

## SOJOURN *Symposium*

***On Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-Century Philippines* by Lisandro E. Claudio. Singapore and Loyola Heights, Quezon City: NUS Press and Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017.**

Review essays by Walden F. Bello and Tomas Larsson, with a response from Lisandro E. Claudio.

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### Review Essay I: Walden F. Bello

Lisandro Claudio’s most recent work, *Liberalism and the Post-Colony*, is a welcome take, from one of the country’s leading young historians, on a subject that is none too popular among some sectors of the Filipino intelligentsia: the liberal tradition in the Philippines. In an intellectual atmosphere that has been greatly influenced by what Claudio calls the “Diliman Consensus”, such an enterprise is bound to be controversial, for that school, he claims, has consigned Philippine liberalism to the intellectual, political and ethical wilderness.<sup>1</sup>

#### Challenging the “Diliman” Consensus

Indeed, to many in the intelligentsia, Philippine liberalism carries the stain of having been formed under the influence of the United States during the nearly half a century that the country was an

American colony. The politics of that period has been seen as a shameful parenthesis between the glorious revolution of 1896 and the nationalist revival and struggle against dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. The “sin” of the liberals of the colonial era and immediate post–Second World War period was to be seduced by the political vision introduced by the colonizers, even as the latter made the local economy into an appendage of the U.S. economy and a springboard for the projection of military power.

Claudio seeks to bring Philippine liberalism in from the cold, characterizing its being dismissed as a “colonial mentality” as a product of binary, black-and-white thinking that conceals the constructive role that it has played in the formation of Philippine political culture. He adopts a historico-biographical methodology, focusing on four individuals whom he considers paradigmatic liberals — Camilo Osias (1889–1976), Salvador Araneta (1902–82), Carlos P. Romulo (1898–1985) and Salvador P. Lopez (1911–93) — and on their interaction with the national and international trends of the times in which they lived.

Claudio treats his subjects with sympathy and assesses them with nuance. He draws from a wealth of sources, including the testimonies of contemporaries. He contends that, far from being cat’s paws of the West, the four men were not only nationalists but also in fact liberal internationalists who did not hesitate to identify with American and Western values and saw no contradiction between their internationalist orientation and their nationalism. Claudio’s command of his sources is impeccable, but his is not, as he acknowledges in the conclusion, a detached approach. It is partisan, one that seeks to rescue what he considers a much-maligned but valuable intellectual and political tradition.

Claudio offers careful, measured portraits of these individuals, especially Romulo and Lopez, as people trying to hold fast to the liberal values of human rights and democracy in a twentieth century world threatened by the extremes of communist insurgency on the one hand and right-wing authoritarianism on the other. They are, in his view, non-utopian, cautious and averse to short cuts and to

radicalism. Claudio does not hesitate to point to these men's flaws, especially their lapses into hypocrisy in the face of power, but he sees them as role models. Their contradictions are, in fact, part of their attraction for him. They were, in his view, the Filipino counterparts of Arthur Koestler, George Orwell and, in the case of Salvador Araneta, John Maynard Keynes, though, of course, he does not claim for them the intellectual depth of those towering figures.

### The Elephant in the Room

I admire Claudio's *perspective engagée*. It is from a similar standpoint that I shall engage this good friend and respected colleague. What I find problematic is that his careful portraits are presented without adequate attention to "background", especially to the elephant in the room — a presence that is assumed, referred to, but never systematically analysed. This presence is the U.S. colonial system under which his subjects grew up during the first half of the twentieth century. Without this context, one finds it difficult to assess the fairness of the Diliman Consensus's dismissal of liberals like Osias and Romulo or the soundness of Claudio's effort to bring them in from the cold. Let me attempt to provide this much needed context here.

Imperial systems cohere not only through force but also because those over whom they rule perceive them as legitimate. The U.S. imperial project has had a particularly vexing problem in establishing its legitimacy. After all, the country was born through an anti-colonial insurgency directed against the British Empire. Americans have long seen themselves as representatives of a new society, a democratic republic, leading the fight against authoritarian political systems of which empire constitutes a subspecies. Thus traditional colonialism was out of the question for the United States.

For Americans, it is important that the imperial process be made to seem consistent with democratic values. It is in this sense that the United States is an "imperial democracy" (May 1961). The imperial enterprise long enjoyed a measure of domestic approval because it

purported to extend the political blessings of the homeland to the unfortunate and oppressed around the world. Winning consent from those outside the boundaries of the United States was, of course, more problematic. The same ideology that went down well at home ran up against the realities of foreign domination. The big question for the American imperial elite, then, was, "How do we sustain a belief in the common interest and values of the oppressor and the oppressed?" The ideological dimension of imperialism was thus a much more critical dimension of the American project than of that of other empires. And this is why the Philippine experience was so central to the American imperial enterprise.

### Ideology and Empire

The United States annexed the Philippines after the bitter and bloody suppression of Asia's first modern war of national liberation, a war that cost the lives of over 200,000 Filipinos and more than 4,000 American troops. Faced with the need for legitimation for its imperial rule over a restive population, Washington eventually evolved a solution that was classically liberal and American. It would prepare the Filipinos for "responsible independence" by exporting the institutions of American democracy. That formula legitimated forty-six years of colonial rule and set the basis for the postcolonial relationship between the two countries.

