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Projecting order in the pericolonial Philippines: An anthropology of Catholicism beyond Catholics

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In a majority Catholic country like the Philippines, it can be difficult to appreciate the true impact of Catholicism, beyond the obvious presence of Catholics. For the 'unchristianised' indigenous minorities in its peripheral upland regions, the role of the Catholic thought-world in shaping who they are today is masked substantially by their cultural distinctiveness. Missionary-dominated narratives in colonial historiography configure our understanding of the present, structuring our approach to anthropology in these peripheral spaces. This article argues that the diachronic component is necessary to make sense of how Catholicism has not only shaped the diversity of modern Philippine cultures, but also how it has configured cultural and political spaces so completely that, as anthropologists, we at times reproduce this thought-world uncritically through our own ethnographies. A focus on the so-called unchristianised Lumad ethnic minorities of Mindanao argues that it is essential to look beyond Catholics as obvious subjects when undertaking an anthropology of Catholicism.

Keywords: Catholicism, Philippines, pericolonial, historiography, missionaries

In the Philippines, Asia's only Catholic majority nation, the anthropology of Catholicism presents a real challenge. Catholicism, specifically the thought-world reproduced by its European missionaries from the 16th century onwards, has long provided continuity for the very idea of 'the Philippines' itself. In fact, the Philippines, as a cultural reality and physical space, remains a projection of the political agendas of Iberian *Religiosos*, missionaries of the Religious orders, who were the prime movers of the Spanish colonial project called *Filipinas*. Given the overwhelming Roman Catholic character of Filipino history, culture, politics, and of course religious practice, how does one interrogate objectively and productively the role of Catholicism in society beyond analysing its obvious Catholicity?

Deconstructing its localisation and appreciating its inherent multivocality are important; significant challenges to the dominance of the Catholic Church are well-documented in existing scholarship. Ethnographies of a broadly defined Filipino Christianity encompassing Protestantism, Evangelicalism, Iglesia ni Kristo, and local

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charismatic movements like El Shaddai, likewise compel us to question the future hegemony of Catholicism. Yet these Christianities continue to mask a more significant type of diversity and otherness in Philippine society—one which evolved as part of the colonial project that brought Catholicism to the Philippines. Or was it the Catholic project that brought colonialism? To this day, Filipinos live—quite unconsciously—with a social stratification so thoroughly racialised that neither religion nor anthropology itself have managed to dismantle the exclusions it engenders in both society and academic study. I refer not to the shocking economic extremes that plague the country, but to the present-day ethnic differentiation between Catholics and non-Catholics that has become both racialised and upstreamed to the precolonial past.

This article concerns the Philippines' so-called 'non-Christian', 'non-Catholic' minorities, specifically those indigenous peoples residing in former pericolonial areas who, as far as both history and anthropology are concerned, have remained outside the fold of the nation's definitive colonial experience with Spanish Catholicism and normative Catholicity. With a primary focus on Lumad peoples in the southern Philippines, I argue for an anthropology of Catholicism that goes beyond Catholics—one that contextualises the colonial experience more broadly and holistically to reintegrate the 'uncolonised' as pericolonial and the 'non-Catholic' as peri-Catholic. However, this requires both an awareness of the tremendous influence of Philippine history upon its own anthropology, and an acknowledgement of the hegemonic Catholic gaze in Philippine anthropology.

Defining the 'Catholic', much less studying it anthropologically, is difficult precisely because of its ubiquity within the Philippine context. Over the centuries, Catholicism, as both a belief system and a political and cultural reality, has grown thoroughly confounded with the idea of 'the Philippines', just as 'the West' is inseparable from historical and cultural Christianity. Anthropology battles its own 'unrecognized orthodoxies' when confronted with the overly familiar in Christianity (Cannell 2005). In this sense, Catholicism is very much *the* context of the Philippines, against which everything is conceptualised and defined, including its precolonial, pre-Hispanic, non-Christian indigenous cultures.

THE FILIPINO AS CATHOLIC SUBJECT

Philippine Catholicism has at times been regarded as so infused by syncretisms and 'folk' aspects as to suggest the doctrinal ignorance of 'legitimate Christianity' by even the most devoted mainstream practitioners (Schumacher 1984; Lynch 2004; Bräunlein 2012a). In previous decades studies of Filipino Christianity have celebrated this 'split-level Christianity' as the enduring religious triumph of pre-conquest indigenous beliefs over centuries of Western colonial erasure (Ileto 1979; Zialcita 2005; Bautista 2010a; Bräunlein 2012b; Cornelio 2014). Philippine Catholicism has thus been rebranded as a culturally and theologically sophisticated 'weapon of the weak', through which Filipinos reconjugated foreign pretensions of empire and conversion into submission over the centuries, and perhaps from the very beginning (Rafael 1988).

