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PUBLIC FORUM**

**Wars in the Philippines
“The Politics of Memory in the Shadow of Empire”**

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Place: ACROS Fukuoka Event Hall (Tenjin, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka City)

Program:

Outline of the Forum and Introduction of Panelists

Professor Shimizu Hiromu (Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies,
Kyushu University)

Keynote Speech

Professor Reynaldo C. Iletto (Academic Prize Laureate)

Panel Discussion

Professor Reynaldo C. Iletto

Professor Ikehata Setsuho (President, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

Professor Arima Manabu (Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies,
Kyushu University)

Professor Shimizu Hiromu



Keynote Speech

In the southern Philippines today there is a violent war taking place between government forces, helped by the Americans, and a Muslim separatist movement led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. In the discourse of world politics today, this war in Mindanao and Sulu is considered part of the global “war on terror.” Filipinos have been divided in opinion about this war. Even President Gloria Arroyo and Vice-President Teofisto Guingona are at odds with each other, particularly on the issue of American participation. In this lecture I show how the positions Filipinos take on this war on terror are greatly influenced by collective memories of past wars.

What are these past wars that maintain their ghostly presence over the country today? The first is the war of independence from Spain—a very memorable event. It began in 1896, when a secret society named the Katipunan mounted a rebellion against the Spanish authorities in the outskirts of Manila. As the Katipunan society grew, this rebellion led to a major war between a Filipino separatist movement and the government of Spain.

The war against Spain culminated in the formation of a Filipino republican government in 1898. No sooner had the Filipino government been formed, however, when the United States intervened in 1899 and proceeded to destroy it. And so we come to the second “great war” in Filipino memory: the Filipino-American war. This bitter conflict led to the deaths of nearly half a million Filipinos. This war officially ended with the proclamation of American victory on July 4, 1902.

When the Americans administered the Philippines from 1902 on, they made sure that this “original war” of 1899-1902 would become largely a forgotten event. During the 40 years of American rule in the islands, educated Filipinos were brought up to think that the future of their country lay in a special, permanent relationship with the United States.

The cozy relationship, however, was put to the test when the Japanese Army arrived in December 1941 to conquer the Philippines. And so we come to the third “real war” in Filipino memory: the war with Japan from 1942 to 1945. This consisted of a joint effort by Filipinos and Americans to resist Japanese occupation.

No sooner had the war with Japan ended when a rebellion by the Huks, a peasant army in Luzon led by the Communist Party erupted in 1947. The war against the Huks and other movements led by the radical Left was part of the global “Cold War.” Only recently has the Cold War been declared over, but soon after that, the war on terror began.

The present war on terror, then, was preceded by four great wars starting with the war of independence against Spain that began in 1896. Let me now explain how Filipino attitudes towards the terror war reflect the politics of memory involving the past wars.

War number one—the war against Spain—is deeply etched in the collective memory. In fact this war, which Filipinos call the Revolution of 1896, is the “foundational event” in the life of the nation-state. Without a collective memory of the first war, the nation-state would have no meaning to its citizens.

The war of 1896 to 1898 is foundational because this was the first time that the term “Filipino” was used to refer to the inhabitants of the islands—not just the Spaniards living there but also, and most importantly, the indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the notion of a Filipino identity was given political form in the sovereign republic of 1898.

The intellectuals and military leaders who led the separatist war against Spain are called “the first Filipinos.” Most of our national heroes stem from this first war: Jose Rizal, Apolinario Mabini, Andres Bonifacio, and Emilio Aguinaldo. They are remembered through their inscription in textbooks as the “founding fathers” of the nation. To facilitate their remembering, monuments have been built to commemorate their deeds; their birthdays have been declared national holidays; and their images are inscribed in postage stamps, billboards, magazine covers and town halls.

The way that the collective memory of the war against Spain was shaped during the 20th century can only be understood by connecting this war to the Filipino-American war that followed it. The first and second wars are closely intertwined, yet the first is remembered while the second is largely forgotten.

The Americans became implicated in the first war when they themselves declared war against Spain in May 1898. Commodore George Dewey, commander of the US navy’s Asiatic fleet, helped the Filipino rebels in two ways: first, by destroying the Spanish fleet in Manila bay, and second, by bringing the Filipino leader Aguinaldo back to the Philippines from Hong Kong where he had lived in exile. Aguinaldo then reorganized his army and captured the Spanish garrisons one by one in the interior of Luzon. He declared the independence of the Philippines from Spain on June 12, 1898.

