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Turning Colonization on Its Head

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shows that Indigenous leaders were also capable of confronting colonial rule by trying to create a »mutual order in which [Indigenous] lands and political authority would be respected«. Its failure on both sides of the imperial divide – though for different reasons and in different ways – is a reminder of just how complex inter-imperial zones are.

For all its creativity and archival rigor, Dixon's »borrowing« of the concept of »republic of Indians« raises a critical question. To what extent did Indigenous people in English America actually consider themselves as vassals or subjects of the English king? This question has been vigorously debated in the Spanish-American historiography over the last couple of decades. There is every reason to suppose they could have done so. As Dixon notes, vassalage and subjecthood, as extended forms of kinship, would have been no less intelligible to Indigenous people in Virginia and Carolina than it was in Spanish-American realms. And yet, the Iberian New World republic of Indians was premised on a specific political theory of society rooted in Catholic theology, one anchored in notions of substantive justice as the ordering principle of human collectivities. Indigenous petitioners in Spanish realms across space and time routinely referred to themselves as *vasallos* (vassals), embraced the idea of their tributary status in exchange for royal protection, and demanded »justice« from the king.

In English colonies, Indigenous understandings appear to have been more explicitly oriented to notions of sovereignty than to justice. Dixon recognizes as much in his epilogue when he asserts that Indigenous people in the colonial Anglo-American south asserted vassalage and subjecthood in order to become »authors of their sovereignty«. Given the centrality of *sovereignty* to contemporary Indigenous peoples in the Anglo-American context, this is an understandable move.

Yet it is perhaps too easy a conflation. In many ways, *vassalage* and *sovereignty* represent distinct political understandings. There are confluences but Dixon neither identifies nor explores them. Still, he has laid bare the question in a way that invites greater collaborations across a historiographical divide between Anglo and Iberian colonial worlds, a gulf that makes little sense from the perspective of Indigenous actors, as Dixon and historians of colonial Spanish America show.

Republic of Indians should be of interest to historians of empire and to historians of Indigenous people in the USA and in Latin America. Dixon convincingly demonstrates the existence of an alternate legal and political idea in which Indigenous actors aimed to live alongside Europeans while retaining their own autonomy and capacity for self-rule. That this experiment was finally rejected by colonists adds a new layer to the story of how Indigenous people have come to be so marginalized in the present-day US polity (differently than they have been in Latin America). Dixon movingly characterizes his book as a »*residencia* for the dead« (a *residencia* was the investigation that all Spanish officials had to face upon conclusion of their term in office). In doing so, he reminds us that it is never too late to hear from those affected and to account for what has happened.

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Most Filipinos have been schooled in nationalist history in which the first century and a half of the Spanish colonial period is depicted as fraught with indigenous uprisings and rebellions against the colonial state and institutions and sustained resistance in the Muslim south. Quite uncritically these events are rendered as paving the way to the Philippine revolution a century and a half later.

* Stephanie Joy Mawson, Incomplete Conquests. The Limits of Spanish Empire in the Seventeenth-Century Philippines, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press 2023, 294 p., ISBN 978-1-5017-7027-2

The idea of »incomplete conquests« is perceived as fact, hand in hand with the imprint of Spanish colonization in the lowlands, embodied by encomiendas, pueblos, and the Catholic church. But if the Spanish colonial regime was the object of continual resistance and attack, how does one account for the establishment and persistence of colonial institutions?

Although *Incomplete Conquests* does not address this popularized narrative, it serves to explain the apparent inconsistencies in this portrayal. Stephanie Joy Mawson argues that from the standpoint of the historiography of empire, many a narrative magnifies the actual scope and power of the colonial state and institutions. Therefore, her main intent is to reexamine the early colonization in the Philippines by foregrounding aspects that hitherto have been sidelined, inadequately substantiated, or even misinterpreted because of a state-centered and -driven approach that has dominated colonial historiography. Having chosen this reverse perspective, she highlights the agency of the indigenous peoples and the Chinese not only as reacting to colonization but also as influencing its direction and circumscribing it. Mawson offers a revisionist view on the state of colonization in the 17th-century Philippines, depicting a more modest image than that of a powerful empire that had conquered and evangelized most of the archipelago, as presented in colonial sources as well as by earlier historians.

The contested power of the state logically bespoke the reduction, if not the loss, of its juridical authority and capacity, and the concomitant weakness or absence of colonial institutions. The author interprets the many instances of violence, whether perpetrated by the Spaniards or by the peoples they sought to control, as strong indications of constrained Spanish sovereignty in many geographical areas and within the very colonial capital where the Chinese population was overwhelmingly larger than the Spanish. Resorting to violence as an acceptable means of defense and control by colonial authorities would cast doubts on some historians' claims that the conquest of the Philippines was relatively peaceful compared to that which occurred in the Americas. Mawson consistently returns to this point to debunk it.

Like a good novel, *Incomplete Conquests* begins with a crisis whose elements are parsed in the next chapters. The fateful years of 1660 to 1663, during the administration of Sabiniano Manrique de Lara, were the inevitable consequence of the colony's financial straits, political turbulence, and the vulnerable state of the military. The new governor faced indigenous labor rebellions in central and northern Luzon and an invasion threat from the Chinese lord Koxinga, which heightened the tension between the Spaniards and the Chinese population in Manila. The Spanish response was to expel the Chinese and to pull out its forces from Ternate and the southern Philippines to protect the colonial capital, thus losing its foothold in the Moluccas and Mindanao. Mawson does not stop at the dramatic significance of this period but points to its representational value for the entire century when the limits of the Spanish empire in the Philippines were keenly felt.