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Beyond theological details, Catholicism provides the prism through which mainstream Filipinos understand their own reality, the general 'register through which they attempt to construct their own value' (Cannell 1999: 249). While I do not suggest a seamless unity, several key elements resonate throughout mainstream Filipino culture, including the moral legitimacy of the Catholic Church to 'speak for' Filipinos, and with it the rarely contested political role of the Church in a formally secular country; being an observant Catholic as *de facto* marker of 'proper' Filipino citizenship, and conversely, the presumed deviance of other practices; the worship of patron saints through public and personal piety, especially Marian devotional 'cults' (Dela Cruz 2015); and finally, the extremely powerful trope of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of others. This trope of martyrdom is notable for providing a ready narrative of dissent and revolt (Bautista 2006; Dela Cruz 2011; Bräunlein 2014: 90–96), particularly through readings of the dramatic *Pasyon* narrative (Ileto 1979). In addition to providing a grammar for anti-colonial revolts, this trope has likewise informed more recent events like the 1986 'People Power' revolt. It saturates with religious significance the injustices suffered by Filipinos past and present (Aguilar 1998), including those of modern overseas contract workers (Bautista 2015), and provides a gospel for economic and social mobility (Wiegele 2012, 2013).

The existing body of work on Christianity in the Philippines is delimited in two ways. First, it deals almost exclusively with mainstream Filipino populations from majority ethnic groups (Cannell 1999; Bautista 2010b). In the case of Protestantism, it primarily addresses more recent converts from Catholicism to Evangelicalism (Wiegele 2005, 2012, 2013).[1] In other words, they focus on populations who have always identified with some form of Christianity. Second, these studies tend to treat the Catholic or broader Christian contexts as self-evident and inevitable. Under the hegemony of Catholicism, the defining feature of the Philippines' indigenous minorities—the Cordilleran, Lumad, Moro, Negrito, Mangyan—is the fact that they are not Catholics. Among the lowlanders, the Protestants, Evangelicals, and Charismatics are acknowledged as adhering to 'alternative' Christianities. Despite the 'Asian difference', these studies of Philippine Christianities are more akin to studying in a Western country the varieties of whiteness within a predominantly white population. While nonetheless fascinating and significant, such studies can address only a limited aspect of Philippine society, however dominant that aspect may be.

Some may note belatedly that these 'non-Christian' minority populations are all found in peripheral areas relative to the centres of lowland Catholic Filipino culture—but their spatial exclusion is likewise attributed to their 'resistance' to Catholicism. From these characterisations, most Filipinos—including anthropologists and other scholars—infer an enduring cultural isolation, which normalises the current distinctiveness of minorities within a wholly Catholicised Filipino culture, and renders it unsurprising. This is, in fact, so established a model of cultural differentiation that it is nearly impossible to imagine that the Lumads and other indigenous minorities could have evolved into such distinct communities even with sustained colonial contact over the centuries (Paredes 2013: 1–9). Much of Philippine ethnography is

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marked by this form of presentism, promoting a thoroughly misleading sense of minorities vis-à-vis the Catholic context, which in turn limits how we anthropologise religion, among other topics, in such populations.

Of course, a careful look at colonial history shows that what we recognise today as 'indigenous' Lumad cultures were shaped profoundly by both Catholicism and colonialism. As I have shown elsewhere (Paredes 2013), the Lumad ancestral past, despite appearances to the contrary, has been configured by early contact with Catholic missions and structured, however subtly, by three centuries of immersion in a thoroughly Catholic milieu that transformed their world completely. While a handful of historians and anthropologists of the northern Philippines have attempted similarly to historicise the indigenous Cordilleran experience (Keesing 1962; Scott 1974, 1982; Finin 2005), these processes are still understood as having separated indigenous minorities from direct Christian influence, rather than having explicitly restructured them into cultural and political conformity. A more cynical reading of nationalist historiography suggests that Filipinos might actually need their indigenous minorities to remain untouched by Christianity, in order to prop up 'Filipino-ness' as it is currently constructed. As Bräunlein (2014: 84–90) points out, approaches to the decolonisation of knowledge in the Philippines have focused on the reconstruction of a pre-Hispanic Philippine culture 'uncontaminated' by Christianity and colonialism, around which to build an 'authentic' Filipino identity.

In much recent ethnography, conversion to Protestant Christianity by ethnic minorities is portrayed predominantly as a significant rupture with the past (Cannell 2006). This may be due to the imprint of Protestant conversion narratives, especially its evangelical varieties that stress the transformative nature of the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. There is a clear *quid pro quo* recognised in evangelical proselytising: letting go of one's sinful past—including the cultural baggage that holds you back—leads to freedom from eternal death, to an 'eternal life' for one's soul. In this vein, a rupture is necessary to access the transformative experience of conversion. Looking at the many Lumad communities converting to Evangelicalism and their 'abandonment' of what most Filipinos presume to be pre-colonial supernatural beliefs, practices, and relationships for a particularly strict, fundamentalist form of Christianity, this cosmic trade appears obvious. Among Higaunon evangelicals, I have seen quite a few adults weep openly when remembering beloved but 'unsaved' ancestors whose company they will miss in the afterlife because it was the price they had to pay to save themselves. That such rhetoric signifies rupture seems entirely reasonable until we take into account the totality of their engagement with Christianity over the centuries. Instead, amongst Lumads, conversion to Protestantism may signify not rupture but a conscious effort to maintain continuity with their ancestral past. For example, the theme of bodily salvation through the Rapture, highlighted in Evangelicalism, is entirely consistent with indigenous supernatural beliefs and narratives about key ancestors among Higaunon and Manobo Lumads (Paredes 2006). In this case, Evangelicalism represents not a rupture with ancestral traditions, but an 'improved' iteration that

