cabinet, and convened a congress by 1899, they were deemed dangerously ambitious and inherently deceptive. By their conduct in the war, these Filipinos had showed themselves to be wild and barbarous. And when they chose to collaborate with the new colonial power, they remained shifty, opportunistic, and often lazy. Spanish colonization and the Catholic religion
had done no more than imprint the natives with the outward signs of civilization. Inwardly, they remained inadequate to the task of civilizing themselves.

One of the most commonly cited character traits in colonial sources that suggested the semicivilized state of Filipinos was their supposed penchant for mimicry. Incapable of original thought, they could excel only in copying their colonial and class superiors. Sanger’s remarks on the ability of Filipino soldiers to follow orders under competent white officers seemed to ratify this belief. The census repeatedly quotes passages from various colonial sources and travel accounts from the late sixteenth century to the early twentieth that retain this notion of native mimicry. Typical were the comments of Major Frank S. Bourns, army surgeon and, later, chief of the Bureau of Health:

The race is quick to learn and has a fairly good natural ability, but such a class will have to be educated before great responsibility can be placed in its hands. . . . My idea [is that] if [Filipinos were] associated with . . . a sufficient number of Americans who are honorable and upright in their dealings, there would be a very strong tendency on their part to do as their colleagues do. They are natural imitators; it is a racial characteristic. (Census, 1:505; see also 1:494, 497, 499, 500–502, 507–8).

As “natural imitators,” Filipinos perforce depend on external stimuli to shape their internal disposition. Merely reactive rather than reflective, they existed in immediate and sensuous relationship to their surroundings rather than as self-conscious agents of their own transformation. If they had committed “atrocious crimes” during the war, according to Governor-General Taft, it was only because they were imitating the actions of their mestizo leaders (who, in turn, were imitating the actions of their Spanish masters). Taft, like Bourns, attributes this tendency of the Filipinos to blindly follow their racial superiors to the fact that “they are an Oriental race. . . . Like all Orientals, they are a suspicious people, but when their confidence is won, they follow with a trust that is complete” (Census, 1:530).

Mimicry on the part of the natives is construed as a sign of inferiority borne out of racial difference. But precisely for this reason, as Taft states, it is also an invitation to white supervision: “[T]he Filipinos] are merely in a state of Christian pupilage. They are imitative. They are glad to be educated, glad to study some languages other than their own, glad to follow European and American ideals” (Census 1:530). Just as the untainted state of the wild peoples provided white men the opportunity to display their manly love, the civilized but imitative and corrupted peoples of a hybrid Oriental-Christian culture called for the studious and diligent care of white tutors and commanders.

Wildness and civility were thus contingent and interchangeable terms. In mapping population differences, the census also projected their future reconfiguration. Such was possible because the religious difference between wild and civilized peoples was subsumed by larger considerations of color and race. Whether they were Christian or non-Christian, marked or unmarked by European influences prior to U.S. rule, both types were seen to display “great homogeneity” with regard to their “brown” color, live in “tribes” with regard to their sociolinguistic organization, and be “Malays,” a species of Orientals with regard to their race (Census, 1:411–12, 2:42–65). Hence is the census able to imagine civilized and wild peoples existing side by side on the same map of the Philippines (Census, 2:50–51). While their separate locations are indicated by the various colors of the map, one gets an acute sense of how their borders were encompassed and flattened out on the same homogeneous surface by the surveying eye of the state. Their identity as wild or civilized peoples was relative to their place on the colonial geobody, just as their distinct characteristics came into focus with reference to the assimilative gaze of white benevolence. The census not only mapped the structure of racial difference; it also established the privilege of a particular race to determine the borders of those differences.