In effect, the Filipinos won the war of independence from Spain with American help. The Americans were initially welcomed as liberators of the Philippines from the tyranny of Spanish rule. Both the Filipino and the American governments in late 1898 depicted the Spanish colonial past as a Dark Age, when the spread of liberal ideas was suppressed by the Catholic Church. After the victory over Spain, Filipinos hoped that their nation-state would be recognized by the Americans, who, after all, had won their independence from the British not that long ago.

The American liberators, however, had other ideas about what to do with their Filipino allies. By the 1890s the United States had recovered fully from its bloody Civil War; its Westward expansion across the continent was complete and so it was keen to join the family of imperial powers consisting of Britain, France, the Netherlands, and others. The Pacific was their zone of expansion, and the Philippine islands were to be their stepping stone to the establishment of trade and influence in the Asiatic mainland. There were also profits to be made in the exploitation of Philippine agricultural and mineral resources. The Americans wanted, therefore, to take over the Philippines from Spain, but the Filipinos were not about to hand it over without a fight.

War number two—the Filipino-American war—began in February 1899 when American troops crossed the line separating the U.S. and Filipino armies in Manila. During the first year of the war, the U.S. army managed to subdue the main Filipino defense forces in central and northern Luzon. The following year, it concentrated on taking southern Luzon and

managed to control the major towns by the middle of 1900. At the point, Filipino resistance took the form of guerrilla warfare.

Even after General Aguinaldo was captured in April 1901, and even as more and more Filipinos were beginning to collaborate with their new American overlords, guerrilla resistance continued for another year. By the end of 1901, in regions such as Samar, Leyte, the Ilocos and southern Tagalog, the U.S. army introduced all-out measures such as the reconcentration of villagers, the burning of houses and food supplies, the torture of prisoners, and search-and-destroy operations. The remaining guerrilla leaders were forced to surrender owing to battle injuries, hunger, desertions by their troops, and fear of tremendous American firepower.

My wife's grandfather, Pedro Carandang, became involved in the Filipino-American war when he was appointed mayor of Tanauan, Batangas, after that town was occupied by the Americans in 1900. But Mayor Carandang only served the Americans during office hours. The rest of the time, when his bosses weren't looking, he provided the guerrilla units with food, money, information, and secret access to the town. When the Americans discovered this, they arrested and imprisoned mayor Carandang until the end of the war.

My own grandfather, Francisco Iletto, participated in the war by providing information about the Americans to his friend General Isidoro Torres, the guerrilla commander of Bulacan province north of Manila. The Americans intercepted a letter that my grandfather sent to Torres in 1900 and thus identified him as an enemy spy. But I do not know whether the Americans arrested him or not.

The reason I do not know what eventually happened to my grandfather is because, remarkably, neither he nor my wife's grandfather passed on their memories of the war to their children and grandchildren. They chose to keep such memories private, and to let their children carry on in life as if this war against America had never happened. However, they did pass on to their children their memories of the war against Spain. They spoke freely to their children about Rizal, Bonifacio and the Aguinaldo who declared independence from Spain. But they kept silent about Malvar, Lukban and the other Aguinaldo who had called for a guerrilla war against the Americans in 1900.

How do we explain this selective transmission of the memories of the two wars? After the Americans had pronounced victory over the Filipinos on July 4, 1902, they proceeded to reshape the collective memory of those long years of war from 1896 all the way to 1902. The aim of the politics of memory was to encourage the remembering of the war against Spain, and the forgetting of the war against the United States. This was conducted through the censored press, civic rituals and, above all, the colonial school system.

What the Americans wanted Filipinos to "remember" above all was that they came as liberators to help free the country from oppressive Spanish rule. This was true at the beginning; the Filipinos indeed hailed them as "redeemers." But how could the liberators justify not recognizing the Filipino republican government? How could they justify their bloody suppression of any resistance to their takeover of the islands? How could liberators justify killing the people they were supposed to have rescued from Spanish tyranny? The other, suppressed, meaning of the coming of the Americans in 1898 was that it was just another foreign invasion, following soon after the Spanish withdrawal.

In order to combat the negative meanings and to establish the official memory of the two wars, the American colonial government did the following:

First, it recognized the liberal aspirations of the leaders of the 1896 war of independence against Spain. The Americans specially promoted the ideas of the nationalist intellectual Rizal, who preferred a more gradualist road to self-rule through the education of the populace. The other hero of the first war, Bonifacio, was downplayed by the government because he led a secret society that advocated armed struggle.