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supersedes the power of ancestral spirits yet resonates deeply with their own indigenous practices.[2]

At the same time, conversion to Evangelicalism, rather than the dominant Catholicism, has also allowed Lumads to embrace a modern, 'civilised' identity marker—by becoming 'Christian' Filipinos while maintaining a meaningful social boundary against the Catholic majority who have, in living memory, discriminated against them racially and oppressed them systematically.[3] Historical and present-day cultural antagonisms, aggravated by land-grabbing by Catholic settlers, have played a major role in recent conversions by Lumads to Evangelical Protestant denominations of Christianity, in deliberate rejection of the overwhelming religious and political dominance of mainstream Filipinos. The immediate impact of Protestantism only masks the more enduring and profound impact of Catholicism on Lumad peoples long before these more recent conversions ever took place. Rather than evidence of a recent and highly localised but nonetheless radical break or 'rupture' with the past, conversion to Protestantism by ethnic minorities like the Lumad is more appropriately situated within the grander context of the long-term Catholic ordering of the Philippines. But rupture is more comprehensible within the nationalist frame because, despite the widespread rejection of Catholicism by indigenous minorities, the notion of rupture still allows Filipinos (and Philippine scholars) to imbue these purportedly 'non-Christian' cultures with a veneer of precolonial authenticity.

Understanding the place of the archipelago's indigenous Islamicised 'Moro' peoples likewise requires the diachronic perspective of history (Gowing 1969). Named after the Moors who conquered the Iberian peninsula in the 8th century and ruled until their political decline and expulsion from Spain in the early 15th century, the Moros were the sole population category in Filipinas to which Spanish Catholics remained unreconciled for over three centuries. With the Reconquista still a fresh memory, the demonisation of Islamicised peoples in Filipinas was essentially an extension of this centuries-old battle. As Kaufman explains: 'This period of Spanish colonial rule was, in the Christian view, "three centuries of Moro-Spanish warfare" aimed at stamping out the "accursed doctrine of Islam"' (2011: 947).

This 'Moro problem' brought the colony's south a reputation for being 'the most laborious and dangerous of ministries in the Philippines' for missionaries (Paredes 2013: 44). Religious orders polished their reputations with narratives of suffering at the hands of the Moros, featuring Catholic martyrs felled by Moro antagonists to whom the label 'jihadist' would be misapplied today. However, there is no evidence of a specifically religious Islamic resistance against the Spaniards at that time (McKenna 1998: 82–83). Today, relations between Moros and mainstream Filipinos remain configured by the anti-Muslim frame of post-Reconquista Christianity.[4] This exclusionary politics has a direct impact on the symbolic politics of the Philippines in that 'Christian Filipinos generally identify with the history of the Spanish colony of the Philippines' (Kaufman 2011: 947).

As such, even though the Moro peoples of the Philippines today are not Catholic by affiliation, they have certainly been incorporated into the Catholic thought-world

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in a very specific way. In this sense they were, and are, equally Catholicised as those Filipinos who emerged from the colonial experience as Catholics. The term Moro was applied to any and all groups with a perceived connection to Islam, regardless of their actual adherence to that faith. The Lumads of eastern Mindanao, known in colonial times as the Karagas, were labelled derisively as 'Karagas Moros', simply because they were once allied with the Maguindanao Sultanate. In the 17th century, Spaniards saw Karagas as 'contaminated' by their exposure to Islam, despite the fact that many Karagas had already been fighting the Moros under Spanish command by that time. There is no evidence that Karagas were ever practicing Muslims, yet today's Kalagan peoples are classified officially as both Moro and Lumad, their fleeting association with Muslims seemingly tarring the Karagas forever as 'Islamic'.

When we bring history to the table we begin to recognise that Catholicism is at work here, not merely as a religion, but as a totalising cultural and historical phenomenon that has reconfigured a disparate archipelago in the Pacific into a reality called 'the Philippines' and its people—Catholics and non-Catholics alike—into 'Filipinos'. Like telling silences in a text, the Philippines' non-Catholic spaces and peoples also speak, in this case to alternate strains of the same defining Catholicity. Within the context of a thoroughly Catholicised place like the Philippines, therefore, the anthropology of Catholicism must be more than the study of Catholics. As I argue below, the influence of Catholicism on historiography itself has so magnified its impact on the construction of non-Catholic otherness that, in turn, the anthropology of the Philippines to date has only reproduced and reified these colonial constructs.

CONSTRUCTING COLONIALISM

At the heart of the colonial experience that transformed the Philippines so profoundly was the foundation of Catholic missions by various Religious orders among the native *indios* (literally, 'indians') from the very beginning of the colonial project. As in the Americas, these missionaries sought to create Spanish subjects out of native populations by drawing them within the aural influence of the Roman Catholic Church—bringing them 'under the bell' into Christianised settlements (*reducciones*) where they could be exposed systematically to the approved brand of 'civilisation'. Most *indios* experienced colonisation primarily through missionary contact, rather than through other, non-Religious agents of the colonial state.