This racial privilege was endowed with a genealogy. In the census section titled “History of the Population,” then Chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes David Barrows writes about the peopling of the archipelago in terms of waves of migrations of different “races” from the outside. In doing so, he reiterates the speculations of other colonial accounts regarding the prehistory of the Philippines—speculations that, since the archeological advances of the 1960s, have been definitively discredited. My interest in pointing out the census’s use of the wave migration theory has less to do with disproving its accuracy than with showing how its currency in official accounts grew out of the colonial concern with racializing Philippine history.

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The original inhabitants of the islands were supposedly the Negritos (a Spanish term that literally means "little Negroes"), or Aetas, "aboriginal black dwarfs" whose origins, according to Barrows, remain shrouded in mystery. With their shorter stature, dark skin, "woolly hair," nomadic forest existence, and austere material culture, they seemed to Barrows and other writers from the United States to be so racially distinct as to be historically removed from the rest of the population. "They probably approach as nearly to the conception of primitive man as any people thus far discovered," Barrows notes. The aboriginal Negritos were then said to have succumbed to a succession of more culturally sophisticated and physically better endowed Malays from the south. Arriving in large boats, they conquered the islands, pushing the aboriginal populations into the forests while occasionally intermarrying with them. Later migratory waves brought even stronger Malays, some in possession of an Islamic faith acquired from Arabs, driving the older Malays into the mountains. The spread of Muslim Malys, however, was checked by the arrival of the Catholic Spaniards in the sixteenth century, marking the break between the prehistoric and properly historic epochs in the Philippines. The Spanish conquest also led to an influx of a "Chinese element" into the population, as traders settled and intermarried with the Malays, giving rise to a small but economically and socially significant mestizo population (*Census*, 1:411–17, 454, 532).24

This narrative of the peopling of the archipelago imagines the Philippines to have been a tabula rasa settled by successive waves of colonizers. As such, the racial and tribal diversity of the population can be explained in temporal terms as the inevitable retreat of darker-skinned, more savage inhabitants in the face of advancing groups of lighter-skinned, more civilized, and physically superior conquerors. Indeed, the epochal break between the prehistoric to the properly historical era occurs only with the arrival of the Spaniards. Racial differences result then from a long history of colonization culminating, presumably, in the arrival of the strongest, most progressive, and lightest-skinned colonizer to date: whites from the United States. The effect of racializing both the social structure and cultural history of the Philippines is to position the population in a derivative relationship to the outside. It is as if the country was naturally destined for conquest just as the United States was manifestly destined to colonize it. The historical recounting of the population, like its statistical accounting, renders colonial subjects visible from a transcendent, posthistorical vantage point, one occupied by what we might designate as the white gaze. Spatially, it is a gaze that dreams of surveying and cataloging other races while remaining unmarked and unseen itself; temporally, it is that which sees the receding past of nonwhite others from the perspective of its own irresistible future.25

The privileged poise of seeing a regulated and well-policed future already prefigured in the heterogeneous and disorderly past comes across with special clarity in the photographs of Filipinos that appear in the census report. Set off from the textual and statistical sections of the census, the photographs are arranged to form an album of colonial subjectivities. "Typical" examples of wild and civilized peoples are featured in the photographs in the first volume, along with pictures of native enumerators and their local supervisors. Dressed in their tribal attire for the camera's lens, images of colonial bodies are wrenched from their historical and social contexts. In their frozen state, they suggest the appearance of specimens undergoing different stages of tutelage. At the lowest extreme, the scantily clad Negritos hunched over the ground, with tangled hair and minstrel-like grins, are made to appear farthest removed from the civilizing touch of colonial rule (fig. 3). Head-hunting Igorots, those putative descendants of the first wave of Malay conquerors, along with Muslim Malys appear more erect, even regal, decked out in their tribal ornaments signifying their more advanced state (figs. 4 and 5). Closest to civilization are the Western-clad census workers. Set against a background of American flags, their appearance suggests well-disciplined bodies, while the portraits of local supervisors identified by name and area of responsibility produce images of bourgeois respectability assimilated into the state machinery (figs. 6 and 7).