The wholesale transplantation of formal political institutions began shortly after the conquest. American colonial authorities and missionaries served as instructors, and an indigenous Filipino upper class constituted a dutiful student body. By the time of independence, in 1946, the Philippine political system was a mirror image of the American one. It featured a presidency balanced by an independent Congress and judiciary and a two-party system.

On the ground, however, Philippine democracy married the feudal paternalism of the Filipino elite to "Chicago-style" machine politics. Wealthy landowners, those whom the United States detached from the national liberation struggle and formed into a ruling class,

enthusiastically embraced electoral politics. But it was not simply or mainly a belief in representative government that turned this elite into eager students. The upper class realized that the genius of the American political system lay in the way that it harnessed elections to socially conservative ends. Because running for high office in both countries cost a fortune, only the wealthy or those backed by wealth could think about doing so. In the American system, elections made voters active participants in legitimizing the social and economic status quo.

Still, organic intellectuals, to use Gramsci's term, were needed to articulate for the subject population the vision of American liberalism that accompanied empire, and this was the role that was filled by elite intellectuals like T.H. Pardo de Tavera in the early colonial era and later by the U.S.-educated *pensionados* — students sent to the United States on colonial government scholarships — of middle or lower-middle class origins like Camilo Osias. In decrying what it labelled a “colonial mentality”, the Diliman Consensus was underlining the importance of the ideological dimension of the American imperial mission. It largely conceived of this dimension, however, in conspiratorial or instrumentalist terms. Indeed, I think that what the Diliman Consensus is to be primarily faulted for is not its lopsided, binary judgment of colonial-era public intellectuals like Osias. Rather, we ought to fault it for its theoretical failure fully to grasp liberalism and liberal democracy as central structural features of the American imperial project, without which the economic and strategic dimensions of the enterprise would have lain on unstable grounds.

The Diliman Consensus perhaps treated Osias and his generation of pedagogues and intellectuals with undue harshness and with little attention to nuance. But the more fundamental point that adherents to that consensus were trying to make was that these pedagogues had allowed themselves to be seduced and disarmed by the attractive liberal democratic and internationalist vision of imperial ideology while ignoring or underestimating the dark realities at work on the ground. They overlooked, that is, the fashioning of the economy

as an appendage of the American economy and the conversion of the country into a strategic platform for the projection of American power on to the Asian land mass.

### The Philippine Paradigm and the Cold War

During the Cold War, the Philippines provided a model for America's approach to what came to be known as the Third World. The historic contradiction between Washington's disdain for formal colonies and its desire for control was now reproduced on a regional and global scale. The United States, Neil Sheehan points out, "did not seek colonies as such".

Having overt colonies was not acceptable to the American political conscience. Americans were convinced that their imperial system did not victimize foreign peoples.... It was thought to be neither exploitative, like the nineteenth-century-style colonialism of the European empires, nor destructive of personal freedom and other worthy human values, like the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and China and their Communist allies. Instead of formal colonies, the United States sought local governments amenable to American wishes and, where possible, subject to indirect control from behind the scenes. Washington wanted native regimes that would act as surrogates for American power. The goal was to achieve the sway over allies and dependencies which every imperial nation needs to work its will in world affairs without the structure of old-fashioned colonialism. (Sheehan 1988, p. 131)

As in the case of the Philippines, liberal democracy controlled by local elites tied to the United States provided both the mechanism of influence and the justification for intervention in the affairs of Third World countries. As Frances Fitzgerald pointed out,

The idea that the mission of the United States was to build democracy around the world had become a convention of American politics in the 1950's. Among certain circles it was more or less assumed that democracy, that is, electoral democracy combined with private ownership and civil liberties, was what the United States had to offer the Third World. Democracy

provided not only the basis for opposition to Communism but the practical method to make sure that opposition worked. (Fitzgerald 1973, pp. 115–16)

The U.S. project was promoted not simply via force but through ideological struggle with communism and radical nationalism and through support for efforts at democratic nation-building. It needed convinced liberal allies on contested terrains, and who could be more convinced than Carlos P. Romulo, who had distinguished himself as a promoter of what one might term “American Exceptionalism” in the era of empire-building? As he put it in his wartime book *Mother America*,

The Filipino fought with the white man’s America because he believed in that America. He was not alone in that trust. It is universally shared by his fellow Orientals. All over the Far East, wherever I traveled before the outbreak of war, I heard this expressed in many tongues. The Oriental’s suspicion toward the white race does not include America. He has seen in the Philippines the American principle of fair play expressed for the first time in the Oriental [*sic*].

Everywhere else in the Far East he became familiar with exploitation and pillage, the bleeding of his country’s riches, and the reduction of his living condition to an animal status by white men operating under a protective imperialism.

How differently America proceeded in the Philippines!

And the Oriental, as I know him, realizes this and has a pathetic desire to set his case before America.

Only America can re-establish contact between the white and colored races in the Far East. Only America can rebuild a trust broken under centuries of imperialism.

America can do this. She is the only white man’s country that can.