The role of Catholic missionaries in the construction of colonialism cannot be overstated. The fundamental cultural exchange between Iberian and *indio*—first contact, conversion, and colonial subjection—was enabled by *fraile* (friar) interventions. Neither is it an exaggeration to say that most of what we know about 'the Philippines' today has been mediated primarily through both the written and unwritten legacies of the Roman Catholic Religious orders in missionising Filipinas. The nucleic role of the *frailes* in the production of the Philippine colonial experience remains so strongly enunciated in narratives of both conquest and revolt that we continue to view the nation and its pastness through the lenses of these Iberian orders. This is true even for

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groups casting a distinctly 'non-Christian' demographic profile, such as the Lumads, who were created by colonial dispossession and differentiation, and the Muslim Moros who, despite successfully resisting colonial rule, were using the toponym *Filibin* (an Arabised form of 'Filipinas') by the 19th century (Gallop 2008). Today one cannot look at the map without seeing these islands instinctively as an archipelagic whole. As with any map projection method that creates distortion in the course of representing a particular area on a plane, exaggerating some relationships while minimising others, the Catholic panoptic has distorted our map of the Philippines in significant, totalising, catholicising ways.

First and foremost, it informs Philippine history in a literal way: with the exception of a handful of indigenous artefacts, the only primary sources for Philippine history are the colonial records. Events were captured for posterity through the lenses of European observers working at the behest of Spanish and Portuguese colonial powers, lenses calibrated to the civilising gaze of Catholicism. Whatever we can historicise as indigenous to the 'Filipino'—including languages, whose first dictionaries were compiled by *frailes*—was modulated in tandem by colonisation and Christianisation. The *frailes* were the only colonial agents likely to speak the native languages, especially in far-flung areas where missionaries were the only regular Spanish presence. One could indeed argue that *frailes* had the best access to the native 'street' in Filipinas. Spain explicitly recognised and appreciated the political importance of religious missionaries as a civilising influence, especially their role in maintaining social order and restoring it when conflicts grew out of control in the colony. This was especially important in pericolonial areas like Mindanao. Both Jesuit and Recoleto chroniclers celebrated their unofficial mandate as peacekeepers, often remarking that it was their patriotic duty to protect colonial personnel from the wrath of the natives.

Secondly, these Catholic distortions effectively dictate the historiography of the archipelago's pericolonial areas, where today's indigenous minorities are found. The only primary sources with contemporaneous eyewitness accounts of the Spanish colonial period are the occasional reports that were made by Recoletos, Jesuits, and other Catholic missionaries.[5] Given that political integration was piecemeal and limited largely to a few coastal areas, pericolonial areas are marked by a paucity of historical records, mirroring their peripherality to the grander Religious gaze. For the history of Lumad peoples prior to the 19th century, for example, the narratives of Recoleto *frailes*, specifically their endless struggles in the mission field, provide the only text-based historical narratives. This has the effect of not only magnifying the political, cultural, and historical significance of these texts, but also bending time and space according to the Religious view. Scholars interrogating the past in such places must therefore examine these scraps for meaningful data, heeding William Henry Scott's (1982) advice to look through all possible 'cracks in the parchment curtain' to bring the indigenous experience to light. Thanks to various Religious archives, five hundred years later the various places, people, and events they encountered in these pericolonial spaces are historically real—but only to the extent that Jesuit and Recoleto missionaries encountered and wrote about them. In this way, both the specific contours

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of Philippine national history and the ethnohistory of its murkier pericolonial parts are drawn directly from the Catholic thought-world of a few missionary orders. This Catholic 'ordering' is far more pronounced relative to our view of the pericolony than for the fully incorporated areas of the archipelago.

Third, the dearth and limited focus of the source material, combined with the modern cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of these indigenous 'non-Christian' peoples compared to mainstream Filipinos, means that the Catholic thought-world has had a disproportionate influence on the anthropology of the Philippines' pericolonial areas. For over a century, anthropologists and others have studied Lumad, Cordilleran, Moro, and other 'non-Christian' areas as spaces free of meaningful colonial interference. The archival record for Mindanao itself is so sparse compared to more centralised regions of the archipelago that when historians of the Americas have delved into the Spanish colonisation of the Philippines they have routinely concluded that Mindanao was neither Christianised nor incorporated sufficiently into the colonial political and economic system to warrant scholarly attention (Phelan 1959; Newson 2009). The problem for anthropology, however, is that a more holistic examination of ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data shows that these pericolonial spaces have, in fact, been configured extensively by both colonialism and Catholicism (Paredes 2013; Acabado 2017). It is ironic that by de-historicising and de-Catholicising the spaces occupied by indigenous minorities anthropological research has instead been reproducing and reinforcing the Catholic panoptic.

