

# Trans-Pacific Connections: Cultural Contacts through the Lens of Miguel López de Legazpi's Representation of the Philippines and its Relationship with the Early Accounts of the New World

Kim Beuchesne\*

The University of British Columbia, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

This article is inscribed in the context of a larger project that addresses the early modern Spanish accounts of Asia, which are generally less researched than the well-known chronicles of the New World. More specifically, my present work joins the efforts of a progressively growing number of scholars who seek to create links between both bodies of texts by inquiring whether –and, if so, to what extent– the Spanish representations of the native peoples of America had an impact on the Spanish portrayals of the inhabitants of Asia (in this case, the Philippines). For this purpose, I compare the *Relation of the Voyage to the Philippine Islands* (1565) and other documents written by Miguel López de Legazpi with narratives about the New World, mostly by Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés. I analyze the rhetorical devices used in these writings to describe cultural contacts, and more broadly, to relate them to the “connected histories” –a term coined by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and further elaborated by Serge Gruzinski– that were taking place between Spain, America, and Asia, and have continued to develop until today.

**Key Words:** Miguel López de Legazpi, Spanish representation of the Philippines, chronicles of the New World, trans-Pacific studies, connected histories

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\* Kim Beuchesne is associate professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada (Email: kim.beuchesne@ubc.ca).

## INTRODUCTION

While the early modern Spanish accounts of Asia have long been overshadowed by the more canonical chronicles of the New World, an increasing number of critical works are focusing on the Spanish exploration of the Philippines, Japan, China, and other Asian regions. Because the cultural displacements that occurred for centuries between Spain, America, and Asia are still significant today, it is crucial that we continue to reduce this gap between the two research areas. The enduring Spanish presence in the Philippines and the numerous Asian communities in Latin America, for example, make such connections impossible to ignore.

Among the studies that deal with the Spanish expeditions to Asia, most belong to the discipline of history and very few are based on a rhetorical perspective. For instance, Serge Gruzinski's *Les quatre parties du monde* (2004) and *L'aigle et le dragon* (2012) are brilliant historiographic texts on the cultural exchanges between Europe, America, and Asia, notably in the sixteenth century. Other important historical works on the relationship between the Spanish empire and Asia are essential to consider the representation of social differences during colonial times.<sup>1</sup> However, there is still a need for a careful reflection on the early Spanish descriptions of Asia, comparable to Beatriz Pastor's *Discursos narrativos de la conquista: mitificación y emergencia* (1988[1983], rev. 2008), which provides a basis for the Spanish American context. As for literary criticism, it mostly focuses either on one book, like *Los infortunios de Alonso Ramírez* (1690) by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, or on the role of Orientalism in the textual production of twentieth-century authors.<sup>2</sup>

The present article addresses the above-mentioned lack of studies on sixteenth-century Spanish narrative discourses about Asia by analyzing

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1 See Chaunu (1960), Nickerson (1963), Lach (1965-1993), Phelan (1967), Knauth (1972), Sánchez and Fuertes (1979), Rafael (1988 and 2000), Solano et al. (1989), Gil (1989 and 1991), Iwasaki Cauti (1992), Fradera (1999), Sola (1999), Holt (2002), Menzies (2003), Cabrero Fernández (2004), Brewer (2004), Lisón Tolosana (2005), Morillo-Alicea (2005), Clossey (2008), Newson (2009), García-Abásolo (2011 and 2012), Hirayama (2012), Ruiz Ibáñez (2013), Aram and Yun-Casalilla (2014), Seijas (2014), Thomas (2014), Giráldez (2015), and Tremml-Werner (2015), to name but a few. In this essay, I will refer to these studies whenever possible.

2 See Kushigian (1991). Among the few exceptions are Carmen Y. Hsu's works (including an article on Philip II's letters to the emperor of China [2004]), Walter Mignolo's classic *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003[1995]), and Catalina Quesada Gómez's "Del Caribe al Ganges: relaciones entre América Latina y Asia en el período colonial" (2013), an essay that establishes links between colonial writings about America and Asia; however, these links are not explained in detail.

Miguel López de Legazpi's accounts –especially the *Relation of the Voyage to the Philippine Islands* (1565, hereafter cited as the *Relation*) and letters to Philip II. These texts were selected for their foundational nature and thus relevance, despite being little known in the field of Hispanic colonial studies.<sup>3</sup> A Basque navigator, Legazpi is also famous for being the first Governor-General of the Spanish East Indies (the Philippine Islands, Guam and the Mariana Islands, the Caroline Islands, parts of Formosa, and the Moluccas) and for ordering the creation of the Manila galleon trade. Although much research on his documents is concerned with the geographical information or empirical data they contain,<sup>4</sup> I believe they are particularly noteworthy due to how they portray the Other.

In order to contribute to our understanding of colonial Hispanic culture and its legacies, this corpus will be viewed in the light of the writings that were sent only a few decades earlier from the New World to the King of Spain by Christopher Columbus and Hernán Cortés, since they are truly representative of the texts produced about America in this specific period. My objective is to investigate if and to what extent the early accounts of the New World “influenced” (or, more accurately, had an impact on) those of Asia by paying attention to the following questions: How are the inhabitants of the Philippines depicted by Legazpi? What recurrent allusions, lexical fields, or leitmotifs are used in the Spanish invention of this region? Are these principally clichés or the results of an acute sense of observation? Does the author make explicit comparisons between the Other in America and in Asia? To what degree are the narratives on Spanish America used as models? And how does Legazpi's style differ from or reformulate previous descriptions?<sup>5</sup>

To respond to these concerns, I will complement my literary analysis (which is based on the terms that were just mentioned, such as “lexical field”, originally theorized by Jost Trier as a set of meaning, as well as other mechanisms that belong to the modern practice of close reading) with the crucial notion of “connected histories” coined by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and reconceptualized by Serge Gruzinski. As this French historian argues, the rigid categories that define the chronological and

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3 Indeed, even though the *Relation* is the most complete account by Legazpi that is included in Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson's volume, I will quote letters that add to this main narrative. The original versions may be found at the General Archive of the Indies, Seville, Spain.