She did it before, in the Philippines. (Romulo 1943, pp. 5–6)

After the war, Romulo indefatigably pushed the Western agenda at the United Nations, where he served as president of the General Assembly in 1949 and 1950, and, as Claudio points out, he crossed swords not only with Zhou Enlai at the historic Bandung Conference in 1955 but also with the neutralist Jawaharlal Nehru. National

liberation movements — some of which were led by Communist parties, some by less radical parties, but all of them nationalist — were on the rise at the height of Romulo's diplomatic career in the 1950s. He served as a loyal accomplice in the U.S.-led campaign to discredit them while promoting more conservative U.S.-aligned forces, though he appeared to have a soft spot for Hồ Chí Minh — if the account of his meeting with the latter in a Paris bistro is to be believed and was not fabricated, as Claudio suggests.

Not without cause did Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. ambassador to the Philippines at the time, eulogize Romulo at his death as “a close colleague of the United States for all of his adult life” (quoted in Pace 1985). It is true, as Claudio points out, that Romulo had his differences with the Americans. One of these differences concerned the veto power of the leading Western governments at the United Nations. But they were, in the overall scheme of things, rather minor. For the most part, in the great political debates of the time, he was a faithful supporter of the U.S. position and did not hesitate to proclaim his gratitude to Washington.

Though the term colonial mentality was probably unnecessarily provocative, the Diliman Consensus's assessment of Romulo and his generation of intellectuals was, on the whole, a very welcome corrective to a political perspective of Filipinos who had been seduced by the promise of American liberalism but were, for the most part, complicit, tolerant or at the very least naïve when it came to its accompanying imperial impulse.

### Liberalism's Confrontation with Dictatorship

S.P. Lopez, a man who, as president of the University of the Philippines, was caught between the libertarian demands of radicalized students and the drive of the regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos to keep them in line, emerges as the figure to whom Claudio is most sympathetic. To Claudio, Lopez's dilemma was how to protect the students, which would mean displeasing Marcos, while remaining a voice in national politics as university president, which entailed dancing with the dictator. In Claudio's view, the failure to forge a



compromise acceptable to both sides was Lopez's undoing, but this was a noble failure on the part of a tormented liberal.

Claudio's focus on Lopez, however, leads him to fail to notice or pay adequate attention to a momentous transformation in Philippine liberalism during the Marcos period: its cutting of its umbilical cord to its American patron. Upholding human rights, due process and democracy became the battle cry of a band of leaders who sought to remain faithful to the principles of the American liberal vision. However, it brought them into conflict with the American state, whose foreign policy, largely under Republican presidents, evolved towards support for dictators like Marcos. This evolution culminated in the infamous "Kirkpatrick Doctrine" during the Reagan era, when the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick provided a sophisticated justification for a policy shift that had, in practice, begun much earlier, with Richard Nixon. Since safeguarding American strategic interests motivated the United States to support dictatorship, Philippine liberalism took on an increasingly nationalist cast, with dyed-in-the-wool liberals Jose Diokno (1922–87), Lorenzo Tanada (1898–1992) and Jovito Salonga (1920–2016) taking the lead in forging this marriage between liberalism and nationalism. Their nationalism was no longer the Filipinism of Osias or the anti-communist anti-colonialism of Romulo, to each of which liberalism had been previously hitched. It was, rather, a nationalism that had previously been associated with the lone elite figure of Claro M. Recto (1890–1960) and with the left, with its emphasis on gaining economic sovereignty and securing the withdrawal of the U.S. bases from the country. This high point of the new liberal nationalism was the Philippine Senate's vote against the new bases treaty with the United States in 1991, which led to the dismantling of Subic, Clark and other American bases in the country.

### Liberal Recovery and Relapse

Even as people in the old liberal mould like Romulo and Lopez compromised with the Marcos regime, the leading role of the liberal nationalists armed with a renovated liberal ideology in the struggle

against that regime gave liberal democracy a new lease on life. The constitution of the new liberal democratic republic that arose on the ashes of the Marcos regime was a liberal constitution par excellence, with human rights, democracy and due process constituting its core, but with a strong nationalist orientation evinced in its economic provisions and its ban on foreign bases. As politics settled down to normal, however, the new liberal regime showed once again that the liberal state was vulnerable to elite capture. Marcos had exploited this same weakness to justify his grab for absolute power in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite the promises of political, social and economic reform enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, liberal democracy once more fell into the trap of serving mainly as a mechanism for elites to contend for power through elections while preventing substantive social and economic reform that would benefit those below.

There are limits to how often the masses can be dragged through the process of electoral legitimation without protest. By the time of the elections of 2016, a yawning gap had opened between the democratic republic's promise of popular empowerment and the redistribution of wealth on the one hand and the reality of massive poverty, scandalous inequality and pervasive corruption on the other. Add to this brew the widespread perception of inept governance during the 2010–16 administration of President Benigno Aquino III, and it is not surprising that a good part of the electorate saw Rodrigo Duterte's tough-guy, authoritarian approach — cultivated when he was mayor of the southern frontier city of Davao for nearly twenty-five years — as precisely what was needed. To borrow the novelist Anthony Doerr's description of the state of mind of pre-war Germans, Filipinos had “become desperate for someone who can put things right” (Doerr 2014, p. 63).