Within the context of the census's racializing frame, such photographs constitute a visual complement to the statistical tables, a distinct but related way of seeing native subjects as objects of knowledge and reform. Where statistical tabulations abstract native identities into faceless numbers, the photographs give a kind of composite face to the statistics. Shadowed by the notion of typicality—which I take to be the reduction of cultural differences into an ordered range of variations and
a set of representative figures—these photographs form part of the same enumerative and classificatory optic of colonial knowledge.

Photographs of wild and civilized Filipinos are reproduced not only in the census report but in various official documents of the colonial archive. Many were taken by government officials themselves, most prominently Dean C. Worcester, as part of their regular trips to survey the peoples and conditions of the country. Within a colonial context, these photographs make a claim analogous to that of the census: while a diverse collection of tribes may exist in the archipelago, they can be encoded within the same racial hierarchy and enclosed within a single visual field. Constructed as examples and exemplars of native types, photographic images of colonial subjects map cultural differences within the same representational grid. That is to say, they bear the marks of a colonizing gaze that is able to arrogate for itself, in remaining discrete and dispersed, the privilege to rank and assess the comparative value of the native inhabitants and their world. They image the subjects of colonialism as objects of transitional significance whose present is bound to fade into the past as they are wholly annexed to the civilizing embrace of the future. Mementos of conquest, such photographs serve as dioramas of benevolent assimilation. Like the census tables and graphs, they work to erase the traces of violence at the origin of U.S. rule and instead pay tribute to the technologies of supervision and classification that maintain the disciplinary devotions of white love.26

Short-circuiting Surveillance Were there other ways of reading benevolent assimilation that went against the grain of the census? Did alternative styles of envisioning the Philippines exist that called into question the racializing narratives of the Philippine past along with the disciplinary prescriptions for its present and future?

At about the same time that the census—with its dream images of a benevolent empire—was being conducted and published between 1903–1905, a series of nationalist plays in the Tagalog vernacular were being performed in and around Manila. Written and performed largely by urban, working-class artists, some of whom had been active in both the revolution against Spain and war against the United States, these plays were extraordinarily popular among working-class audiences as well as

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members of the nationalist elite critical of U.S. rule. Occupying the same historical terrain as the colonial census, nationalist melodramas mark the limits of the census’s reach. While the census serves as an important foundation in the construction of a larger colonial archive—one that would eventually come to include transcribed and translated examples of Tagalog “seditious” plays as part of the colonial court records—nationalist dramas performed a history whose meanings eluded the imperial logic of benevolent assimilation and surveying gaze of the archive.

Under the Sedition Law, the colonial Supreme Court banned these nationalist dramas, claiming that they tended to “incite the people of the Philippine Islands to open and armed resistance to the constituted authorities” and “inculcate a spirit of hatred and enmity against the American people and the Government of the United States in the Philippines.” Forced to go underground in order to evade the constant scrutiny of colonial authorities, playwrights and casts were frequently arrested, fined, and imprisoned. Through such coercion, the colonial government managed to curtail and finally extinguish the production of nationalist plays after 1905.

Official anxiety over these nationalist dramas had to do with the extent of their popularity among Filipinos. Playing to crowded houses in Manila, such dramas also attracted “every man, woman and child” in the outlying barrios. It was not uncommon for an audience to “cheer on its feet, rabid with fury and frenzy for three hours” after a performance, as one U.S. observer nervously wrote. “When the seditious plays appeared, the people rose to it as one man, recognized that it told their story and patronized them liberally” (Riggs, xi, 45, 57). In order to evade colonial surveillance, theatrical groups relied on such tactics as publicizing plays under different titles, staging impromptu songs and speeches advocating Philippine sovereignty, and dressing the cast in costumes that, when brought into formation on stage, momentarily created an image of the outlawed Philippine flag. They used visual props such as the rising red sun symbolic of the revolutionary organization Katipunan, which had led the revolution against Spain, and structured their
stories as allegories of romance and kinship to invoke recollections of recent events and provoke sympathy (damay) for the sufferings of the motherland (Inang-bayan). Through the characters, the playwrights staged debates about the present and future of the nation, crafting lengthy soliloquies and pointed exchanges that questioned U.S. pronouncements of benevolent assimilation and critiqued the practice of Filipino collaboration. Indeed, colonialism and collaboration were seen in the plays as mutually reinforcing, working to enslave (alipinin) the population and disrupt the affective ties that constituted the borders of the national community.