Second, the American regime recognized the aspirations by Aguinaldo and the Filipino educated class to form a republican state. However, the Americans insisted that Filipinos in 1898 were not prepared for democracy and self-rule. As “proof,” American writings pictured Aguinaldo as a despotic president, and the masses of the people as blind followers of their local bosses. The colonial administration wanted the new generation of Filipinos studying in the public schools to “remember” the coming of the Americans in 1898 as an act of “benevolent assimilation,” wherein the Americans would stay for as long as was needed to help prepare the Filipinos for democracy and responsible self-government.

Third, it follows from the above that the war of resistance to U.S. occupation would be regarded as a “great misunderstanding.” In fact, these were the very words David Barrows, the superintendent of schools, used in his high school textbook to describe the Filipino-American war. If only, he said, the Filipinos had fully understood the noble motives of America, and if only the Filipinos had accepted the fact that they were still an underdeveloped people needing to be uplifted by the superior civilization of the Americans, then they would not have resisted the U.S. occupation, and so the disastrous war would not have taken place.

Fourth and finally, the American colonial regime decreed in 1902 that anyone who continued to oppose their presence would be arrested for sedition, and that armed groups that attacked government forces would be treated as bandit gangs, religious fanatics, and remnants of the defeated guerrilla armies. They would be treated as plain criminals and terrorists. Instead of resistance to foreign occupation, the war would be remembered as a time of banditry, fanaticism, disorder and dislocation.

In order to succeed in school, to become employed in the colonial civil service, and to embrace the modern ways brought by the Americans, Filipinos were made to “remember” the Filipino-American war in the terms that the American colonial administration dictated. Understandably then, my grandfather, who came to terms with American occupation when he was recruited as a teacher in the public school system, chose not to transmit his memories of the war to his children.

The American colonial grip over the shaping of public memories was most effective in the schools. As the English language spread, so did the official view of the past. The official management of the collective memory, however, did not fully subsume the private memories of the Filipino-American war. After all, countless Filipinos had been involved in the anti-imperial struggle; hundreds of thousands were killed or injured. Many veterans of the Filipino-American war chose to keep alive these memories through veterans associations, patriotic societies, labor unions, and religio-political sects, most of which were illegal.

Beneath the official cluster of memories about the two wars, we can identify alternative modes of remembering.

One of the focal points of alternative memories was a veteran of the first and second wars: Artemio Ricarte. Trained as a school teacher, Ricarte became a military commander in battles against the Spaniards and rose to become a general in the war against the Americans. When the war ended, he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States and was imprisoned. But he managed to escape, first to Hong Kong, and then later to Yokohama. From these places of exile, Ricarte continued to keep alive memories of the wars against Spain and the United States, treating them both as a single, unfinished event. From 1904 up to 1935, he inspired various secret societies and peasant movements which awaited his return from Japan to liberate the country from the Americans.

In order to understand the third war in our series—the Filipino-Japanese war—we need to relate it to the first two. Filipino revolutionists had always sought the help of Japan in their wars against Spain and the United States, but except for small shipments of arms, Japanese involvement in the Philippines was slight. The American victory over the Filipinos in 1902, however, followed by Japan's momentous victory over Russia in 1905, signaled the beginning of American-Japanese rivalry for dominance in the Asia-Pacific.

The rise of Japan as an Asian power did not escape the notice even of the new generation of Filipinos learning English in the American schools. The fact that the venerable Ricarte came to be based in Yokohama heightened among Filipino nationalists the consciousness of Japan as an alternative model of development. And so when the Japanese came to occupy the Philippines in 1942, bringing with them Ricarte, there were a few Filipinos who welcomed them as liberators.

The majority, however, regarded the Japanese as invaders. The Filipino-American joint resistance to Japanese occupation was premised on the colonial construction of history propagated in the schools since 1903. In this history, the Filipinos had defeated the Spanish government with American help, and the Americans had stayed in order to train the Filipinos for future self-government. By the 1930s the vast majority of Filipinos had already forgotten the Filipino-American war. They saw their fate and that of the U.S. as intertwined. And so when the Japanese forces arrived, they were seen as nothing but an army of invasion. After the defeats of the Filipino-American forces in Bataan and Corregidor, a guerrilla war of resistance continued to be waged indefinitely. Actually, it was pretty much a replay of the Filipino-American war!