Moreover, the republic's discourse of democracy, human rights and the rule of law had become a suffocating straitjacket for a majority of Filipinos, whom the overpowering reality of their powerlessness simply left unable to relate to it. Duterte's discourse — a mixture of outright death threats, coarse street-corner language, misogynistic

outbursts and frenzied railing coupled with disdainful humour directed at the elite — was a potent formula. It proved exhilarating to his audience, whose members felt themselves liberated from what they experienced as the stifling political correctness and hypocrisy of the hegemonic democratic human rights discourse. For the second time in forty-six years, then, liberal democracy in the Philippines faces an existential threat, but it is one with which Claudio's preferred brand of liberalism is ill equipped to deal with.

### Liberalism, Compromise and Principle

In his conclusion, Claudio lays out what he considers the distinguishing marks of genuine liberals. Liberals, he says, seek “power to limit power”.

Liberals are not self-marginalizing, because they are willing to compromise. This willingness to get their hands dirty lands liberals in the halls of power. Once in positions of influence, however, liberals use power to diffuse it. Liberals are brave enough to test their consciences in the field of political negotiation, knowing that they can return to first principles. This places liberals in stark contrast to Communists who seek great power because they are “principled”. Their earnest Marxist hearts preclude compromises, since “history” demands their ascension to power. But liberals accept that politics occurs after a fall from Eden, where all actors partake of democracy's original sin. For how can one not be hypocritical in a context where one believes in things but is forced to respect contradictory thinking. Liberals know that the game of hypocrisy, is, indeed, dangerous, and not everyone is able to conquer it. Carlos Romulo became addicted to bureaucratic power, failing to see that liberal deliberation was no longer possible in a dictatorship. S.P. knew better, treading a very fine line between mediation and criticism. Though their responses to dictatorship were different, both were liberals in that they engaged in a to and fro dance with power. (p. 153)

I find this passage eloquent but hard to agree with. Communists are not the only political actors who draw firm lines based on principle, who feel that there are red lines beyond which one cannot go without

inviting irreparable damage to one's integrity and community. There have been liberals who have acted in a similar fashion. Benigno Aquino Jr (1932–83) and Jose Diokno flat-out refused to compromise, refused to dance with power or indeed to engage the dictator in negotiations unless Marcos promised to reinstate liberal freedoms. Who can now deny that their example eventually proved the key to bringing down the dictatorship? Unlike Lopez and Romulo, liberals like Aquino and Diokno felt a responsibility to themselves and to the nation to take principled stands, and this — and not the influence of the Diliman Consensus — is the principal reason that they are remembered while the former are forgotten. Indeed, my question for Claudio is why he has decided to highlight Romulo and Lopez when there are better exemplars of the liberal tradition in the persons of Aquino, Diokno, Tanada and Salonga.

#### Liberalism, Violence, and Revolution

In another passage from his book's conclusion, Claudio writes,

*Postcolonial liberalism is a gradualist philosophy that does not preclude change. It is not the liberal's business to assess when, if, and how a large, amorphous, and barely definable system like "late capitalism" or "the system" will be destroyed. As far as liberals are concerned, revolutions that have aimed at total change have become total dictatorships. Again, postcolonial liberalism refuses an Edenic return, and insists on a conservative realism. Liberals are not risk-takers when it comes to politics, because the stakes are too high. (p. 153)*

Again, I find this passage eloquent but problematic, for two reasons. First, there have been liberal enterprises — landmark ones — that involved great violence and were as revolutionary as non-liberal ones. As Barrington Moore reminds us, the violence of the English Civil War of the seventeenth century, which culminated in regicide, was central to

the strengthening of Parliament at the expense of the king. The fact that Parliament existed meant there was a flexible institution

which constituted both an arena into which new social elements could be drawn as their demands arose and an institutional mechanism for settling peacefully conflicts of interest among these groups. (Moore 1966, p. 29)

The quintessential liberal revolution, the American Revolution, was also marked by great violence on the part of patriots, with George Washington himself ordering his subordinates to wreak havoc on the Native American allies of the British through “the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more” (quoted in Kamensky 2017). More and more, scholarship is revealing that the difference between the liberal revolutions of Britain and America and the radical revolutions of France, Russia and China is one between widespread, indiscriminate violence and even more widespread, indiscriminate violence.

As for liberalism’s alleged refusal of “an Edenic return”, what could be more Edenic, more utopian and more inspired by a *tabula rasa* mentality than the American Declaration of Independence? That document sought, after all, to create a new political community, one never before seen on earth, whose bond of solidarity was not shared ethnicity or the same blood but common intellectual and ethical adherence to a set of ideas called democracy.

### Negative Liberty and Positive Liberty

My second objection to the passage is that it effectively reduces the liberal enterprise to the pursuit of what Isaiah Berlin (1969) called “negative liberty”, the right of the individual to be free of external constraint against doing as she or he wished. This variant of liberty is in contrast to “positive liberty” — the freedom to develop the individual’s full potential, impossible to exercise without the state or society or a movement stepping in to create the conditions for this potential to flourish. In cautioning against movements seeking

comprehensive social change, Claudio appears to endorse Berlin's position that, on account of the risks of promoting positive freedom, liberals should be concerned only with negative freedom. They should, that is, concentrate on ensuring that no obstructions or obstacles are placed on individual freedom (Fawcett 2014, pp. 324–25).