4 See Pizano y Saucedo (1964) regarding the actual location of the port of La Navidad.

5 When I interpret Legazpi's writings together with the chronicles of the New World, it is unnecessary to make an even-handed comparison, since Columbus and Cortés, for example, are better known than the Basque governor.

regional frameworks of world history are much too artificial and limited because they follow a rather ethnocentric (and usually Eurocentric) scheme that is informed by a Western perspective (Gruzinski 2001, 85-86). In contrast, during his research on acculturation (and *mestizaje*) in New Spain, he encountered phenomena that belonged simultaneously to different “worlds” and stumbled upon “the sources [that] revealed to us mixed landscapes, often disconcerting, always unpredictable” (Gruzinski 2001, 87, emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, he states that histories are multiple, plural, and intertwined (Gruzinski 2001, 87), facilitating the emergence of a cultural globalization since the sixteenth century, a fact that is patently visible in the construction of the Catholic Monarchy (Gruzinski 2001, 89-90). In a later work, *L'aigle et le dragon*, he reiterates the importance of studying distant and interrelated events that have “common dynamics” (Gruzinski 2012, 58),<sup>7</sup> such as the first contacts of the Spaniards with the Chinese and the Aztecs. These arguments are essential to grasp the variety of tendencies (i.e., from Europe, Asia, and America) that shape Legazpi’s writings, as I will show. Moreover, because such “connected histories” seldom occur without social and ideological inequalities, it is intriguing to verify if the term “coloniality of power” proposed by Aníbal Quijano (and further elaborated by Walter Mignolo)<sup>8</sup> to demonstrate that “[i]n America, the idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by the conquest” (Quijano 2000, 534) is also appropriate with respect to the early modern Spanish exploration and settlement in the Philippines.

This theoretical apparatus regarding cultural contacts must evidently be employed while taking into consideration the sociohistorical context to which Legazpi’s documents belong. For instance, it is imperative to

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6 My translation of “les sources [qui] nous dévoilaient des paysages mélangés, souvent déroutants, toujours imprévisibles”.

7 My translation of “une dynamique commune”. Gruzinski adds: “In the sixteenth century, many parts of the world enter into contact with the Europeans. The processes that then take shape may only be apprehended at a global scale. In hindsight, they will seem irreversible and appear as the evident starting point of a unification of the world that we date, quite anachronistically, to the late twentieth century” (Gruzinski 2012, 58) [My translation of “Au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, plusieurs parties du monde entrent en contact avec les Européens. S'ébauchent alors des processus que l'on ne peut appréhender qu'à l'échelle planétaire. Avec le recul, ils apparaîtront irréversibles et s'imposeront comme les prémices d'une unification du globe qu'on date, bien anachroniquement, de la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle”]. Although polemical, this statement is endorsed by other historians, such as José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez (2013, 29) and the editors Bethany Aram and Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla (2014, introduction and chapter 15). See Osterhammel and Petersson (2005) for an overview of the ongoing debates surrounding the term “globalization”.

8 See Mignolo (2003[1995], 441).

remember that Asia attracted the first explorers of America (the most obvious example being Columbus), although Spanish expeditions to that region did not begin until 1521, when Ferdinand Magellan sailed to the Mariana Islands.<sup>9</sup> The European conquerors' fascination with the East Indies was so great that Cortés himself, in his *Fifth Letter* (1526), proposed to travel across the Pacific Ocean, probably with the complementary objective of reaching China –“the underlying goal” (Mann 2011, 20) and “the stimulus that pulled Spain to search the seaways” (García-Abásolo 2011, 224):<sup>10</sup>

[...] I will undertake to discover a route to the Spice Islands and many others, if there be any between Maluco, Malaca and China, and so arrange matters that the spices shall no longer be obtained by trade, as the king of Portugal has them now, but as Your Majesty's rightful property; and the natives of those islands shall serve and recognize Your Highness as their rightful king and lord. (Cortés 2001[1526], 445)

It is thus clear that what the Spaniards sought in Asia was the availability of exotic commodities (spices, besides silk and medicines) and people, which were both allegedly waiting to be appropriated in order to increase the power of the Spanish monarch, especially in comparison to that of John III of Portugal. As Juan Gil suggests, not only Cortés but also many other explorers, such as Alonso Sánchez and Guido de Lavezaris (Gil 1991, 65-66), considered the conquest of this area fundamental to the expansion of the Spanish empire. Their conviction led to more reconnaissance missions, and after the Portuguese captured Malacca, the Moluccas, and Macau, the Spaniards wanted their share of the profits. It is well known that in 1565 Legazpi established the first Spanish settlement in Cebu and the service of the Manila galleons was inaugurated to facilitate trade between the Philippine archipelago and Acapulco in New Spain.<sup>11</sup> Peru followed soon afterward: the first trans-Pacific voyage between Manila and Lima took place in 1581, as Fernando Iwasaki Cauti reminds us (Iwasaki Cauti 2005[1992], 22). Such intercontinental travels triggered the circulation of Asian goods in the New World and allowed the Europeans to bring their religion and other cultural ideologies to Asia (and vice

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9 For more information about Europe's thrust toward Asia, see Lach (1965, Vol. 1) and Gil (1989). The Portuguese invention of this region is certainly another crucial field of study.