The Japanese Imperial Administration sought to legitimize its occupation of the country by encouraging Filipinos to revisit the history of the first and second wars. All of the heroes of the war of independence could be held up as examples for the youth. And no longer was it considered taboo to excavate memories of the Filipino-American war. Veterans and descendants of these two wars who had never forgotten that the Americans had come as invaders were encouraged to speak freely about the past and to play leading roles in organizations supportive of the Japanese administration.

If we examine the backgrounds and ideas of some of the leading “collaborators” of the Japanese, we find connections with the forgotten war against the Americans. Jose Laurel, President of the Republic of 1943, came from the province of Batangas, a region devastated

by U.S. armed operations in 1902. His father had died in an American concentration camp and a cousin was killed in an encounter with American troops. Claro Recto, Secretary of the Interior, remembered his mother crying while being interrogated by American officers who were hunting down his uncle, a guerrilla leader in Tayabas province. The veteran General Emilio Aguinaldo graced the independence ceremony in October 1943 and hailed the Republic as a fulfillment of the dreams of 1898.

For these leaders of the wartime Republic, there was no particular love for their Japanese sponsors, but there wasn't much nostalgia for American rule either. They remembered the war with Spain, the war with the United States, and the war with Japan as variations on the same theme: resistance to foreign domination. Their aim was to ensure the survival of the Filipino nation which had become sandwiched in a conflict between imperial powers.

I have no doubt that had the Japanese occupation lasted longer, there would have occurred a reprogramming of public memories, similar to what the Americans had accomplished. The Filipino-American war would have been resurrected from oblivion, the Americans remembered as invaders, while the Japanese would perhaps have come to be perceived as liberators. But, as General Douglas MacArthur solemnly declared when he left in defeat, "I shall return." And so did the Americans return in 1945 to liberate the Filipinos from the tyranny of the Japanese rulers. This moment in Philippine history is called "the Liberation."

As soon as the American-sponsored Commonwealth government was reinstated in Manila, it proceeded to restore those collective memories that the wartime period had begun to erode. For example, in a 1945 speech President Osmeña compared General MacArthur's liberation of the Philippines to his father General Arthur MacArthur's entering Manila in 1898 to free the Philippines from Spanish rule. What Osmeña conveniently forgot was that General Arthur MacArthur had commanded the American troops who fought and defeated the Filipino Republican army in 1900!

The final six months of the war with Japan were very similar to the final six months of the war with the United States. Homes and buildings were razed, civilians suspected of aiding the guerrillas were tortured and executed; disaster accompanied the path of the retreating Japanese forces. Meanwhile, American planes inflicted destruction from the sky. Personal experiences of the final months of the war were for the most part sad and tragic.

Post-war Filipino presidents such as Osmeña, Roxas and Quirino promoted the official memory of the war with Japan as a time when Filipino and American soldiers fought and suffered side by side to defend the Philippines. The official interpretation, propagated in public speeches, radio broadcasts, and the school system, encouraged the Filipino people to remember the American colonial period as a golden age, when peace and prosperity reigned. This age of happiness was shattered when the Japanese came and plunged the country into a dark age. The darkness was only lifted when the liberator MacArthur returned. Liberation meant the recovery of a lost age of happiness under America. As promised, the Americans granted independence to the Filipinos on July 4, 1946.

It was not difficult to establish such public memories because they touched a chord with the countless private memories of death and destruction suffered at the hands of the

Japanese army. Note that in this official construction of the past, again the Filipino-American war is a non-event; it is encouraged to be forgotten.

Not everyone, however, could forget the Filipino resistance to American occupation, especially since its remembering had been encouraged during the Japanese occupation. A new generation of nationalist intellectuals had been nurtured during this wartime period—they included historians such as Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino. For them, both the war against the U.S. and the war against Japan were to be remembered *equally*.

One well-known organization that would not forget the Filipino-American war was the Hukbalahap, or “People’s Anti-Japanese Liberation Army.” Formed during the war against Japan, the Huk army saw itself as a successor of the armies that fought the Spaniards *and* the Americans. Most of its leaders belonged to families of veterans of the first two wars. After “independence” in 1946, which the radical nationalists considered fake, the Hukbalahap, led by the Communist Party, transformed itself into a national liberation army opposing U.S. imperialism and its local Filipino clients. This was the start of the Cold War in the Philippines.