As is evident throughout the book, Claudio admires the Keynesian and social democratic transformation of capitalist societies. Yet, as Tony Judt points out — whether achieved through an expansive programme of socialist legislation, as in continental Europe, or through adoption of a succession of pragmatic policies, as in the United Kingdom — the social democratic agenda was ambitious and comprehensive (Judt 2015, pp. 323–24). To adopt Berlin's terminology, it involved an expansion of positive freedom for the masses at the expense of the negative freedom of the elites. Indeed, the latter screamed at every turn that their rights were being violated. In this regard, one might point out that rivalry with Communist parties was instrumental in pushing social democrats to be ambitious, to offer comprehensive programmes, to be the risk takers that Claudio says liberals are not or should not be.

### Misdirected Fears

It is evident throughout the *Liberalism and the Postcolony* that a factor important in leading Claudio to his cautious brand of liberalism is the Stalinist proclivities of the Maoist left in the Philippines. This factor may well explain his silence concerning the brand of liberalism represented by Diokno, Tanada and Salonga; these three men did not hesitate to work with the left. Now, I certainly share Claudio's dislike of the Philippine Maoists' totalitarian outlook and closed mindset. But, as in other parts of the world, the Stalinist left in the Philippines has painted itself into irrelevance — something that it tries to hide with its noisy vituperative propaganda and its sectarian efforts to discredit ongoing attempts to reform the broad Philippine left and make it an influential political actor once more.

While understandable, I think that Claudio's fears are misdirected. As I have suggested above, the biggest threat to the Philippines at this point, and to both liberalism and the progressive vision, is the right-wing populism whipped up by President Duterte and his supporters. It is an angry populism that proposes thoroughgoing authoritarianism as the solution to the many problems left unsolved by the country's thirty-two-year-old liberal democratic republic.

Claudio's cautious Berlinian liberalism, focused on protecting negative freedom, cannot compete with this authoritarian upsurge. Only a bold alternative promoting positive freedom, liberal or progressive in provenance, stands a chance of countering the appeal of the angry new authoritarianism. This, I submit, is the need of the hour.

### Review Essay II: Tomas Larsson

Lisandro E. Claudio's *Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-century Philippines* examines "liberalism" as ideology and practice in the Philippines, from the era of American colonialism, through the early independence period, to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. The study's main organizing principle is biographical, and the focus is on the ideas and careers of four intellectuals-cum-bureaucrats who played important roles in the making of the modern state and nation in the Philippines between the 1920s and the early 1970s. Enriched by archival research and interviews, *Liberalism and the Postcolony* makes a stimulating and provocative contribution to our understanding of Asian "liberalism", Southeast Asian political thought and Southeast Asia's place in global intellectual history. Claudio's analysis of Philippine social and intellectual history is important in its own right, but his broader argument should also be relevant to scholars working on other parts of Southeast Asia.

Although this is an historical work, its introduction starts with an observation about the present: "Liberalism is in crisis" (p. 1). This is true both in the Philippines and abroad, as exemplified by the blood-

soaked presidency of Rodrigo Duterte and the intolerant sentiments and populist forces that have gained political ground across the West. Claudio intends for his exploration of liberalism's "forgotten" history in the Philippines to serve not only historiographical purposes but also contemporary political and ideological ones: to reassert and revitalize the liberal political tradition, to "infuse creativity into a tiring political credo" (p. 2).

While authoritarian populism provides a contemporary "hook" for the book, its polemical edge is aimed less at Duterteismo than at "progressive" critics of liberalism, postcolonial theorists in the West prominent among them. Unlike these anti-liberals on university campuses, Claudio does not wish to see "the Global South" in revolt against liberal modernity. He argues that there simply are no desirable alternatives to liberalism. "A civic, deliberative liberalism is necessary in the postcolony, for postcolonies are, like other polities, venues where multiple value claims are debated" (p. 6).

As regards to the study of Philippine history, Claudio's primary foil is what he calls the "Diliman Consensus" — a particular form of nationalist historiography that by the 1970s had achieved the status of academic orthodoxy. Closely associated with historians at the Diliman, Quezon City, campus of the University of the Philippines, this "consensus" has linked Philippine nationalism with the lower classes and defined it in parochial terms. It is grounded in the assumption that authentic nationalism must be opposed to "Western" influences. The effect, according to Claudio, has been to obscure the role of liberalism in the making of Philippine nationalism. The 1898 Philippine revolution, he reminds us, was a liberal one.

One of the first challenges with which any book about "liberalism" must deal is a conceptual one. What is liberalism? Claudio understands it less as an ideology and more as a matter of temperament and as political practice. For Claudio, the archetypical liberal is a pencil-pushing functionary of the state — a bureaucrat — whose "liberalism" consists, mainly, in a high degree of comfort with civil society and the rule of law. The substantive core of the book, then, is an exploration of the lives and ideas of four incarnations



of such bureaucratic liberalism: the educationalist Camilo Osias, the economic planner Salvador Araneta, the diplomat and statesman Carlos P. Romulo, and the diplomat and university president Salvador P. Lopez. The concluding chapter provides what could perhaps best be called a manifesto for “postcolonial liberalism”. And a postscript highlights a “fifth liberal”, the psychology professor and feminist Rita D. Estrada — Claudio’s own grandmother.