Nationalist plays drew their formal coherence from the melodramatic conventions of nineteenth-century vernacular genres, especially the komedya. By the nineteenth century, the increasing commercialization of agriculture and opening of the Philippines to world trade laid the conditions for the emergence of secular art forms tied to the marketplace rather than the Catholic Church. Theatrical genres such as the komedya were part of these cultural developments. They were local versions of medieval Spanish romances featuring forbidden love, melodramatic conflicts, and predictable resolutions between Christian and Muslim princes and princesses and their respective families. Performed in the vernacular language, komedyas rearticulated Spanish forms. They highlighted spectacular stage effects, densely choreographed movements such as sword fights and marches, brightly colored costumes, and elaborate rhetorical modes of address. Focusing on the social conflicts generated by the proscribed love of Christian for Muslim, komedyas took up the themes of transgressive desire, filial betrayal, the crisis of parental authority, and by extension, the unmaking and remaking of the bonds of reciprocity on which such authority was based. Set amid the fantastic surroundings of imagined but distant medieval European kingdoms, nineteenth-century popular theater translated and so conventionalized the persistent presence of the foreign in one's midst in ways that escaped clerical and colonial representations. It thus opened up an alternative space for conceptualizing and addressing colonial conditions in terms other than those authorized by the church and state.

Komedyas, furthermore, were linked to the marketplace as much as to the communities where they performed. Out of this genre, a notion of the author as owner and origin of his or her work began to form (such as in the case of the best-known playwright, Francisco Baltazar), and certain performers became widely recognizable to different audiences across geographic divides, allowing them to charge more for their appearances. Theatrical troupes were portable and mobile, making money by traveling from one town fiesta to the next rather than enjoying the patronage of the state or church. With the outbreak of revolution, theatrical forms were politicized and performative conventions rearticulated toward more radical ends. Reynaldo Ileto, for instance, has demonstrated such transformations in the case of the Pasyon, the epic story of Christ's passion performed in the vernacular during Holy Week and mobilized to frame the tumultuous events of the revolution in millenarian terms. It comes as no surprise, then, that the melodramatic conventions of the komedyas should also lend themselves to being retooled to respond to the force of events relating to the war and onset of U.S. colonial rule.

The plots of nationalist dramas served as screens for projecting profoundly felt and widely shared social experiences of revolution, colonial occupation, war, and the intense longing for freedom (kalayaan). They usually revolved around the relationship between a female beloved and her male lover-protector or between a mother and her children. One personified the nation and freedom; the other stood for the patriot and the people. In either case, their relationship is invariably threatened by a male foreign intruder harboring designs on the woman-nation. He is aided by a local collaborator, who in betraying his siblings and parents, substitutes the love of nation for the lust after money. Together, they abduct the woman-nation, thereby precipitating a crisis of filiation. Encouraged by their mother-land, the male-patriot and his supporters battle both foreigner and collaborator to regain the freedom of the beloved-nation. Extended calls to mourn (damay) those who had perished in the fighting are issued by the motherland (Inang-bayan). She appeals to her sons and daughters to recall the sacrifices of the dead, thereby turning death into an occasion to celebrate the bonds that unite them. Although the endings of the plays may vary in their details, they all envision the spectacular reunification of the beloved nation, whether in the present or future, with her lover-patriot returning from imprisonment or death itself to lead the people to victory against foreigners and collaborators alike.