Fourth, the hegemonic Catholic narrative is itself structured by the politics of missiology, in that the specific missionary view of the world that we receive depends upon which Religious order has managed to dominate historiography. Given the already disproportionate power of the Religious optic in this context, it means that our understanding of both the cultural and political past and the present is further skewed by the discursive impact of specific orders. As I have noted elsewhere (Paredes 2013), the mission history of the Philippines was characterised by rivalries not only between the Religious and Crown authorities, but also amongst the Religious orders that operated in Filipinas. Administrative politics ultimately determined the distribution of missionaries in the colony, resulting in fierce competition even in peripheral, isolated areas like Mindanao. In Lumad areas, the grand rivalry was between the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and the Order of Augustinian Recollects (Recoletos). These seemingly intractable political rivalries characterised not only the Pacific theatre but also the Americas (Greer 2000). Indeed, these rivalries remained a historical constant, echoing across the wider narrative of global Christianisation.

In pericolonial Mindanao, the Recoletos took over after a brief foray by Jesuits in 1596. In the 1610s, the Recoletos, then a pioneering new order, took over the abandoned Jesuit *visita* (outpost) in Butuan. They proceeded to plant an impressive series of Catholic missions and visitas all over northeast Mindanao. Their successful missionising in Mindanao continued through the Jesuit expulsion (1767–1814), when European politics led to Jesuit banishment from the Spanish empire and formal suppression by Pope Clement XIV. Although the Jesuits were restored as a Religious order

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in 1814 by Pope Pius VII they did not return to their Philippine missions until 1859, only a few decades before the end of Spanish colonial rule. In Mindanao, the Jesuits returned in the late 19th century to reclaim their former missions, displacing the Recoletos and, ultimately, displacing all non-Jesuits from the dominant historical narrative.

Unlike Recoletos, the Jesuits routinely documented and publicised their own work, always actively promoting themselves as an order (Paredes 2013: 40).[6] Despite the long-term success of Recoleto missions throughout Mindanao, and the historically belated reappearance of the Jesuits, it is somehow the latter's accounts that dominate our current understanding of the missionisation and colonial history of Mindanao. Thus the historiography of Mindanao has for the past century been delimited by Jesuit voices pushing the notion that the pericolonial south was altogether untouched by Christianity until the Jesuits returned in the late 1800s.

For example, the 'study of the exploration and evangelization of Mindanao' by Bernad (2004), a Jesuit, relates only the activities of his Jesuit predecessors, implying that nothing of substance took place on the island for most of the colonial period. With the discursive dominance of the Jesuits, noted Americanists such as Phelan and Newson can deem Mindanao unworthy of study in terms of colonialism or Christianisation, and leading, respected Philippine historians can summarise the entire Spanish period there as: 'Jesuit missionaries began converting the people in northern Mindanao' (Jose 2004: 891). Even sincere attempts to delve into the colonial experience of Mindanao, such as the history of Bukidnon by Edgerton (2008), always begin in the late 19th century. This is how studies of Mindanao have managed routinely to omit, in its entirety, three centuries of Recoleto missionary labour and, along with it, the possibility of acknowledging the colonial experience of Lumads, including their significant contact with Catholic missions. This, in turn, informs how anthropologists approach the study of indigenous ethnic minorities in the Philippines, limiting our understanding of the true impact of Catholicism on the nation's cultural peripheries.

The political and cultural road that the Philippines has travelled since decolonisation has continued along the same itinerary plotted by the Iberian Catholic orders as part of the grander colonial project of Filipinas. In writing about the transformation of colonial states into 'ethnographic' states, Nicholas Dirks points out that, as part of an imperative to 'know' its subjects, the state archive 'produces, adjudicates, organizes, and maintains the discourses that become available as the primary texts of history' (2002: 59). The colonial archive of Religious orders like the Jesuits and Recoletos, just like the state archive of any former colonial power, 'bears the traces of [their] anxious regimes of classificatory knowledge-production in all cases,' with 'the authorizing voice of its documents often betray[ing] anxieties of rule' (Tagliacozzo & Willford 2009: 2–3). This is reflected strongly in the state archival regime of Spain, along with the archives of the Iberian orders that, in effect, reproduce the same Catholic/Religious frame across time.

At the heart of modern Philippine nationalism is a particular understanding of the colonial experience, with Christian conversion underlying its key aspects. Specifically,

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that the Filipino people were transformed by both colonisation and Christianisation, mainly through extensive suffering described popularly as 'Christ-like' (Ileto 1979), becoming a people by fighting against foreign persecution through a bloody revolution. For a majority of Filipinos today, this journey through Christianisation, articulated as sacrifice and suffering, is the embodiment of who they are. It is also the trope through which present-day economic and political struggles are enunciated, such as the 'People Power' revolt of 1986 (Bräunlein 2014: 90–91), and the emotional sacrifices of wage labour migration (Bautista 2015). As Aguilar (1998) and others have shown, this particular narrative of Catholicism is embedded profoundly in Filipino identity, and their very notion of the past follows the missionisation of the archipelago, with the unconverted uplands as negative spaces. Thus the correlation between peripheral spaces and those perceived to be un-Christianised and un-colonised is inescapable. Nowhere are the boundaries drawn by Catholicism more evident than in spatial terms.