In the chapter on Osias, the author of *The Philippine Readers* with which generations of Filipino elementary school children were to become intimately familiar, Claudio demonstrates how the American philosophers and pedagogues William James and John Dewey inspired Osias to articulate an open and cosmopolitan form of nationalism — a “dynamic Filipinism” (p. 28) that was opposed to “chauvinistic” (p. 34) forms of nationalism — and to use the education system and, in particular, school textbooks, to popularize it.

While Osias was successful in leaving an imprint on state practices, not all bureaucratic liberals were. In the chapter on Araneta, we learn about his largely failed efforts to promote New Deal-style policies in a postcolonial setting. Inspired by figures such as John Maynard Keynes, Franklin D. Roosevelt and William Beveridge, Araneta put forward arguments supportive of state planning of the economy, advocating government intervention to boost production, devaluation of the currency to help exporters, and the adoption of full employment policies to help the un- and underemployed. These notions were, however, successfully vetoed by Miguel Cuaderno, governor of the Philippine Central Bank from 1949 to 1960, and a believer in the beneficial effects of “austerity” (pp. 58–59). As a matter of practical politics, the greatest sin of Philippine post-independence liberalism, according to Claudio, was its failure to follow in the footsteps of American liberals and European social and Christian democrats in their embrace of economic planning as a means by which to counter the threat of more radical working-class challenges to the established (capitalist) economic order.

The third bureaucratic liberal that we encounter is the diplomat Carlos P. Romulo. While the previous two bureaucratic liberals’ main

role was to “import” liberal ideas from the West, with Romulo the direction of travel is reversed. Romulo stands out as a more creative intellectual, a man who sought to “export” Philippine liberalism through his articulation and international advocacy of anti-communist forms of Asianism and Third Worldism. Claudio endeavours to rehabilitate Romulo from the prevailing judgement that he was “at best a dilettante opportunist, and at worst an embodiment of reaction” (p. 90). He presents Romulo as a “genuine voice of the Third World” (p. 91). The 1955 Bandung conference is the pivotal moment in the chapter on this figure. Claudio highlights Romulo’s role as one of the leading liberal anti-communists — alongside, among others, Thailand’s Prince Wan Waithayakon — present at the meeting. Of particular note is Romulo’s and other liberals’ successful framing of their anti-colonial and anti-communist position in terms of human rights.

The fourth and final bureaucratic liberal, Lopez, was a protégé of Romulo who came to play a key role as a Third World champion of human rights, not least as chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. However, the chapter pivots around Lopez’s tenure as president of the University of the Philippines. He tried, with some but not ultimate success, during the tenure to mediate between the antagonistic social forces represented by revolutionary Maoist students and Marcos’s martial law enforcers that threatened the integrity and indeed the survival of the university as a liberal space.

These empirically orientated chapters inductively build up to a conception of “postcolonial liberalism” that is explicitly articulated only in the concluding chapter. But it is less a coherent set of closely linked ideas than a set of political attitudes. Claudio’s postcolonial liberalism is therefore perhaps better understood as a personality type than as an ideology. To rephrase his definition of postcolonial liberalism in such terms, Claudio’s postcolonial liberal is comfortable with a civic, as opposed to ethnic, form of nationalism; accepts as unproblematic the Western and Enlightenment origins of liberalism; patiently accepts that good — that is, liberal — governance necessarily entails slow-moving processes of mediation

and deliberation; seeks political power only in order to diffuse power; accepts and is willing to confront the reality of economic inequality; and embraces only moderate, gradualist political ambitions, fearful of the tyrannical consequences that tend to follow in the wake of radically transformative and visionary approaches to social and political change.

*Liberalism and the Postcolony* has a dual purpose: it is both intellectual history and political pamphlet. It is, in my judgement, more successful as a model for the exploration of Southeast Asian political thought and practice than as a call to arms for postcolonial liberals.

Claudio has done the field a great service by highlighting the importance of bureaucrat-intellectuals as both transmitters and generators of liberal political ideas in a Southeast Asian context. A scholarly community excited by revolutionaries and radicals of various, but usually illiberal, stripes has indeed consigned these figures' role in history to the margins. *Liberalism and the Postcolony* could therefore serve as a starting point for a comparative exploration of the liberal, or not, ethos of prominent bureaucrats in postcolonial Southeast Asia. Indeed, the precise nature of the relationship between liberalism and one of its institutional vehicles — the state bureaucracy — warrants further exploration, in the Philippines and beyond. Of particular importance are the questions of how those who identified as embodying “bureaucratic liberalism” have viewed the bureaucracy and the state themselves and how they have understood its relationship to “the people”. Is bureaucratic liberalism merely the personal liberalism of some bureaucrats, thus making their bureaucratic position largely incidental? Or does bureaucratic liberalism rest on a deeper ideological association of the state apparatus with liberal virtues, such as rationality? The latter possibility may help explain why ostensibly “liberal” bureaucrats have been willing to serve otherwise seemingly illiberal and decidedly undemocratic Southeast Asian governments; Romulo's leading role in the Marcos regime offers a striking example.