10 My translation of “el estímulo para que España saliera a buscar los caminos del mar”.

11 For concrete data on the participants and other components of this trade route, see Chaunu (1960), Bradley (1982), and Giráldez (2015), for example.

versa),<sup>12</sup> as will be demonstrated in the analysis of Legazpi's writings.

## CONNECTED TEXTS: LEGAZPI AND THE EARLY SPANISH CHRONICLERS OF AMERICA

The troop led by Legazpi first arrived at Gamay Bay off Samar in February 1565. Dedicated to searching for food supplies, it went to Cabalian on Leyte, quickly moved to Limasawa and Bohol, and in April 1565 finally settled in Cebu, in the Visayas, where it would stay and wreak “havoc among local populations” until 1571 (Newson 2009, 53) before leaving for Luzon.<sup>13</sup> The *Relation*, which narrates this journey, opens with a conventional greeting to King Philip II of Spain, positive commentaries about the good health of Legazpi and his men that confirm the expedition's success, and the explanation of the causes of a minor incident, namely the loss of the vessel “San Lucas” due to the pilot's treason. Immediately afterward, on the second page, begins a detailed description of the sailors' arrival at the Ladrones Islands and the mercantile exchanges that took place there (198) –a textual organization that stresses the importance of the financial dimension of the Spanish enterprise. Legazpi mentions the large number of natives that approached the crew and proceeds to make an inventory of the articles available: “potatoes, rice, yams, cocoa-nut, sugar-cane, excellent bananas, and several other kinds of fruit” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 198) –produce that, even if less valuable than precious metals, were greatly desired for the survival of the fleet members. He continues to refer to the abundant vegetation, with a greater emphasis on the economic lexical field: he points out in hyperbolic terms that ginger “grows in this island in so great quantity that it is a thing to wonder over”, and underscores the fact that no work is required, as it conveniently “comes up [...] of itself in the open fields” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 198) without the need to cultivate it –a clear allusion to the fertility of the land “discovered”. The Basque navigator then focuses on the commercial partners themselves. According to him, they are strong and of good stature, which is indicated by a comparison to the home country: they are “better proportioned than the Spaniards” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199), but definitely “savages” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199), since they “have no laws, or chiefs whom

12 Regarding the role of Christianity in the colonial Philippines, see Brewer (2004).

13 About the shifting limits of the Philippines and its ironic naming by the Spanish explorer Ruy López de Villalobos in ca. 1543, see Rafael (2000, 4-5).

to obey” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199). This latter statement (perhaps more akin to a cliché than the result of an acute observation) is contradicted later on with references to local kings and their customs.<sup>14</sup>

The similarities with Columbus's first representations of the New World are striking. Indeed, it is known that the intertwined economic and environmental<sup>15</sup> lexical fields, portrayal of the well-built indigenous people, frequent hyperboles, and analogies to what is “best” in Spain also appear in the Genovese's writings, as has been demonstrated by Beatriz Pastor (1988[1983], 33). For example, like Legazpi, he manifestly depicts the fertile vegetation in exalted terms, rendering it equivalent to that of the Old World: “And later [I noticed], near the said islet, groves of trees, the most beautiful that I saw and with their leaves as green as those of Castile in the months of April and May, and lots of water” (Columbus 1991[1492], 75-77). Moreover, in his famous *Letter to Luis de Santangel* (1493), the pecuniary connotations in the description of this vegetation may not be overlooked: “There are wonderful pine-groves, and very large plains of verdure, and there is honey, and many kinds of birds, and many various fruits. In the earth there are many mines of metals; and there is a population of incalculable nature” (Columbus 2003[1493], 264-265) –as if the workforce was anxiously waiting to labor for the King of Spain by extracting the territory's natural resources.

Other key paragraphs from Legazpi's texts could be mistaken for Columbus's accounts of his first voyage to America, mostly due to how the physical appearance of the natives is conceived in them. While the Genovese sailor notably asserts in the above-quoted October 11 entry of his diary that “[a]ll of them go around as naked as their mothers bore them; and the women also [...]. They are very well formed, with handsome bodies and good faces. Their hair [is] coarse –almost like the tail of a horse– and short” (1991[1492], 65-67), Legazpi's *Relación circunstanciada* (Legazpi et al. 1943[1565], 55)<sup>16</sup> declares the following:

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14 Linda E. Newson offers a detailed description of the chiefdoms and the social practices that were established in them at the time that Legazpi and his men reached the region (Newson 2009, 58-61).

15 Of course, this adjective is related to the natural landscape, not to an ecologically friendly vision.

16 Manuel Valdemoro firmly believes Legazpi is the main author of the *Relación circunstanciada de los acontecimientos y suceso del viaje y jornada que hizo el Armada de Su Majestad, de que fué por General el muy Illre. Señor Miguel López de Legazpi*... (hereafter cited as the *Relación circunstanciada*, not to be confused with the *Relation*), since he most likely dictated it to a scribe (Valdemoro 1943, 42).