ORDERING THE PERIPHERY

The colonial period reordered Philippine space according to post-Reconquista Catholic referents, which has had profound consequences for how various indigenous identities were formulated, and how they continue to evolve. Today, all indigenous 'uplanders' of the Philippines are still identified as categorical non-Christians by scholars and non-scholars alike, with any hint of attendant Christianisation explained as either recent temporally or as flimsy mimicry of lowland Filipino culture. Indigenous minorities are located consistently in direct spatial, cultural, and cosmic opposition to Christian 'lowlanders'. Regardless of the many critical nuances that complicate any upland-lowland distinctions we might make for the early colonial period, this facile topographical equation remains the hermeneutic for distinguishing the Christians from the non-Christians, and consequently, the Filipino from not-so-Filipino.

In Mindanao, the Lumads, like all other indigenous minorities of the Philippines, have been relegated mostly to the island's mountainous interior spaces that are difficult to access. Thus have Lumads become peripheral not only culturally and religiously, as explained above, but also spatially. Over time, their association with isolated hinterland spaces and the higher elevation of mountainous spaces has become both explicit and concrete. The Lumads now claim these spaces as their 'ancestral lands', and have taken to mapping their own notably triumphalist assertions of indigeneity and cultural exclusion onto the spatial plane. Despite the primarily coastal, lowland origins of their ancestors, acknowledged in many oral traditions, Lumads have embraced their identity as uplanders and now celebrate their own peripherality relative to mainstream Filipinos as a marker of both moral superiority and cultural purity (Paredes 2016).

The indigenous minorities have long been stereotyped as not merely primitive but specifically as modern survivals of an imagined pre-colonial Philippine culture. Even as Lumads fight stereotypes of primitivity, they have also seized on the same

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stereotypes to assert a moral contrast between the 'indigeneity' of their cultural practices and the 'modernity' of a mainstream Filipino culture that is corrupt and destructive due to extensive foreign influences (Paredes 2015). This contrast is more strategic than anthropologically or historically accurate, given that Lumads themselves are products of the colonial period. Beyond the fact that colonial realities—mediated by Christianity—gave rise to a general pattern of minoritisation specific to the Philippine archipelago, extensive contact with Iberian Catholic missionaries also transformed Lumad cultural practices and identities over the centuries. As I argue elsewhere (Paredes 2013), many of the identities and traditions we can observe and study as anthropologists today are hardly pre-colonial at all, and instead came about as a result of specific colonial experiences.

My ongoing research on governance among the Higaunon Lumad provides several examples of this. According to oral traditions, their concepts of political authority, specifically the role of the *datu* as indigenous leader, came about after the ancestor Tawagá returned from a magical journey to meet the 'King of Manila' (the Spanish Governor-General of Filipinas). While in Manila, Tawagá absorbed its customs and laws (*batasan*), which he then carried back to his people, along with symbols that were in turn adopted by the Higaunons. Foremost amongst these symbols is the *bagobal ha bulawan* (golden cane), referencing the 'cane of office' given by the Spanish colonial government to natives who had served the Crown in some capacity (Paredes 2013: 151–165). Despite the cane's foreign origins, it is widely regarded as symbolising the most authentic core of Higaunon culture and ethnic identity. Present-day Higaunon customary law itself appears to have been formalised during the colonial period, as indicated by oral traditions that reference Spaniards, including a man known as 'Mindusa [Mendoza] Malahilà' with whom the ancestor Lagawlaw made a treaty in the late 18th century, reckoning from *pigtuadan* (genealogies). Known today as the *Bungkatol ha bulawan daw nangka tasa ha lana*, a term that defies literal translation to English (see Paredes 2016), this body of customary laws emerged in response to political schisms amongst the Lumads that were fuelling internecine warfare in northern Mindanao. The *Bungkatol* originated as a 'spiritual law' proposed by the ancestor Pabuluson, who lived around the early 18th century, again reckoning from *pigtuadan*. Pabuluson led some Higaunons away from their original lowland settlements, towards the interior areas recognised today as ancestral Higaunon territory (Paredes 2013: 122–123). It is precisely during this early period that the Recoletos were establishing their missions all over northern Mindanao, and their long-term presence was likely a political catalyst for these events.

The *Bungkatol* itself includes many supernatural elements and seems to be as much a religion as a legal system when analysed according to Western norms. Higaunon leaders today—all Christians, coincidentally—worry that their people are losing touch with the values of the *Bungkatol*, thanks to their embrace of mainstream Filipino culture. In their view losing or contravening the *Bungkatol* signifies the abandonment of what it means to be a 'real' Higaunon. However, most of the *datu* I have interviewed also claim that Christianity and the *Bungkatol* are entirely compatible because they

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both emphasise mutual respect and cooperation. In fact, three of my *datu* interviewees, preachers for an upland Pentecostal church, declared that Christianity and the *Bungkatol* are the very same law, merely conveyed at different times to different populations. With these encompassing intimacies asserted between Christianity and indigenous tradition, it is remarkable the Higaunon Lumad—as uplanders—continue to be conceptualised and labelled as 'non-Christian', and their conversions to evangelical Christianity framed as a 'rupture' with the past.

