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Book Review: Import of the Archive: U.S. Colonial Rule of the Philippines and the Making of American Archival History by Cheryl Beredo

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**Import of the Archive: U.S. Colonial Rule of the Philippines and the Making of American Archival History** by Cheryl Beredo. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, LLC., 2013. 168 pp. ISBN 978-1-936117-72-7.

Signaling the end of an empire for Spain and the dawning of a new age of expansionism for the United States, the Spanish-American War of 1898 engendered a series of dramatic socio-cultural and political shifts in the countries of Cuba, the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. Colonial properties fighting for their independence from the *metropole*, these island nations initially welcomed American intervention and support of their revolutionary struggles. But with the end of the conflict and subsequent transfer of these territories from Spain to the U.S., the peoples of these nations came to fully realize the imperialist designs of their American allies and to experience the unfortunate consequences of the internationalization of Manifest Destiny.

It is this historical instance that serves as the backdrop for Cheryl Beredo's book, *Import of the Archive: U.S. Colonial Rule of the Philippines and the Making of American Archival History*, and its reach for an understanding of the ways in which the island's colonial and revolutionary histories are intertwined with the creation of documentary evidence and the archival institutions that maintain them. Divided into five chapters, including an Introduction and a Conclusion, the book explores the intersections of archives with war, anti-imperialism movements in the U.S., and land rights and property issues in the Philippines. In particular, Beredo tracks the evolution of the Bureau of Archives, and highlights how its creation and relationships to these aforementioned phenomena were emblematic of the changing role and purpose of archives in quotidian colonial life. Moreover, she astutely points towards the use of archives as engines of American propaganda in the Philippine context, and their concomitant affirmation of a doctrine of "Benevolent Assimilation" that purportedly embodied the modernity, order, and organization that was the promise of the U.S. colonial presence. In turn, she asserts the intrinsic "role of archives in narratives of American progressivism" (p. 9), as well as the critical part they played in American imperial history and the creation of the colonial state in the Philippines.

Although focused primarily on archival materials that reflect American activities in the archipelago, from repositories in the U.S. and the Philippines, the scope of Beredo's study also touches upon documents ceded to the U.S. by Spain that chronicle the latter's colonial rule, as well as evidence of insurgent and/or revolutionary activities in the Philippines before and after the Spanish American War. Both of these are in evidence in Beredo's discussion on archives and war in Chapter 2, and serve as an entry point for a larger dialogue on the subsequent evolution of archival institutions in the country. Besides representing the additional spoils of a war, the records of the colonial regime functioned as an administrative and ideological tool for the maligning of the Spanish colonial system (as inefficient, disorderly, corrupt and inept) and the curbing of insurgency on the islands. Indeed, those records culled from revolutionary forces that were ultimately collected under the auspices of the Office for Insurgent Records were used to further delegitimize attempts to displace American predominance in the region, and to sabotage efforts to assert an independent Filipino national identity. As Beredo notes, these records

provided evidence of detailed plans by nationalist groups in the Philippines on governmental divisions and institutions they intended to use to establish a stable, democratic and independent state. The suppression of these materials served to perpetuate the notion that Filipinos were infantile and incapable of creating the necessary structures for self-governance. Ironically, once these plans came into the hands of American officials, they were used as templates for their own colonial structures and governmental bodies.

In the following chapters, Beredo continuously speaks to the generative power of these records towards the building of archives in the Philippines, and notes the development of “oppositional non-governmental archives” as a result of the activities of the Anti-Imperialist League in the United States, as well as the growth in land records that functioned to map the new colonial territory. If the records of the Anti-Imperialist League attested to “the self-conscious recording of an alternative record on war atrocities in the Philippines” (p. 44), the increase in records detailing the partition and registration of properties in the archipelago was indicative of American moves to control the nation’s economy and subsequently exploit its natural resources. Both phenomena speak to Beredo’s central hypothesis, noted above, that the formation of archival repositories were intrinsic to the fulfillment of the United States colonial mission in the Philippines. The land records in particular, were yet another mechanism for the assertion of American order and efficiency, and the continued effort to cast a beneficent light on the American presence in the islands. Given the armed resistance to the shift from Spanish to American colonialism exemplified by the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), it behooved the new colonial overseers to mollify dissent by emphasizing their ability to draw the Filipino nation into the dawning twentieth century.

What Beredo does effectively throughout her book, is to deploy the minutiae of her archival research towards teasing out how the creation, maintenance, destruction, and use of documents sustained United States colonial policy. But moreover, her work demonstrates how archival documentation enabled the new American colonial administration to both learn about and control the population of the Philippines itself. If the records of the previous Spanish colonial authority were representative of a bankrupt system, they were nonetheless useful for acquiring knowledge about the socio-cultural and political layout of the archipelago, and the make-up of revolutionary movements. Notwithstanding later efforts at “Filipinization,” which sought to place more natives in positions of colonial authority, Beredo proves that the process of archivization was one of control shrouded in benign kindness. Moreover, she brings to relief the growing recognition in archival circles that it is difficult to distance the work of archiving from the vagaries of political power. Although she is at moments hard-pressed to evoke the materiality of archives in her historical accounts, she eventually brings her observations back to her study’s relevance for a thinking of archival history and praxis. Trained as an archivist herself, Beredo is mindful of the implications of her historical argument for archival training and practice. She in turn poses the question of the impact on archivists and the ideological conflicts they may incur, going as far to contend that their activities and decision making are rarely located outside the bounds of political pressures and their historical consequences.

Cast as they are in Beredo's conclusion, these questions and issues are admittedly secondary to the intent of her historical study. Nevertheless, for archivists reading this text, she maintains that it is necessary to recall the connections between archivists and historians as a way of exploring their joint work in the building of archival institutions. This salient point brings to bear the agency of archivists in the process of building collections, but moreover their contributions towards manufacturing historical phenomena. As Beredo demonstrates, it is the very administrative paraphernalia of memos, pamphlets, deeds, etc. that constitute the foundation of any government. In the case of the Philippines, both new and legacy records served to undergird the American colonial regime. Thorough in its approach and level of historical detail, Beredo's book is also valuable in its insistence on this point and contributes towards a growing body of literature that interrogates the ideological situatedness of historical records and the archivists that tend to them. Moreover, it fills a dire need for additional works that ruminate on the intersection between archives and the (post-)colonial world, and which create a space for diverse perspectives on archival history and praxis. Although brief and perhaps limited in its scope, this book is nonetheless a worthy companion in history and information studies courses, and valuable reading for practicing archivists.

#### **Reviewer**

Mario H. Ramírez is doctoral student in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles where his research interests include the role of states of repression in the creation of documentary evidence, the archiving of human rights violations in Latin America and the construction of memory and national identities in post-conflict societies and their Diasporas. He is the author of "Witness to Brutality: Documenting Torture and Truth in Post-Civil War El Salvador" in *Archiefkunde*, "The Task of the Latino/a Archivist: On Archiving Identity and Community" in *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, and co-author, with Laurence Lepetit and Patrizia Lapiscopeia, of "The Role of Social Media and Web 2.0 Technologies in the Protection of Cultural Heritage."