They leave the body quite uncovered. They are tall, robust, well built, and apparently of great strength. The women, too, are very tall, and wear only a cord tied about the waist [...]. All the rest of the body is uncovered. Both men and women wear their hair, which is of a yellowish color, loose and long, gathering it up behind the head. (translated in Legazpi et al. 1911[1559-1568], 110)

Although the animalization of the aboriginal people is not as explicit in this fragment as in the remarks provided by Columbus, the same features are highlighted: their semi-nudity, their physical strength and beauty, and the length and color of their hair. These attributes are probably selected because the ethnic Other, to be “worthy” of being conquered (according to the colonizer’s perspective), is required to be both uncivilized and aesthetically attractive.

In *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*, the distinguished scholar Charles C. Mann confirms this link by tracing a continuum between the actions performed by Legazpi (accompanied by his highly experienced navigator Andrés de Urdaneta) and Columbus: “[T]ogether Legazpi and Urdaneta achieved what Colón failed to do: establish continual trade with China by sailing west. Another way to state their accomplishment would be to say that Legazpi and Urdaneta were to economics what Colón was to ecology: the origin, however inadvertent, of a great unification” (Mann 2011, 19). There is no doubt that this claim is quite accurate, but the relevance of the cultural aspects (besides the financial ones) that pertain to Legazpi’s trans-Pacific displacements should also be noted.

In this regard, a significant element borrowed from the chronicles of the New World is the terminology that reflects the richness of the cultural exchanges taking place between Spain, America, and Asia in the early modern era. The most patent examples are the terms “Indian”, employed on almost every page to name the inhabitants of the Philippines, and “Moros”, which was commonly used in Spain to refer to the Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Another word, “barbacoa” (Legazpi et al. 1943[1565], 61), derived from the Taíno language of the Caribbean, demonstrates the constant “traveling” of vocabulary (and its cultural connotations) from one context to the other. Moreover, such terms coexist with Filipino ones, such as “prau” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 210 and 211), a phenomenon that implies notable instances of hybridity.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the word “escaupiles” (Legazpi

17 It is known that “[p]rior to 1565, Muslim port communities had already established themselves north of Mindanao, in Mindoro, and in Luzon, principally in the Maynila region and in what is now the province of Pampanga” (Francia 2010, 58).

18 On the cross-cultural trade occurring in early modern Manila (between the natives,

1911[1565], 213) or “*escaupil*” in the singular—a corruption of the Nahuatl “*ichcaupilli*” meaning “a species of ancient Mexican armor”, according to footnote 97—is clear evidence that the Spanish invention of Asia was (at least partially) filtered by the representation of the natives of the New World, especially New Spain in this case.

As for the economic objectives mentioned by Mann, another important point that should be taken into account when considering his comment is that Legazpi's apparent success is tinged by the fact that he seldom writes about gaining concrete access to material riches. Indeed, the proximity of gold mines or exotic goods is frequently promised in a more distant land (Legazpi et al. 1911[1559-1568], 117; 1911[1565], 202; 1943[1565], 77), exactly like in the Columbian model. Furthermore, Legazpi does not hide other negative aspects, such as his expedition's dire “need of food” (Legazpi et al. 1911[1559-1568], 127), which recalls the “discourse of hunger” omnipresent in Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's famous account of his shipwreck off the coast of Florida, often translated as *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca* or *Castaways* (1542).

Other discursive models come to mind when analyzing the rhetorical strategies at work in Legazpi's texts. On the one hand, the Basque governor seemingly delivers messages of peace and protects the aboriginals whenever possible. He repeatedly resorts to “good treatment” to convert them into obedient vassals of the Spanish monarch, similar to the alleged behavior of many explorers, according to their own writings.<sup>19</sup> We must not forget that Philip II, as a result of the Valladolid debate (1550-1551), among other factors, supported bloodless conversions to Christianity instead of violent forms of conquest, and “[t]he Philippines would effectively be the testing ground for this more enlightened colonial policy” (Newson 2009, 6). On the other hand, when the harmonious ties are disrupted, Legazpi turns to a discourse reminiscent of Cortés's self-portrayal as just, industrious, efficient, loyal to the king, and respectful of the law—thus determined to punish the natives who commit acts of treason—as Pastor appropriately defines it (Pastor 1988[1983], chapter 2). Such a connection, however indirect, is not accidental, since Legazpi probably became familiar with the European rhetoric on the New World during his stay in New Spain between 1528 and 1564 while working in the financial department council and as the civil governor of Mexico City. For example, in the same manner that Cortés presented himself as “one of Your subjects and vassals” who strove “with all his bodily powers to extend Your Majesty's

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Spaniards, Chinese, and Japanese), see Tremml-Werner (2015).

19 See Las Casas (2004[1552]) and Hernández (2010[1555]).

realms and dominions in these parts” (Cortés 2001[1524], 333), Legazpi aimed to be “a very prudent and rigorously just man”, a strong-willed leader capable of making the right decisions and who induced “many of the natives to become vassals of your majesty” (Legazpi 1911[1567], 232). Also like Cortés, who did not hesitate to execute traitors (Cortés 2001[1522], 211) or burn towns (Cortés 2001[1522], 254), the Basque governor allegedly needed to deal with autochthonous people who committed “evil deeds” and hence deserved punishment. For instance, when some aboriginals randomly killed Spanish soldiers, their houses were immediately set on fire and they were sentenced to hanging (Legazpi et al. 1943[1565], 60, 75). Reminding us of Cortés’s passage on how he violently substituted “idols” with “images of Our Lady” (Cortés 2001[1520], 106), this emphasis on individual leadership is combined with allusions to the religious lexical field, which was evidently predominant in that period. Legazpi ends his narration with a reference to the importance of venerating “an image of the child Jesus” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 216).<sup>20</sup> Unsurprisingly, one may observe other manifestations of the religious discourse that is omnipresent in Legazpi’s writings, as in the chronicles of the New World,<sup>21</sup> especially in relation to how the crew was frequently saved by God: “On Holy Saturday [...] while we were thus plunged in great anxiety and grief, fearing that our companions might have been lost, captured, or killed”, they reappeared, looking “well and strong” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 210-211). At the end of the journey, the indigenous acts of resistance (in addition to the arduous physical conditions) were so intense that Legazpi begged for assistance, expressing what Homi K. Bhabha calls “colonial paranoia”, namely the eminent fear caused by the menace of the subaltern Other. Therefore, perceptible moments of insurrection reveal that the situation was not always placid, although these are often followed by impressions of awe with respect to local customs (for example, how the natives used canoes is recorded as “a thing to marvel at” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 110))<sup>22</sup> –an ambiguity that equally permeates the early accounts of America.<sup>23</sup>