The next two chapters scrutinize the internal weaknesses of colonization in the Philippines. Chapter 2 discusses how the state depended on the indigenous elite's cooperation to extract tribute and labor needed to maintain the colony. In the pre-Hispanic social structure, debt servitude articulated the hierarchies, the command over labor being the main measure of status and power. Commoners escaped to the hinterland or upland to evade the colonial burdens of tribute and labor. Such response threatened the authority of the indigenous elite; caught between the exigencies of vassalage to Spain and their weakening power base, they rebelled. Mawson incisively explains how the pre-Hispanic political economic structure was harnessed by the colonial state for its own ends, but since the focus of this study is the instances of failure, it does not go deeper into the inner workings of the system, especially in the areas where it consolidated the socioeconomic structure.

Chapter 3 queries the early success of the missionary enterprise as claimed in religious chronicles and averred by John Leddy Phelan. This view contrasts with anthropological studies that note the persistence of pre-Hispanic animist beliefs and practices in the Philippines as well as with 17th-century accounts of the same and the violent response of the religious orders and colonial government. The author takes it upon herself to break the seeming silence of historians of religious orders about the abuse and violence that accompanied the project of religious conversion and to some extent subverted it. She provides detailed instances of misconduct and the legitimized use of violence to counter unbelief, whether in the form of apos-

tasy, flight, or rebellion. Such an emphasis, however, runs the risk of skewing perspectives as much as triumphant church history could. Religious adaptation proved to be a more effective means in the long run, an aspect which church historians have also dealt with abundantly.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the geographical frontiers of the Philippine colony: the southern archipelago comprising Mindanao and Sulu and the mountainous regions, especially the Cordillera in northern Luzon. The first was the site of maritime slave-raiding polities which continually threatened the colonial settlements in southern Luzon and the Visayan islands, while the second was the home of indigenous peoples who resisted conquest and the refuge of those who fled from the reach of the colonial state. While these are the better-known limits of the Spanish empire in the Philippines, whose historical continuity manifests in the configuration of autonomous regions today, the chapter that follows, on Cagayan Valley, vividly illustrates the nodal character of Spanish colonization in the Philippines which is rarely discussed in Philippine historiography. The network of forts which were also the mission bases became trading posts between upland and lowland, mediated by Christian natives who profited from the trade in complicity with Spanish officials. Administrative and military corruption discouraged religious conversion and provoked native flight to the uplands where resistance in turn was bolstered, making this region an »embarrassment« for Spanish imperial power.

The final chapter marvelously caps the book's theme. From the frontiers dealt with in the previous chapters, »Manila, the Chinese City« details the insecurity at the very center of Spanish rule. The tension between the Spanish and the Chinese arose from the ironic fact that the city was heavily dependent for its economic needs on the very people by whom the Spanish felt threatened both in terms of numbers and due to their indifference to Christianity. The argumentation behind proposals of expulsion revolved around these points. The Chinese were segregated in their own quarters; nevertheless, their commercial and artisanal activities allowed them close contact with indigenous communities in and outside Manila. Mawson notes the seemingly friendlier relationships between the Chinese and the indigenous people, to which she attributes the greater incidence of *mestizaje*. On this point, she seems to overlook the fact that the sheer number of Chinese men – who were always more numerous than the Spaniards – seeking local female partners could have accounted for that.

This book stands out in the way it narrates human movements across Philippine regions and beyond, providing local and inter-archipelagic context and giving due attention to geography's substantive role, both as an idea and as reality. Mountainous regions and maritime slave raiding conditioned the efforts at conquest and religious conversion. Indigenous peoples exploited their familiarity with the terrain and waters to avoid or hinder colonial expansion. In describing the beleaguered state of the colony in the mid-17th century, the author complements recent studies on pueblos as to why the number of foundations dipped in the second half of that century until the first half of the next, especially in the Visayan islands.

The other major merit of this work is the extensive knowledge of pre-Hispanic society and culture demonstrated in the analysis of the challenges to religious conversion and of the colonial labor economy, thereby explaining modes of indigenous resistance, missionaries' adaptation strategies, and the key disruptive elements that incited the elite-led rebellions. This insight into indigenous society results in a perspicacious analysis of the encounters between normative orders, between the indigenous and the Spanish and Catholic. Pervading this view is the agency of the indigenous peoples which Mawson underscores. Thus, she achieves one of the principal objectives of turning colonization on its head.

At the very end, she asserts that recognizing the limits of colonization in the 17th century helps us make sense of the cultural diversity that characterizes the Philippines today, a prime indicator of the continuity of indigenous cultures. Such an interpretation, however, could possibly ignore processes other than contestation, constraint, or avoidance, which are perceived as primary manifestations of agency. Even in areas that were intensely colonized, cultural hybridity has regional variations expressing the differentiated ways in which the autochthonous interacted with the Hispanic and Christian. Indigenous agency was exercised in different ways, beyond as well as within the limits of empire.

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