Yet the essentialisation of lowlanders as Christianised and of uplanders as un-Christianised is hardly surprising when we understand that hinterlands were generally recognised from very early on in the colonial period as zones of 'refuge' and 'refusal' (Scott 2009) for all sorts of people. In Filipinas, colonial subjects based in the coastal zones are known to have sought refuge from slave-raiding and piracy by Moros. In both coastal and interior areas, people fled revenge-raiding by rival communities. As for refusal, we know that *encomienda* taxation, *corvèe* labour, and criminal prosecution spurred the routine avoidance of colonial and state authority, rather than a refusal of 'civilisation' and Christianity. In fact, even Christian converts and other missionised people already settled in the lowlands were known to have fled to the uplands with regularity in order to avoid paying taxes or to escape punishment for a crime. What is relevant here is that, during the colonial period, running to the hills was a common defensive tactic all over Filipinas, as it was regionally across Southeast Asia. Locating oneself in the hinterlands did not necessarily mean one was 'resisting' Christianity, modernity, or 'the foreign'. However, this particular understanding is possible only if we acknowledge the full hegemonic impact of the Catholic thought-world on the whole Philippines, and not just on its lowland Catholics.

In this new century, the Philippine uplands—as default hinterland—remain a zone of refuge and refusal for people wanted by the law, including armed rebels of every stripe, from the communist New People's Army to the various Muslim breakaway rebel groups. Even today in Mindanao, due to poor roads, lack of services, and sheer distance, such areas remain difficult to access and a struggle to live in, despite the fact that the uplands have been targeted over many decades for extractive enterprises by corporate interests, and for migration by landless Christian settlers. These intrusions onto Lumad ancestral lands, combined with the out-migration of many Lumads to urban areas in search of economic and educational opportunities, have since transformed the demography of the uplands and intensified competition between Christians and non-Christians, as previously distinct cultural spheres have been forced to co-exist, cheek by jowl. Nevertheless, the Mindanao 'uplands' remain identified strongly, even exclusively, with the Lumads, and as such they remain characterised as distinctly non-Christian spaces, despite the fact that the majority of Lumads are Christians, and that indigenous Christian churches have even been established by Lumads.

Elsewhere, the Moros have been slowly boxed in in western Mindanao, and ghettoised in the 'Muslim' quarters of Metro Manila and other major urban areas. Even the triumph of having secured a designated 'Moro autonomous region'—in the form of the current Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and the future Bangsamoro

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sub-state being proposed—implies not so much the defence of a homeland as much as the Philippine state's political need to contain Moros within an ever-diminishing space. Colonial referents that once floated non-Catholic 'others' on the fuzzy periphery of a cultural-religious-civilisational plane now emplace them culturally, historically, and politically on a tangible spatial plane, in ossifying ecological niches that reinforce the exclusion of indigenous minorities from authentic Filipino-ness.

NON-CHRISTIAN OTHERNESS IN AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CATHOLICISM

Within the context of the Philippines, the place of Lumads, Moros, and other indigenous minorities—both socially and spatially—revolves primarily around their putative non-Christianity. Specifically, these cultural boundaries serve to identify and categorise other communities that had not been integrated fully into the mainstream Catholic population by the end of the Spanish colonial period. To this day, their cultural distinctiveness is explained away as a natural artefact of their successful 'resistance' against colonialism, and the consequent 'defence' and 'preservation' of their 'precolonial' cultures. Filipinos still learn this in school. But since the American colonial period, the tenuous distinction between those who assimilated into the Catholic thought-world and those who fled and 'resisted' has become so thoroughly essentialised and ethnicised according to 'place' that elevation—the current upland/lowland dichotomy—has since come to mark spatially and socially the boundary between those who evolved into 'proper' Filipinos and those who did not.

In the American period (1898–1946), this distinction was formalised early on as the Lumads and other upland minorities fell under the administration of a separate colonial agency that would eventually be called the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. The Moros, meanwhile, fell under direct military rule as part of the administration of 'Moro Province' (Hawkins 2013). In contrast, 'Christianised' Filipinos, perceived as passably 'modern', were administered under the main colonial bureaucracy. Over the decades, this dividing line that privileges the 'Christian' lowland Filipino as the norm has only been reinforced further, becoming definitive with the advent of 'wave migration' theory.[7] A theory advanced by American amateur ethnologist H. Otley Beyer and others, 'wave migration' put forward an explicitly racialised biological framework to historicise and normalise the most visible cultural differences amongst 20th century Filipinos (Beyer 1948; Aguilar 2005). Even though this ersatz racial model of migration was formalised during the American colonial period, various iterations had already been circulating for some time. Its inherent racism had never been contested in the Philippines because, even in the late 19th century, the Catholic natives did not identify at all with the non-Catholic indigenous minorities. Europe-educated elites, including Philippine national hero José Rizal, famously expressed horror upon discovering Spain had chosen Negritos, Igorots, and other 'uncivilised' or 'savage' tribal people (all non-Catholics) to represent 'Filipinas' at the 1887 Philippine Exposition in Madrid, rather than showcasing the Westernised artistic and literary talents of the 'modern' Catholic lowlanders (Sánchez-Gomez 2003; Aguilar 2005).