However, there is also, it appears to me, something of a disconnect between Claudio's exploration of bureaucratic liberalism in the

Philippines and his liberal manifesto. Whereas an academic study of bureaucratic liberalism can justify a narrow focus on political elites within the state, a liberal manifesto is obviously intended to appeal more broadly. *Liberalism and the Postcolony* thus raises the question of the nature of the relationship between the bureaucratic form of liberalism analysed in the book, on the one hand, and other strands of liberalism, actual or potential, on the other. The critical question is whether postcolonial liberalism has a past, and a future, beyond the bureaucracy — in political parties, social movements, religious and other organizations.

I have little doubt that there are many in the Philippines, and other parts of Southeast Asia, that share many if not all of Claudio's liberal sensibilities. Those with an aversion to the word "liberal" might prefer the label "social democratic", which better encapsulates the ideological position that Claudio seeks to define. Because of these sensibilities, these Filipinos and other Southeast Asians are terrified by the recent regional backlash against liberal values in areas such as human rights, press freedom and the rule of law. It is for them rather than for me to judge whether Claudio has succeeded in breathing new life into liberalism as a political doctrine. Whatever the case, Claudio has helpfully reminded us that the charge that human rights are a "Western" creation and imposition rings hollow in light of the prominent role of Southeast Asians in the development of the international human rights regime. Claudio has also usefully emphasized that it is thanks to the work of liberal bureaucrats that "islands" of liberalism can be protected and preserved even when illiberal authoritarians have seized the reins of state power. Whether "liberal bureaucrats" are able to do so in the current moment — in the Philippines and beyond — is an important question for research.

#### Author's Response: Lisandro E. Claudio

Philippine liberalism is an old tradition. One of the first nationalist formations of Filipinos was the *Comite de Reformadores* of the

1870s, which along with its youth wing the Juventud Escolar Liberal styled itself as the country's "first liberal party" (Corpuz 1989, p. 5). From the seed of the *Comite* emerged Jose Rizal's generation of *ilustrados* (enlightened ones) who laid the foundation for the anti-Spanish revolution of 1896.<sup>2</sup> Rizal himself was an unabashed liberal, who imagined an independent nation animated by the French Declaration on the Rights of Man (Schumacher 1997, p. 270). As Leon Ma. Guerrero explains, Rizal was a liberal first, a man who sought "for himself and the Filipinos the legal and constitutional rights of the Spaniards", and "it was only in resignation, in despair, that he became a nationalist" (Guerrero 2013, p. 56).

The Philippine Revolution of 1896 was, as Walden Bello correctly notes, a glorious high water mark for Philippine activism. But because it was birthed within the Rizalian tradition — and not, as previously believed, in millenarian proto-socialism — it was liberal in both form and content. It could not have been otherwise. Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, radical revolutionaries could only look to liberal revolutions in places like France, the United States and Haiti for inspiration. The historian Janet Polasky has examined the appeal of these revolutions as "calls to liberty" in the Atlantic World (Polasky 2015).

Tomas Larsson, as his generous response notes, advocates a new historiography that seeks the resonances of these visions of liberty in Southeast Asia. His own work has shown us how classical liberalism has circulated for more than eight decades in Thailand through interpretations of Rousseau (Larsson 2017). And Peter Zinoman's work on the early-twentieth-century Vietnamese novelist and journalist Vũ Trong Phung elucidates the role of a local republicanism that opposed both colonialism and communism (Zinoman 2013). Both Larsson's and Zinoman's work highlight the oppositional role of liberalism in Southeast Asia, and one hopes for more scholarship that grapples with similar questions.

Liberalism, in Europe and in Asia, has a radical history, and Bello is correct to remind us of this history — a history that I should have highlighted more in my book. Larsson is likewise correct to posit

that my “narrow focus on political elites within the state” obscures other strands of liberalism, especially those that were more insurgent. It was, indeed, only in the twentieth century that liberalism turned bureaucratic, as it became the dominant ideology of governance for much of the Western world and for some postcolonies like the Philippines and India.

Liberalism, as I noted in the book, swings like a pendulum. Sometimes, liberals mediate and compromise with power; at other times, they take firm stances and draw red lines. Sometimes liberalism is peaceful reformism; at other times it is tempestuous and even violent revolution.

Bello cites the history of liberal revolutions to critique my vision of a careful liberalism that avoids violence. But it was precisely because of these earlier liberal revolutions that liberalism turned cautious in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If liberals were less willing to shed blood, it was because they remembered the waves of Jacobin terror that followed many uprisings. Of course, they could still advocate violence. Rizal himself saw revolution as *la última razón* (the ultimate reason) — the final option that a people could take to end oppression (Hau 2017, p. 177). But the bar for violence was higher, and this remains so today.