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Whereas the allegory of benevolent assimilation regarded imperialism as the melodrama of white love for brown brothers, seditious plays used the language of melodrama to express the love of nation. We can see how language is politicized in the plays by looking at the conventions for naming different characters. Playwrights generally used common nouns and adjectives to denote each character and have each character signify a particular concept or social entity as gleaned from the play’s dramatic personae. For example, in Juan Abad’s Tanikdlang Guinto (The Golden Chain), Liwanag (literally “light,” signifying “freedom”) is betrothed to K’ulayaw (“defender,” standing for the patriot), the son of Dalita (“suffering,” connoting the captive condition of the motherland). Liwanag, however, is desired by Maimbot (“avarice,” that is, the U.S. colonial government), who enlists the aid of the collaborator Nag-tapon (“one who is thrown away”). Nag-tapon accepts money from Maimbot and thus betrays his brother, K’ulayaw, and mother, Dalita (Riggs, 497–542).

Similarly, in Juan Matapang Cruz’s Hindi Pa Aco Patay (I Am Not Yet Dead), Macamcam (“avaricious”; again, the colonial state), the son of Maimbot seeks by force and deception to wed Karangalan (“dignity” or “respect,” connoting the natural resources of the country), the daughter of Pinagsakitan (“she who suffers,” or the motherland). Macamcam and Maimbot employ the services of the son of Pinagsakitan, Ualanghinyang (“shameless one,” the Filipino collaborator), who in exchange for money, helps to engineer the abduction of Karangalan. However, Karangalan’s lover, Tanguilan (“protector,” the Filipino patriot), the nephew of Katuiran (“reason” or “justice,” signifying Filipino rights), attempts to rescue her by challenging Macamcam to a duel. Macamcam seems momentarily victorious, and everyone believes that Tangulan is dead. But as the wedding between Macamcam and Karangalan is about to take place, Tangulan suddenly appears on the stage, declaring to the wild applause of the audience, “I am not yet dead!” (Riggs, 543–606).

In one of the most famous seditious dramas, Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow), by the prolific writer Aurelio Tolentino, Philippine history is depicted not as the successive waves of conquests described in the census report but as the progression of anti-colonial struggles against foreign invaders and local collaborators. In act 1, “Yesterday,” Inangbayan (“motherland”) rallies her people, led by Tagailog (literally, “from the water,” a reference to the Tagalogs), to defend their land, Balintawak (a reference to the site where the revolution of 1896 against Spain began), against the incursions of the “Chinese” despot Batang Hari (“child-king,” perhaps a reference to the seventeenth-century “Chinese” pirate, Limahong, who had threatened to invade the Spanish colony). Batang Hari is aided by the machinations of the collaborator Asalhayop (“behaves like an animal”). In act 2, “Today,” Tagailog escapes from prison by killing the collaborator Dahumalay (“venomous snake”), concealing his identity, and rousing his fellow Tagalogs to rescue Inangbayan—then in the process of being buried alive by Matanglawin (“hawk-eye,” the Spanish colonial government), his wife, Dilatnabulag (“sighted but unable to see,” Spain herself), and Halimaw (“monster,” the Spanish friar). Finally, in act 3, “Tomorrow,” Tagailog presses a condescending Malaynatin (“one whom we don’t know,” the U.S. government) to live up to his promise of granting independence to the people. Inangbayan also pleads with Malaynatin’s wife, Bagongsibol (“fresh spring,” the U.S. nation), to convince her husband to accede to Tagailog’s demands. The latter prepares an army to attack Malaynatin should he renge on his promise. But such a plan proves unnecessary, as Bagongsibol finally succumbs to the entreaties of the children of Inangbayan and gives the country its independence. “Tomorrow” ends on a hopeful note with everyone celebrating the new freedom of Inangbayan (Riggs, 607–51).