I shall not go into detail about this war that divided the world into Leftist and Rightist camps, one led by the communist and the other by the capitalist superpowers. What I would like to stress is that during this war, memories of the past wars were shaped and made to conform to the political exigencies of the times.

As stated previously, the immediate postwar governments of Roxas and Quirino highlighted the joint struggle by Filipinos and Americans against the Japanese. This strategy was aimed at solidifying the alliance between the Philippines and the United States. It was targeted at the Huks and the Communists who, being aligned with the Soviet Union, were critical of U.S. imperialism. However, after Laurel and most of the collaborators with Japan were pardoned in 1948, and as the Cold War intensified in the 1950s, the war with Japan gradually faded in official memory. After all, Japan was a staunch Cold War ally now, and Japanese war reparations were forthcoming. Officially, the war with Japan was to be forgotten during the Cold War, although privately it continued to be remembered as a dark age by those who had lived through it—my father’s generation.

The real battleground for Cold War memory-makers was the Filipino-American war. Few veterans of that war were now left to remind the younger generation of their experiences. The government, of course, persisted in its official forgetting of that war. Even during the recent centennial celebration of the revolution held in 1998, there was hardly any mention of the violent U.S. invasion. To remember the war with the Americans would harm the Cold War alliance.

The official view was nevertheless challenged by a vocal group of activists who struggled to restore the memory of the Filipino-American war in public consciousness. Among them were politicians and intellectuals Claro Recto, Teodoro Agoncillo, Leon Maria Guerrero, Renato Constantino, Cesar Majul, and even wartime president Jose Laurel who founded the Lyceum school to promote a pro-Filipino rather than a neocolonial understanding of the past. Some of them had served the Republic during the Japanese occupation. As a result of their reeducation campaigns in the 1950s and the 1960s more and more educated Filipinos came to learn about the “suppressed history” of the Filipino-American war. A new collective memory of that war became established particularly among the youth.

The collective memory of the war against Spain also became a terrain of conflict during the Cold War. The anticommunist camp, including the Catholic Church, continued to endorse the intellectual Jose Rizal as the hero of the revolution. The radical nationalists, on the other hand, championed Andres Bonifacio, the working-class founder of the Katipunan. President Marcos condemned the student movement's worship of Bonifacio and portrayed himself as another Emilio Aguinaldo (who, by the way, had ordered the execution of Bonifacio in 1897). The struggles over what to remember about the war with Spain were numerous and intense during the Cold War, and they are far from over. Why did President Ramos identify with Aguinaldo? Why did President Estrada portray himself as Bonifacio? Obviously they were tapping the collective memory of the war against Spain.

Our excursion into the politics of memory surrounding the past four wars should help us understand how Filipinos position themselves in the present war on terror. When American soldiers returned to the Philippines in the early months of 2002 to help the government pursue the war on terror, a majority of the populace led by President Gloria Arroyo welcomed them with open arms. They remembered the Americans as their allies and even their liberators in the war against Japan. Only a minority saw the return of the American army as a ghostly echo of their arrival in 1898 to occupy the Philippines by force. Most Filipinos read about the war in Iraq and fail to see it as a mirror of their own country's experience in 1899. They have largely forgotten the Filipino-American war.

Today we are being told to take sides in the war on terror, just as during the Cold War we had to take sides. "You are either with us or against us," we are warned. And of course the Philippines, being a poor country in need of aid, has been compelled to join the coalition of the willing. But it is not just poverty or pragmatism that has led to this. What we see are the effects of a century of manipulation or reshaping of collective memories about past wars. The war on terror is being built upon a massive forgetting of past invasions, past injustices, and acts of terror on the part of the coalition itself.

To fight without question the "terror" perpetrated by Moro rebels means forgetting the past injustices that led the Muslims in the south to a separatist war. Having American troops fighting side by side with Filipino troops may bring back memories of the joint struggle against Japan, but it also entails forgetting the equally terrible Filipino-American war. Did Filipinos fight those past wars only to end up serving the empire of the day? If history is to serve its function as the codifier and guardian of collective memories, it should participate in the present war, not to endorse its goals but to interrogate its very rationale. By remembering past wars in all their dimensions, by resurrecting those memories that are hidden away in the dark shadows of empire, then and only then shall we begin to see an end to the present war.

* The above text introduces the keynote speech given by Professor Reynaldo C. Ileto, the Academic Prize laureate of the 14th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2003.