

Jocano's Digging for a Pre-Colonial Past at Santa Ana in Manila: Nation-Building at the Nexus of the Cold War and Decolonization¹

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Felipe Landa Jocano was at the center of the archaeological dig at Santa Ana, Metro Manila in the 1960s. The following brief analysis of this dig underlines Jocano's role as a nation-builder and as an anthropologist, touching on the political implications of doing research under Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos and against the overlapping contexts of decolonization, the Cold War, and the post-World War U.S. global empire.

Santa Ana in Manila was an archaeological dig from 1966 to 1967.² The Santa Ana site provided insight into the precolonial city; in hindsight, the National Museum considers the dig one of the "major archaeological undertakings in the 1960s."³ University of Chicago graduate and National Museum of the Philippines anthropologist Robert Fox led the excavating team,⁴ which worked specifically within the Santa Ana Parish Church and the adjacent areas along Lamayan road.⁵ After graduating from the University of Chicago himself, Jocano returned to the Philippines and rejoined the team at the National Museum of the Philippines.

Jocano, Fox, Avelino Legaspi, Alfredo Evangelista, and others from the Division of Anthropology of the National Museum were digging for a precolonial past. They uncovered material remains interpreted as evidence

of habitations and burials that could be dated 400 years back prior to Spanish contact. Legaspi and Fox described in their report (published in 1977 but written during the excavations) how the church had been built on a mound which contained two stratigraphic layers: one was from the Spanish era that counted less than a meter, and a pre-Spanish one that counted more than two meters. In the older layer the archaeologists found water shells, animal bones, charcoal, Chinese pottery, and iron slags.⁶

The dig must be seen in the context of Philippine nationalism. Philippine nationalism had been stunted by the Spanish, U.S., and Japanese empires from the second half of the 19th century into the first half of the 20th century. In the 1960s, Philippine society was longing for a national identity that was untouched by the colonial past.⁷ Many nationalist scholars, including Jocano and his colleagues, were “on the trail of an aboriginal Eden,”⁸ to borrow a phrase from Benedict Anderson. This search for a precolonial past had much to do with nation-building and imagining the precolonial roots of the Filipino nation. The Santa Ana report outlines the intellectual framework of the project: “(...) for it was during the proto-historic period when the foundations of contemporary Filipino culture crystallized.”⁹

Historian Michael Salman makes a case for taking a closer look at post-World War 2 Philippine nationalism by theorizing along the lines of Benedict Anderson.¹⁰ Relying on the Philippines to develop his “imagined communities,” Anderson asserts that at the time of Spanish “contact,” the populations “were mostly unaware of one another’s existence in the huge, scattered, and sparsely populated archipelago [...]”¹¹ Tying back the current new nation to a glorious past and thereby creating a linear connection from the past to the current society is an “invented tradition” that is a part of any nation-building process.¹² Jocano and the other National Museum anthropologists at Santa Ana were able to open a vista looking into a precolonial past, rooting the nation therein and thus decolonizing Philippine history.

Following this trail, Fox and Legaspi state: “Though not usual the practice of burying infants and children in cemeteries separate from adults is known ethnographically in the Philippines, and is still being practiced by mountain peoples, such as the *Sulod* in the interior of Panay Island.”¹³ By combining Manila urbanites with provincial mountain peoples when speaking about the discovery of child burials, Fox and Legaspi bring these *Sulod* mountain dwellers into the projected far-away national fold. The report of course points to Jocano’s research on the *Sulod*, that he had started in the 1950s.¹⁴ This nation-building thrust found its equivalent in Jocano’s contemporaneous publications. For example, in “Filipino Catholicism” of 1967, he ties the different peoples and areas of the archipelago together to make general observations about “any man (a farmer or employee).”¹⁵

Such nationalist desire to provide a unity to the Filipino nation dovetailed with the unifying, if not centralizing nationalist discourse of the Marcos’ regime, at least during the 1970s.¹⁶ The discoveries at the Santa Ana site resulted in Imelda Marcos’s financing the project “Pre-Spanish Manila Through Archaeology.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the collaboration among Jocano, Fox, and Evangelista in the dig with Imelda prefigured the social scientific collaboration between those University of Chicago graduates—sometimes in concert with and sometimes in opposition to one another—and Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos during Martial Law. Jocano joined the Asian Center in 1973 which Marcos hijacked and turned into the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies (PCAS), a policy-writing institute that catered to his needs.¹⁸ Jocano and Evangelista worked together to maintain the PCAS museum, where various artifacts from all over the Philippines were collected and studied. Evangelista was appointed as Assistant Director of the National Museum by Ferdinand Marcos in 1973 and held that function all through the Marcos era and beyond.¹⁹ Evangelista oversaw the restructuring of the National Museum via Presidential Decree No. 1, issued through Martial Law. This “Integrated Reorganizational Plan” was applied to all government offices and enabled the expansion of the

National Museum.²⁰ Fox joined the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities (PANAMIN) as a consultant in 1967 where he rose to the position of director in 1971. That same year, Fox became the presidential assistant on anthropology, bringing him even closer to the inner circle of Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos.²¹ These connections exemplify the links between the Marcos dictatorship and anthropological practice during the 1970s.

The Santa Ana dig also had a broader geopolitical context: that of the Cold War. In 1966, the head of states of the Pacific were converging in Manila to discuss the war in Vietnam that London B. Johnson recently had escalated.²² Imelda Marcos and the other First Ladies descended on the excavations at Santa Ana as part of the program of the Manila Summit Conference in October 1966.²³ Their husbands—as Pacific leaders of the “free world forces”²⁴—were debating at the global stage of politics on how to contain “Communist aggression”²⁵ in Vietnam. There was then, a gendered division of labor that surfaced during the conference.