Arthur Stanley Riggs, who compiled an extensive dossier on these plays for the colonial government, remarks on the practice of using common words to denote the names of characters:

Such names... are to the native mind filled with the keenest suggestion, and the artful connotation of the playwright in thus making the very names of his mimes tell more than their set speeches has had a tremendous effect. Every time the common nouns were employed in the body of the text, the audience saw not only the characteristic properties suggested by them, but also swiftly imagined the particular characters to which the names belonged... The result was a quick, lively, and entire confidence established between author, players, and audience impossible to obtain in any other way. (Riggs, 122)

In nationalist melodramas, mimicry acquires a value different from that assigned to it by colonial sources in relation to native characteris-
Filipino relations are bilaterally reckoned. Individuals trace their links with self-consciousness geared toward acting out historical narratives that ran counter to official versions. Common names are invested with new meanings and remade by characters into emblems of collective experiences. They become hieroglyphs, as it were, for recalling the nation's history and redrawing its moral boundaries. In this sense, the commonality of words becomes proper not only to the individual character on stage but to the particular vernacular community from and to which that character addresses her- or himself.

The practice of naming in nationalist melodramas bears comparison to the representational conventions of the census report. As we have seen, the latter designated the population as the aggregate of quantitatively visible entities within a closed set of categories. Reifying identities into schedules, cards, and photographic specimens of the typical, the census consigned both their naming and interpretation to a bureaucratic apparatus. Translatable into numbers and locatable on a grid, names were regarded as part of an ensemble of objectifying devices with which to regulate and supervise the relationship between knower and known, state and subjects, white and nonwhite peoples.

By contrast, nationalist plays turned common names into new sites for public life, rendering their referents easily accessible to actors, audiences, and authors who shared the same vernacular. The practice of naming was a way of establishing an imagined continuity between communication and community. Thus could names speak more than their characters inasmuch as they provided not merely a way of marking one from the other on stage; they also opened up a space from which to address all those who considered themselves affiliated with the nation. Where colonial archives characterize and classify in order to render their subjects available for discipline, nationalist melodramas resignify the vernacular so as to reclaim the capacity of people to nominate themselves as agents in and interpreters of their experiences.

The narrative of those collective experiences was shaped by a thematic of kinship ties. As with many Southeast Asian island societies, Filipino relations are bilaterally reckoned. Individuals trace their links equally on both the mother's and father's sides. Bilateral kinship descent allows for the cultivation of extended families through both ritual and extraritual means. Historically, such ties tended to be idealized along the lines of an economy of reciprocal obligations: that is, through conventions of deference, respect, and expectations of mutual caring between parents and children, older and younger siblings, husbands and wives, lovers and beloveds, landlords and tenants, masters and servants, and any other configuration of superordinate and subordinate relations. Reciprocal obligations are, in a way, the "grammar" of kinship ties, determining the lines of filiation and affiliation between self and other as simultaneously personal (face-to-face) and political (hierarchic and subject to conflict and change). Put differently, kinship is a way of conceiving the self as fated, and thereby obligated to the other and to a social order predicated on the circulation of mutual indebtedness. In a sense then, to acknowledge one's kin is to imagine the limits of one's social experience.31

By mapping the national community onto the extended family—and conversely, by imaging colonization and collaboration as the disruption of that family and the subversion of an economy of reciprocal indebtedness—nationalist dramas reenact the relationship between the personal and political. As melodramas, they regard kinship as the terrain of conflict and alliances that bear simultaneously on the private and public spheres—indeed, that call attention to their mutual constitution. To better understand how these plays dramatize the link between the personal and political, it is instructive to look at the ways in which they engender the image of a nation by placing gender itself in motion.

As we saw earlier, the discourse of benevolent assimilation was predicated on a racial hierarchy that surveyed as it sought to discipline colonial subjects. Yet the census also differentiated the population as males and females, coordinating gender distinctions with race, age, occupation, cause of death, disability, and the like. Worth noting is the fact that while racial difference was conceived of in spatial and temporal terms as organized by and subordinate to whiteness, gender distinctions were posed without commentary, as if they were wholly natural. Indeed, the category of gender was not used at all, but rather that of sex, so that the distinction between men and women appears to be "natural" and beyond any sort of social convention.