Bello is more beguiled by liberalism *qua* insurgency than the pencil-pushing form that I advocated in my book, and it amuses me that the seasoned activist shows more élan than his younger friend and comrade. Many of the differences among liberals are, as Larsson explains, a matter of “personality type”, and I am, indeed, attracted to thinkers with “a high degree of comfort with civil society and the rule of law”. Larsson is also correct to say that this personality type is attracted to the state, since the rationalism of liberalism seeks a rational apparatus of governance. My moderate and rationalist temperament notwithstanding, my book never denies that, sometimes, liberals can and should, as Bello notes, “draw firm lines based on principle...”.

Bello lumps S.P. Lopez along with his mentor Carlos P. Romulo as a collaborator with the Marcos regime. This is the only historically

inaccurate statement in Bello's trenchant review. I wrote about S.P. precisely to show that the liberal dance with power has its limits. In the twentieth-century Philippines, that limit was, as Bello will surely agree, Marcos. Unlike Romulo, who refused to criticize the dictator, S.P. used his bully pulpit as president of the University of the Philippines to advocate a return to constitutional, multi-party rule. Though he was in the government while he did this, it made him no different from Jose W. Diokno. One of the anti-Marcos liberals that Bello cites favourably, Diokno started criticizing the dictator while he and Marcos were still in the same political party. Bello notes that the Marcos period made Philippine liberalism insurgent again — a shift to which he wishes that I paid more attention. The chapter on S.P., someone whom I called a “grand old man” of the opposition (p. 144), was my way of acknowledging that shift. S.P. was a state-building liberal who became an activist one. It is thus no wonder that Filipino Maoists still express grudging respect for him.

Bello asks why I neglected the famous liberals of the anti-dictatorship movement like Diokno, Tanada, Aquino and Salonga. I did so precisely because they *are* famous, and their stories have been told in important works such as Mark Thompson's *The Anti-Marcos Struggle* (Thompson 1995). More importantly, as I noted earlier, my book is not primarily about liberalism as oppositional politics. Rather, it is about liberalism as a platform for building a nation-state, and the goal of highlighting state-building is evident even in the book's title. I failed to note, however, that this goal stemmed from a frustration that I have with the Philippine left. For, while fellow activists theorize about how to challenge power, they rarely think about how to wield it responsibly and democratically. Our attraction to the poetry of resistance makes us negligent of the prose of governance.

Like all legacies of the Enlightenment, the liberal creed is the bearer of much poetry, best expressed in what Bello calls the “*tabula rasa*” of the American Declaration of Independence. But I disagree that the lofty goals of the Declaration render it utopian. It is, at minimum, less utopian than the Marxist belief in global revolution

and the withering of the state. Jefferson's poetry was immediately translated into the rule-based prose of Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution, and the most passing glance at the Federalist Papers reveals an obsession with guidelines for the rational regulation of power.

The practicality of the American constitution appeals to me. More broadly, the idea, though not always the reality, of the United States appeals to me, and the final difference between Bello and me lies in our assessment of the American experiment. Of course, I am also critical of the genocidal Filipino-American War and of Cold War-era neo-imperialism. But I believe, as Richard Rorty did, that these shameful episodes were inconsistent with America's liberal credo (Rorty 1998). I also believe that many intellectuals — from T.H. Pardo de Tavera, to Camilo Osias, to Salvador Araneta — admired the United States not just because they were “seduced and disarmed by the attractive liberal democratic and internationalist vision of imperial ideology”, but because they could draw from the multiple traditions of a heterogeneous country.

I show in my chapter on Araneta, for example, that U.S. “imperialist” economics was inconsistent, and my narrative belies some of the history of American economic domination that Bello cites in his review. As Bello is one of the world's foremost scholars in the field of political economy, I am surprised that he does not have much to say about this chapter.

In the 1950s, the International Monetary Fund recommended expansionary measures for the Philippines — measures rejected by the pro-austerity Central Bank Governor Miguel Cuaderno. Today, Cuaderno would be labelled a neoliberal, but in the 1950s his “neoliberalism” was in defiance of what was then the Keynesianism of the IMF. Meanwhile, Cuaderno's rival Araneta advocated for expanding credit and depreciating the currency to boost domestic production and exports. He cited developments in Keynesian and New Deal-era economic thought as his inspiration. Both Cuaderno and Araneta saw their economic ideas as consistent with American-style liberalism, but one killed the country's export industry while the other could have saved it. Between these two, who was the pawn of empire?<sup>3</sup>



My goal in highlighting intellectuals like Araneta and even dilettantes like Carlos P. Romulo has in part been to revel in political ambiguity, because liberalism is the philosophy of grey areas. Which likely explains why Larsson believes my book works better as an intellectual history than as a political manifesto. After all, the fixed idea — so easily simplified in slogan and narrative — inspires without complication. Liberalism is anything but fixed. Still, one may hope for rationality and enlightenment to guide us as we wander into the ambiguous and the unknown.

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#### NOTES

1. “The Diliman Consensus” is Claudio’s term for what he considers the prevailing orthodoxy in Philippine historical studies. The mainstays of this orthodoxy are the works by the University of the Philippines historian Teodoro Agoncillo (1912–85) and the progressive historian Renato Constantino (1919–99).
2. Rizal’s brother was a member of the Juventud.
3. For a recent study touching on the Philippine Central Bank under Cuaderno’s leadership, see Takagi (2016).

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