A photograph²⁶ printed in Fox’s and Legaspi’s report depicts the First Ladies congregating in the Santa Ana dig, among whom Imelda Marcos stands most prominently and authoritatively, illustrating the powerful position she held and would hold within the New Society. She is facing Fox who stands elevated on a higher ground of the excavation site looking down on the women and on Jocano, who appears to be involved in preparing the finds for the visitors to admire. Claudia Alta Johnson, also known as Lady Bird Johnson, is leaning in to catch a glimpse of the artifacts.

The context in which decolonizing nation-building and the Cold War intersect frames the image—depicting both the Philippines and the United States through their respective First Ladies looking at a precolonial site. The image thus is an expression of the United States’ support of decolonizing efforts of “emerging” nations which were not a threat to the U.S. but something it embraced in order to obtain postcolonial influence in the Philippines in particular, in Southeast Asia²⁷ as well as in the Global South in general.

End Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank Josephine Munch Rasmussen and the editors of the *Asian Studies Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* for their critical reading of the text.
- ² See Jesus T. Peralta and Lucila A. Salazar, *Pre-Spanish Manila: A Reconstruction of the Pre-History of Manila* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974).
- ³ “Anthropology,” *National Museum of the Philippines: Annual Report: A Voyage of 100 Years* (Manila: National Museum Library, National Museum of the Anthropology, 2001), 24.
- ⁴ National Museum, *Annual Report: 1966-1967*. (Manila: National Museum Library. National Museum of Anthropology). Jocano is visible on pictures taken at Santa Ana.; Avelino Legaspi and Robert Fox, *Excavations at Santa Ana* (Manila: National Museum of the Philippines, 1977); Fred Evangelista to Fred Eggan, March 8, 1967, Box 22, Folder 2, Philippine Studies Program Records (PSP), Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. Jocano as a staff member of the National Museum team is also mentioned in a letter about the Santa Ana diggings from Fred Evangelista to Fred Eggan.; Fred Eggan to Henrietta Deutsch attachment CV F. Landa Jocano: Activities Since Graduation, October 14, 1969, Application Alumni Citation., Box 7, Folder 17, PSP Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. Jocano was a Senior Anthropologist at the Philippine National Museum from 1963-1967.
- ⁵ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 1f; Peralta and Salazar, *Pre-Spanish Manila*, 49.
- ⁶ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 6f.
- ⁷ Michael Salman, “Confabulating American Colonial Knowledge of the Philippines: What the Social Life of Jose E. Marcos’ Forgeries and Ahmed Chalabi Can Tell Us About the Epistemology of Empire,” in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American States*, ed. Alfred McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 260-270, here 262f.
- ⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 170.
- ⁹ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 1.
- ¹⁰ Salman, *Confabulating*, 262.
- ¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 171.
- ¹² Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger. (Cambridge, UK: 1983), 1-14.
- ¹³ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 11.
- ¹⁴ F. Landa Jocano, *Sulod Society: A Study in the Kinship System and Social Organization of a Mountain People of Central Panay*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1968). Jocano’s research was published in 1968.
- ¹⁵ F. Landa Jocano, “Filipino Catholicism: A Case Study in Religious Change,” *Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1967): 42-64, here 64.

- ¹⁶ For a related discussion, see Reuben Ramas Cañete, Matthew C.M. Santamaria, and Marc San Valentin, "Sulu sojourns: Photo-ethnography and political discourses on four ethno-linguistic groups in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Archipelagoes," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 35, no. 2 (2017): 136-157, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01154451.2014.964796>>.
- ¹⁷ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 1.
- ¹⁸ Matthew Santamaria, "History of PCAS," *News @ UP Asian Center* (website post), *Asian Center*, n.d., downloaded December 16, 2017, <http://ac.upd.edu.ph/index.php/resources/news-announcements/1215-up-asian-center-brief-history>; "AC Faculty, Staff Form Panel on F. Landa Jocano in 'UP Anthropology @ 100' Conference," *News @ UP Asian Center*, Asian Center, published December 5, 2017, accessed October 2, 2019, <<https://www.ac.upd.edu.ph/index.php/resources/news-announcements/968-panel-landa-jocano-anthropology-conference-diliman>>; Lily S. Mendoza, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities: A Second Look at the Poststructuralism-Indigenization Debates* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 116.
- ¹⁹ Wijnne H. Lumagui, "Alfredo E. Evangelista: Pioneer Filipino archaeologist," *Official Newsletter of the National Museum of the Philippines* 7, 2008.
- ²⁰ "History of National Museum," *National Museum: Annual Report 1985* (Manila: National Museum, 1985) 38-39, here 38f.
- ²¹ Robert B. Fox, CV. 1—7, n.d., Robert B. Fox, Sr. Papers, Box 16, Folder: Curriculum Vitae, University of the Philippines, Baguio Library.
- ²² Odd A. Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2017), 321.
- ²³ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*, 11.
- ²⁴ Manila Summit Conference, Joint Communiqué, signed October 25, 1966, downloaded March 1, 2019, Manila, <https://vietnamwar.govt.nz/sites/default/files/documents/manila-summit-communication.pdf>.
- ²⁵ Manila Summit Conference, Joint Communiqué, 3.
- ²⁶ Fox and Legaspi, *Santa Ana*.
- ²⁷ See also Simeon Man, *Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific*, (Oakland, CA, 2018).