The extent to which gender seems unproblematic in the census is, I
think, a function of the overwhelmingly masculine construction of colonial order. There is never any doubt in official sources that white love is paternal and the task of colonial administration, though it employed women as teachers in public schools and nurses in public health programs, is by and large men’s work. Colonial politics was conceived of as a homosocial affair involving the tutelary bonding between white fathers and their male native-mestizo apprentices. To be coded female of whatever race was, in effect, to be consigned to a marginal position in the public sphere of colonial society. Gender was thus conflated with sex as the representation of sexual difference was naturalized in relation to the paternalism of the colonial state. Just as racial difference was organized from the vantage point of whiteness, sexual difference was structured from the state’s masculine perspective. To be classified as male or female meant becoming visible as such to the gaze of white fathers.

Nationalist melodramas, by contrast, do not contain a discourse on race. Whatever hostile references these plays may have to supposed foreigners, such characters are never distinguished by color or race but in terms of behavior and language. Hence, characters standing for the U.S. colonial government are depicted as loud and disrespectful, given to excessive drinking and crude behavior (as Filipinos often witnessed U.S. soldiers do during the war), and untrustworthy by virtue of having reneged on past obligations. In Tolentino’s play, the foreigners representing the United States are even more complex, depicted in a sympathetic light as potentially responsive to the rights of Filipinos, and by implication, assimilable into the family. The occasional reference to Chinese invaders may reflect a sense of anti-Sinitism cultivated by Spanish colonial policies in the past, but these Chinese remain so vaguely drawn and unracialized as to be tokens in a larger discourse about nationalist resistance to colonial rule.32

Indeed, race as a trope for difference and power is remarkably absent in these plays. What seems crucial in drawing social distinctions, however, is gender. The importance of gender is apparent in the names and plots of the dramas. Figures for the beloved nation (such as Inangbayan, Pinagsakitan, Karangalan, and Dalita) and desired freedom (Liwanag, Bituin, Malaya) are invariably cast as women. Those who desire her, whether patriot-protectors or colonialists and collaborators, are always cast as men. It is as if these dramas triangulate social desire, casting nationhood in terms of the masculine struggle over a feminized object. The relationship between the nation and nationalists and colonizers alike is thereby mediated by what appear to be gender stereotypes. While men act—they threaten or protect, abduct or rescue, wage war or make peace—women react and watch the spectacle of men seeking them out.

Yet in the text of the plays, these gender stereotypes are provisional and shifting. In attributing a gender to the characters, the plays also problematize the meaning of those roles, particularly under the severe conditions of revolutionary upheaval and colonial dislocation. In Hindi Pa Aco Patay, for example, Karangalan calls out to Tangulan to rescue her from Macamcam. Nonetheless, it is she who ends up rescuing him in the forest by shooting a predatory bird symbolizing the colonial Philippine Constabulary. It is from her, too, that we hear the most incisive critique of collaboration as mere enslavement to money and the most resonant refutation of U.S. assessments regarding the unfitness of Filipinos for self-government. Luhang Tagalog (Tagalog Tears), an earlier play by Tolentino, features a wife, Bituin (“star,” signifying independence), who protects her husband from the murderous designs of his collaborationist father. She also counsels the mothers and wives of those going off to war, offers a trenchant critique of war as an arena of masculine privilege, and eloquently exposes the link between benevolent assimilation and colonial subjugation (Riggs, 352–422). As the suffering motherland (Busilak in Tomas Remigio’s Malaya [Freedom], Pinagsakitan in Hindi Pa Aco Patay, and Inangbayan in Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas), women do not serve as passive spectators to their own rescue. Rather, they initiate the call to struggle by putting forth the need to remember the dead. They invoke the importance of mourning (damay), which because it rekindles ties between the living and dead, the past and future, constitutes the historical and affective boundaries of the national community.33