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While the 'wave migration' framework has long been discredited by reputable social scientists, it has never been dismantled systematically from the Philippine education system. As such, 'wave migration' thinking remains a basic element of the social studies curriculum in Philippine primary schools. Christians, Moros, and the tribal 'others', are instinctively regarded by most Filipinos as belonging not only to distinct races, but to a specific colonial-era hierarchy of races in which non-Christian others are defined as less evolved and less attractive compared to 'normal' (read: Christian) Filipinos. In turn, each 'race' is designated its own 'natural' ecological and evolutionary niche. Wave migration theory was an attempt to 'historicise' post-missionary cultural distinctions in the absence of history, in order to fill in the negative spaces on the map that had already been drawn centuries earlier by the Religious orders. It is easy to recognise wave migration today as outrageous on its face, yet a century ago, it was perfectly in line with mainstream anthropological ideas about cultural evolution and diffusion, with a heavy dose of social Darwinism. Though never formally trained as an anthropologist, Beyer himself would eventually establish the first university department of anthropology in the Philippines, and lay the groundwork for an anthropology that has valiantly sought to explain and analyse the anomalous persistence of non-Catholic otherness in a Catholic majority nation. However, the core idea that the upland minorities evolved and belong in their own spatial niches has rarely, if ever, been in question.

The colonial antecedents for discourses of categorisation in the present-day Philippines—Christian/Moro/Other—are interdependent discourses of minorityhood and majorityhood, both of which are important to recognise in order to appreciate the true extent of Catholic privilege at every level of society. Catholic privilege is a controlling feature of Philippine society not only in terms of inter-ethnic relations but also intra-ethnic in that, amongst lowland Christian majorities, piety and intimacy vis-à-vis the Catholic Church present their own power. Some kind of involvement in Church affairs—whether in catechism or fundraising and promotion for events, volunteer work, Mass attendance and participation, or having a son or daughter as an altar boy or girl, or better yet, a nun or priest—is one important way of accumulating cultural and social capital that could potentially serve one well in myriad ways, and may even translate to economic and political advantages. In the same way that a person's monetary assets influence their economic standing or class status, their spiritual assets (essentially, their public standing relative to the Church) determine their social, cultural, and political 'place' in broader Philippine society. That said, the active exclusion of non-Catholics from this spiritual economy—whether done consciously or unconsciously—ripples across the archipelago's periphery, widening the gap between Catholics and 'others' whose cultural citizenship as Filipinos is subtly delegitimised. Like the enduring social consequences of slavery in the heavily racialised Americas that privilege whiteness, the social differences that were produced by Catholic missionary orders in the early colonial era became anchored in a specific political economy, one that privileged, and continues to privilege, the Catholic.

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More than a century after the end of the Spanish colonial period, these *fraile* interventions continue to both Catholicise the Philippine state and catholicise Filipinoness, as well as to configure spaces such as Mindanao and the uplands into peripheries, both culturally and geographically. The negative spaces created by colonial-era maps and by silences in the archives continue to inform how Filipinos and scholars of the Philippines imagine the past and engage its earliest ethnographies. Consequently, the ethnicised distinctions produced by the colonial experience continue to be reproduced and reinforced by spatial realities that have become so naturalised as to mask their imperial etymology. In this manner, the Religious thought-world that was transported bodily across the Pacific continues to project a distinctly Catholic ordering upon this corner of Southeast Asia.

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NOTES

1 See the volume on new evangelical Christian movements, edited by Filomeno Aguilar, in *Philippine Studies* 54(4),2006.
2 For example, Garma Navarro's (1998) study of indigenous peoples in Mexico who identify meaningful parallels between traditional curing rituals and the ecstatic practices of Pentecostalism.
3 Conversion to alternate religions is a common occurrence among politically minoritised communities, involving the 'rewriting of religious and cultural change into a form of political intervention' (Viswanathan 1998: 212), as in the Dalit conversion to Buddhism in 1956 to escape their caste (Viswanathan 1996), and Forest Tobelo conversion in Halmahera (Duncan 2003)
4 Modood (1997) explores how medieval Christian antagonism towards Islam continues to manifest itself in modern Europe.
5 Non-Religious primary sources are sparse to non-existent for pericolonial areas. Though indigenous oral traditions are rich in some areas, their historicity is uncertain. Because they are underutilised in Philippine historiography, their hermeneutic significance remains unknown. However, ethnohistorical research shows that upland cultures in both Mindanao and northern Luzon were impacted considerably by Spanish colonial contact (Keesing 1962, Paredes 2013, Acabado 2017).
6 Jesuit accounts for Spanish-era Mindanao include Alcina (1668), Colín (1663), Combés (1667), Dela Costa (2002), Bernad (2004).
7 In the basic wave migration model, the archipelago was populated by three distinct races arriving in 'waves' several thousand years apart, with later arrivals displacing earlier ones through racial, cultural, and technological superiority.

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