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20 The Spanish actually called Cebu Santísimo Nombre de Jesús (Most Holy Name of Jesus) after this statue, which was given by Magellan to Rajah Humabon’s chief consort, Queen Juana (Francia 2010, 58).

21 See Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (2003[1542], 50), for instance.

22 It is interesting to note that the term “marvel”, when used referring to the Philippines, is almost as ubiquitous and polysemic as Stephen Greenblatt (1991) demonstrates it was in the context of the New World.

23 For example, in the complex Columbian model, although the material goal is often hypothetical, one may observe the concrete creation of an ideal world similar to the Garden of Eden.

Given these analogies, it seems logical to be convinced of the relevance of the notion of “connected histories”. During the same period that Columbus and Cortés were relying on a mixture of direct observation and preconceived models in an attempt to make sense of the New World they were encountering, Legazpi undertook the task of describing the residents of the Philippines by using similar mechanisms. In all of these cases, there is an ambivalent gaze toward the indigenous inhabitants –a combination of admiration and disdain– but the superiority of the Spanish subject (and consequent inferiority of the racial Other) is never put into question. It is also essential to stress that besides the connections outlined above, obvious divergences exist between the Basque governor’s writings and his probable textual predecessors.

## **SUBTLE POINTS OF DEPARTURE FROM EARLY ACCOUNTS OF THE NEW WORLD**

Among the few differences between Legazpi’s, Columbus’s, and Cortés’s texts is a minor issue that ruins the invention of what is now called the Philippines as an idyllic region: the manifest absence of a discourse of abundance, which was inherent in Columbus’s depiction of the Caribbean as a *locus amoenus* (“[...] all [hills and mountains] most beautiful in a thousand shapes, and all accessible, and full of trees of a thousand kinds, so lofty that they seem to reach the sky. And I am assured that they never lose their foliage; as may be imagined, since I saw them as green and as beautiful as they are in Spain during May” (Columbus 2003[1493], 264)). It was also a part of Cortés’s well-structured description of New Spain’s squares “where every kind of merchandise produced in these lands is found” (Cortés 2001[1520], 103). Indeed, in Legazpi’s documents, the brief allusions to the fertility of the land (associated with the selflessness of the local people) are progressively overshadowed by a bleaker vision. For instance, despite their “discovery” of “large, beautiful, and fertile open fields” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 214), the soldiers could only obtain “a small quantity of gold, wax, cinnamon, and other things” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 210). In contrast to the exaltation of America’s endless natural resources –“a thousand kinds of trees” (Columbus 1991[1492], 111), “every sort of vegetable”, and “many sorts of fruit” (Cortés 2001[1520], 104)– Legazpi laments that these were limited. In this sense, the diminutive “illas” of “cosillas” used in the *Relación circunstanciada* (Legazpi et al. 1943[1565], 55) serves to emphatically highlight the scarcity of material

supplies (mostly food provisions) and hence arouse emotion through the trope of pathos –a strategy that proved successful, since the Basque governor received an allocation of *encomiendas* from the Crown in 1568 (Newson 2009, 6) and the title of *Adelantado* of the Ladrones Islands the following year.

Another point of departure from Columbus’s letters is the fact that the presumed generosity of the indigenous peoples the Admiral encountered is replaced by the ubiquitous term “contract” (“contrato” and the verb “contratar” in the *Relación circunstanciada*), indicating that pragmatic commercial exchanges must be fair in the negotiation of new social interactions. Whereas Columbus happily affirms in his diary’s entry of October 11, 1492 that “they gave everything for anything that was given to them” (Columbus 1991[1492], 71),<sup>24</sup> the inhabitants of “Çubu” (Cebu) often attempted to sell their goods at the highest price possible. It soon became clear that most of the trading activities were no longer advantageous to the Spaniards due to the elevated costs in relation to the modest gains: “Some of them [the natives] gave [...] a certain amount of rice and other food, but nothing whatsoever through which his majesty has derived any profit –on the contrary, a large amount of gold has been paid out for the provisions aforesaid” (Legazpi in Riquel 1911[1568], 253). For this reason, the expedition members almost always offered to purchase the food (and even the slaves) they received.

In addition, a difference that arises from direct observation is the playful atmosphere that Legazpi summarizes thus: “In these transactions many ridiculous things happened” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 198). According to him, an “Indian” played tricks on the Spaniards by filling up rice packages with “straw and stones”, which made him “laugh long and loud” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199). Although this “jest” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199) is amusing and its retelling may be intended to entertain the reader, the tone of the *Relation* is sometimes more condemning regarding this kind of practice: the natives are treated as “thieves” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199) and “treacherous” beings (Legazpi 1911[1565], 202)<sup>25</sup> –two attributes that undeniably serve to justify their domination in this narrative about the Spanish settlement in the Philippines. Therefore, the people Legazpi

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24 Here is another famous example: he “gave red caps, and glass beads which they put on their chests, and many other things of small value, in which they took so much pleasure and became so much our friends that it was a marvel” (Columbus 1991[1492], 65).