Women personify the beloved nation waiting to be rescued; yet they also generate the conditions that make their rescue both possible and desirable. As nurturing mothers and vulnerable lovers, woman-nation figures take up arms, plan battles, and demand accountability from characters and audiences alike. They are objects of masculine contention, but they are also active interlocutors in the debate over the future disposition of their body politic.
Part of what renders women’s position so complex is the remarkable fact that fathers are either marginal or absent in these plays. The foreigners who covet the woman-nation are constructed as illegitimate or unacceptable fathers. Collaborators are often depicted as less than human, because of their association with money. Patriotic protectors, as lovers, are not yet husbands and tend to occupy shifting positions as characters in need of defense as much as they seek to defend the nation. When taken together, these masculine roles have the effect of deferring the emergence of any kind of paternal hegemony within the world of the nationalist dramas. Just as the relationship between the nation and its people crystallizes in opposition to the avaricious and monopolizing intentions of the colonial state, so it would seem that the gender differences between women and men do not coalesce around a paternal figure of authority. Instead, these differences come up against and before the persistent figure of the motherland. This is not to say that men and women were considered equal; only that the inequality inherent in gender formations was called into question, cast as provisional and conditional under specific historical circumstances. Gender in these plays does not come across as a series of fixed and natural categories but as a set of negotiable positions in the articulation of nationhood. In the absence of a symbolic father that would serve as a point of reference in the gendering of social relations at a time of intense turmoil and uncertainty, it is conceivable that the association between woman and nation in the dramas did not simply reproduce gender stereotypes; it suggested alternative roles as well, enabling women to speak and act in the defense of the body politic against the designs of colonizing others. Small wonder, then, that “the women are as ardent theater-goers, even in times of political stress, as their husbands, brothers and sons” (Riggs, 46).

Nationalist melodramas indicate that the imaging of the nation as woman did not invariably translate into a reified gender hierarchy. Rather, the ambiguous construction of gender categories in the plays arose from the specificity of Filipino notions of kinship historically articulated in relation to the turbulence of war, the revolutionary expectations of freedom (kalayaan), and the absence of a stable patriarchal state between 1899 and 1905. What made the plays significant was that by imagining the nation as woman, they projected a notion of the nation as distinct from the state. And such was indeed imaginable at that particular historical moment, when the structures of authority—colonial as well as familial—were up for grabs. Thus did nationalist dramas allow for a certain play on the meanings of male and female. The unresolved status of gender roles (where, for instance, a display of utter weakness rather than confident mastery can be a male attribute as much as it is a woman’s) underscores, once again, the differences between the representational operations of the census and plays. Where the former was organized around the production of a stable state apparatus that would rule paternally over a racialized and gendered people, the latter were far more concerned with imaging the nation as an extended family predicated less on a patriarchal principle of authority than as a general economy of reciprocal obligations freed from the violence of colonial rule.

Unlike the census, then, nationalist plays did not seek to represent the population as implacably bound to gender and racial categories subject to the continuous gaze of white benevolence. Their seditiousness consisted precisely in providing alternative sources of knowledge and power—sources into which colonial agents were assimilated, but as figures disruptive of reciprocal obligations. As melodramas, they depicted social desires in motion, thereby reintroducing a deep sense of contingency into the narrative of recent events on the levels of language and gender. For where white love prescribed manly discipline, the love of nation postulated a different kind of bondage, one where a network of supervision gave way to a spectacular commerce in tears. As Tolentino writes in dedicating his play Luhang Tagalog to the motherland:

Weeping without ceasing for your children,
And weeping always for your sorrows.
I have taken care to write this piece
So that my tears should flow
Together with the tears from your eyes.
To you I offer this: it is so very fragile
Because it is from me;
Still accept this
For I have nothing more valuable to give. (Riggs, 352)