25 For a complete study of the Filipino reaction to the Spanish conquest, see Phelan (1967) and Thomas (2014).

characterizes are not as innocent as Columbus presented them,<sup>26</sup> but more similar to Cortés's allusions to the alleged "treacherous" acts committed by the aboriginals (Cortés 2001[1522], 184, for example).

Coexisting with these problematic issues, a few happy moments occurred during Legazpi's travels around the Philippine Islands. He maintained concrete relationships with the regional royalty, as was the case of the (apparently) cordial alliances created with the kings Çigala and Tupas, among others –relationships that seem to have been more successful than those reported in the accounts of Columbus or Cortés.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, a particularly extraordinary event is mentioned in his writings: the ceremony of bleeding known as the "Legazpi-Sikatuna blood compact". This quintessential social contract has inspired numerous cultural representations over the centuries, such as Napoleón Abueva's sculpture (1997) located in Bohol where the celebration took place, as well as many critical studies. The anecdote is corroborated by contemporary historians like Luis H. Francia: "Seeking, as Magellan did, to strengthen his alliance with local datos, Legazpi entered into a blood compact in March 1565 with two chiefs of Bohol Island, Datu Sikatuna and Datu Sigala. It was a move precipitated by the fact that two years earlier [...] the Portuguese had, under the guise of friendship, plundered Bohol" (Francia 2010, 58). It is thus evident that this act, rather than an innocent ratification of "friendship", was an astute strategy to gain the trust of the native leaders.

The ritual is described in the *Relación circunstanciada* in the following terms:

[W]hen the blood of all three was drawn it was mixed in some wine, which was poured into three glasses, [...] and all three drank it at the same time, a portion for each one; and after this ceremony the Governor told them he wanted to open his heart to them so that they could understand the great goods that their friendship would bring them all and how much His Majesty loved them.<sup>28</sup> (Legazpi et al. 1943[1565], 100)

26 As Pastor suggests, "(t)he features of this first characterization that the Admiral creates in his *Diary of the First Voyage* are: naked/poor/without arms/generous/not aggressive/cowards" (Pastor 1988[1983], 54) [My translation of "[l]os rasgos de esta primera caracterización que el Almirante crea en su *Diario del primer viaje* son: desnudos/pobres/sin armas/generosos/no agresivos/cobardes"].

27 It should be noted that Moctezuma seemed far more suspicious and evasive (see Cortés 2001[1520], 47-159).

28 My translation of "[S]acada la sangre de todos tres se revolvió en un poco de vino, el cual se echó en tres vasos, [...] y lo bebieron todos tres, á la par, cada uno su parte; y fecha esta ceremonia el Gobernador les dijo, que les quería descubrir su corazón para que entendiesen los grandes bienes que de su amistad a todos les vernia y lo mucho que Su Majestad los queria".

This episode seems to be the confirmation that the aboriginals' "sins" were forgiven, and peace was guaranteed due to a nascent agreement that supposedly benefited all parties. Moreover, the mixing of blood from the three men (who came from different ethnic backgrounds) in a single vessel as well as the role that each of them played imply that they should all have been treated as equal; indeed, the text insists on the communal actions of the participants ("the blood of all three was removed", "all three drank it at the same time"). In addition, the hybridity (or mixture, i.e., "mélange", to use a term favored by Gruzinski) of the passage is enhanced by the fact that this celebration is often praised for being based on a native practice and is currently considered "a founding myth [...] of Filipino nationhood" (Aguilar 2010, 83). However, it must be stressed that this social contract was also negotiated to solidify the control of the Spaniards: the emphasis on the sharing of blood in an act of communion, the offering and drinking of wine, and the presence of three members (recalling the Holy Trinity) implicitly turn this local tradition into a Catholic ritual capable of demonstrating the union between God and Hispanic imperialism. On a more pragmatic level, it allowed the Spaniards to "establish, in the name of the king of *Castile*, a commerce between his vassals" and the inhabitants of the archipelago (Burney 1969, 265). It is important to add that this pact was seemingly "sacred" (Legazpi 1911[1565], 201). Regarding such inviolability, the conquistador Miguel de Loarca affirms that "[r]econciliation between those who have quarreled, whether these are individuals or the people of different villages, is brought about by drawing blood from the arms of both parties, and each tasting the blood of the other, placed in a shell, sometimes mixed with a little wine; and such friendship is not to be broken" (Loarca 2005[1582], 156). Nonetheless, the alliance was not respected for long and this was precisely the excuse Martín de Goiti, the master-of-camp, provided to justify the Spanish occupation of the region in the "Act of Taking Possession of Luzon" (June 6, 1570) transcribed by the witness Hernando Riquel, chief government notary: "[H]aving [Legazpi] made peace and drawn his blood with two chiefs [...] the above said chiefs began war treacherously and unexpectedly [...]. He, in order to guard himself from the injury which the said Moros were doing him in starting the war, [...] attacked the said fort of the Moros, and captured it by force of arms and is now in possession of it [...] in his Majesty's name" (Goiti and Riquel 1911[1570], 85-86). It is manifest that the military lexical field and allusions to the use of violence by the Spaniards were viewed as perfectly legitimate when they served to underscore the troop's loyal service to the king.

Therefore, the alleged equality between Legazpi and his new allies did not prevent the implementation of a “coloniality of power”, the fundamental concept coined to define the ideology that permeates most chronicles of the New World, and which is still relevant today despite the official demise of colonialism in Latin America. Such a mentality –characterized by the creation of social hierarchies structured around the notion of race– may be observed throughout Legazpi’s writings where the explicit classification that is set in place is based on ethnicity and religion. Not only the “Moros” (who are represented as evil intermediaries) but also the “Indians” are considered inferior and accused of being “fickle and treacherous” people who should surrender to the Spanish monarch (Legazpi 1911[1567], 236). It comes as no surprise that historical data corroborate the idea that armed violence was employed to dominate the Other, resulting in “inevitable bloodbaths” (Francia 2010, 61). For example, the Muslim ruler Rajah Sulaiman (or Sulaiman) and his men were defeated on June 3, 1572 (Francia 2010, 59),<sup>29</sup> an event that allowed the Spaniards to take full possession of Maynila (thereafter called Manila) and expel its previous residents (Francia 2010, 59).<sup>30</sup>

In the same vein, Legazpi makes clear that he does not truly believe that the *datus* are comparable to him by suggesting that strategies to maintain peace are not solely grounded on good intentions. It is undeniable that avoiding conflict with the natives means much more to the governor than not hurting them: “[I]f we should make war upon these people, I think that great harm would ensue, but little advantage would be gained, and we should suffer hardships [...]. By the blessing of peace, we have succeeded in attracting into the obedience of your majesty many towns” (Legazpi 1911[1567-1568], 236). In other words, truce and apparent harmony facilitated the process of colonization by helping the Spaniards to both protect themselves and convert the aboriginals. Nevertheless, this strategy did not impede the conquerors from preparing for an eventual attack; two lines below, Legazpi advocates for the construction of a fortification in order to better control the Other, referring once more to the military lexical field: “[A]s these people are fickle [...] and know not how to obey or serve, we ought to have here a fort and a number of Spaniards, who by good treatment might restrain them and make them understand what justice is” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 206-207). Needless to say, this “justice”

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29 It is interesting to note that in 1991 the Rajah Sulaiman Movement was founded to reestablish the Islamic government in the Philippines.

30 Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that the system of destruction of aboriginal cultures associated with Quijano’s notion is merely at its initial stage in Legazpi’s corpus.

was defined on the colonizer's terms and imposed by coercion.

All of these arguments lead us to conclude that despite the alleged pact of friendship between Legazpi and the local chiefs, social relationships between different ethnic groups in such a colonial context were rarely egalitarian. Indeed, Newson convincingly argues that the Spanish conquest of the Philippines was much more bloody than is generally accepted by historians:<sup>31</sup> although the estimated decline in native population of 42.1 percent between 1565 and 1600 is questionable (Newson 2009, 78), “the ravages wrought by Spanish soldiers in their desperate search for provisions were highly destructive of life and property and disrupted subsistence activities and family life”, in addition to “occasional epidemics, often combined with food shortages, which resulted in high mortality” (Newson 2009, 79).

This is why it is essential to insist on the disparities that are inherent in coloniality and sometimes hide behind more politically correct labels, as discussed by the remarkable Filipino theorist Epifanio San Juan Jr., who reminds us that “[i]n the world-system of historical capitalism, the relations between peoples and nation-states have been characterized by inequalities at all levels. [...] If one rejects (as postcolonialists would) this metanarrative of ‘uneven development’, then how is comparatist study feasible?” (San Juan 1998, 57-58). Notwithstanding the fact that this radical claim regarding postcolonialism is debatable, the crucial dissimilarities mentioned here are evident in Legazpi's narrative as they guide the actions of the Spaniards whose main goals were to obtain material goods and subject the autochthonous population to the rule of King Philip II – whether by “good treatment” (hence the blood compact) or sheer violence.

## GLOBAL RAMIFICATIONS

As trans-Pacific displacements were inevitably accomplished both ways (to and from Asia), the impact that Legazpi's writings had in New Spain

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31 For instance, Carlos Quirino states that “[h]istorians have pointed out the undeniable fact that his conquest of the Philippines was relatively mild and humane, when compared to those of Hernán Cortés or Francisco Pizarro, because he preferred to treat the inhabitants of the islands with humanity and use more tact and diplomacy than the mesh glove” (Quirino 1964, 251) [My translation of “[l]os historiadores han señalado el hecho incontestable que su conquista de las Filipinas fue relativamente suave y humana, si se compara con las de Hernán Cortés o de Francisco Pizarro, porque prefirió tratar con humanidad a los naturales de las islas y usar más el tacto y la diplomacia que el guante de malla”].

needs to be taken into account –let us not forget that this viceroyalty administered the Philippines from 1565 to 1821. An illustrative example of the significant repercussions of Legazpi's travels can be found in the *Copy of a Letter Sent from Sevilla to Miguel Salvador of Valencia* (1566; hereafter cited as *Letter from Sevilla*), a text that celebrates “the fortunate discovery made by Mexicans” (221).<sup>32</sup> Given that the purpose of this letter was to praise those who were involved in the exploration of the Philippines, none of the unfavorable aspects that were included in the Basque governor's documents (the physical hardships and the scarcity of profitable commodities, such as gold and spices) were reported –a strategy that explicitly constructs a (quasi) utopian representation of Legazpi's expedition.<sup>33</sup> To consolidate this portrayal, the author chooses to focus on the elements that were part of Columbus's and Cortés's positive value judgments:

Among others is a region so rich in gold, that the amount is beyond estimation. And there is so great abundance of cinnamon that it is burned instead of wood by those people, who are as luxurious as those of Spain. They have a king there who has a constant body-guard of one thousand men, and who is esteemed so highly that none of his subjects see his face oftener than once a year. [...] These people are quite advanced. They possess brocaded and silken fabrics of many different kinds. [...] Moros frequent that district in ships for purposes of trade [with the natives]. (anonymous 1911[1566], 227-228)

Indeed, as in Columbus's account, the references to wealth are full of hyperboles (“so rich in gold”, “beyond estimation”, “so great abundance”) and accompanied by comparisons to the Old World (“as luxurious as those of Spain”). Undoubtedly, such allusions to Spain serve not only to help the reader imagine the newly “discovered” land by equating it with a known territory, but also to show the potential of Cebu to become a “civilized” area, worthy to be further explored. Immediately afterward, the narrator emphasizes elements that were absent from the Admiral's narration, though omnipresent in Cortés's *Second Letter*:<sup>34</sup> the existence of a king who is greatly respected by his people and hence praiseworthy in the eyes of the European readership; the presence of “advanced”

32 Laura Lee Junker asserts that the author of this letter is Antonio Sevilla (Junker 1999, 453), although most researchers agree that Sevilla (Seville) is actually the city from which the document was sent (see Romero de Solís 2011, 167).

33 However, it is obvious that the writer is familiar with Legazpi's *Relation*, since he implicitly refers to it on several occasions (anonymous 1911[1566], 223, 225).

34 I am aware that Cortés's letters form a very heterogeneous corpus, but the second one is emblematic of the canonical representation of New Spain.

individuals who are capable of producing a variety of prized goods, such as “fabrics”; and the performance of “trade”, an activity that demonstrates the natives’ *civilitas* and elevated status. In sum, the schemas that were slightly destabilized with Legazpi –for example, when he deplored shortcomings and the lack of certain items– are reinstated in the *Letter from Sevilla*.

To be exact, such criteria are themselves borrowed from ancient Greco-Roman thought, and in this case, Marco Polo’s later depictions contained in his best-selling *Book of the Marvels of the World* (ca. 1300).<sup>35</sup> For instance, in chapters XII and XIII of Book II he carefully describes all the protocols established to honor the “Great Kaan” (whom Columbus was so interested in meeting), which all exhibit a large degree of civility and social coherence, as well as the incredible fortune this emperor possessed: “[T]he Great Kaan has such a quantity of this kind of plate, and of gold and silver in other shapes, as no one ever before saw or heard tell of, or could believe” (Polo 2010[ca. 1300], 339). In the same manner, in chapters XXVII and XXVIII of Book III he presents magnificent kingdoms whose inhabitants (although “idolaters”) were involved in trading valuable goods, like incense, copper, and gold. Polo thus makes clear that for a people to be “civilized”, their society needs to be organized, respectful of hierarchy, and full of riches available to be exchanged – norms that would constitute the basis of the Columbian and Cortesian models.

Considering that these qualities were present in the territories explored by Legazpi, the author of the *Letter from Sevilla* leaves no doubt in his conclusion: “This is a great and very important achievement; and the people of Mexico are very proud of their discovery, which they think will make them the center of the world” (anonymous 1911[1566], 231). Besides the fact that it is evident that Legazpi’s reception was highly enthusiastic, what is noteworthy in this statement is that “the people of Mexico” as a whole appropriated the governor’s exploit: not only was it gratifying for this nation (from which Legazpi set sail, accompanied by his grandson Juan de Salcedo, Martín de Goiti, and other conquistadors from New Spain), but it also enhanced its significance on a global scale.

This is not the first time that New Spain is represented as a utopian microcosm built on what it has gained from other parts of the world, such as Asia and Europe. Indeed, the above-mentioned praise is reminiscent of Bernardo de Balbuena’s embellished depictions in *Grandeza Mexicana*

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35 Among the numerous editions, the one I will quote is titled *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian: Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*.

## (Mexican Grandeur [1614]):

Cloths from Cambrai and from Quinsay ransom,  
 Coral from Sicily and from Syria nard,  
 Incense from Arabia, and from Ormuz garnets;  
 Diamonds from India and from proud  
 Scita purple rubies and fine emeralds, [...]
   
 From Spain the best, from the Philippines  
 The finest, from Macón the most precious, [...]
   
 In short, the world's finest, the best  
 Of all that is known and produced,  
 Here abounds, is sold and is affordable.<sup>36</sup> (Balbuena 1614, 60)

It should be stressed that these famous stanzas share many points in common with the *Letter from Sevilla*, since here, too, New Spain's splendor is (partly) due to its relationship with the Philippines and other Asian or European lands. Specifically, they recall the "best" that these areas contained –mostly material commodities ("cloths", "incense", and "diamonds", to enumerate but a few) that were purchasable at a reasonable price. All these details (namely, the type of articles and references to trade) convey the sense that the exotic cultural allusions included in Balbuena's poem were probably inspired by accounts similar to Legazpi's.

This is thus another emblematic example of the "mixed worlds" that fascinate Gruzinski: in this local projection of globalization, Mexico feeds itself on regional particularities from Spain, Asia, and other parts of Spanish America. A relevant aspect to keep in mind is that when such cultural singularities coincide, they reconfigure ideologies that are predominant on the international arena. Mignolo aptly explains this kind of negotiation in his definition of the "colonial difference":

The colonial difference is the space where local histories inventing and implementing global designs meet local histories, the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored. [...] Christian and Native American cosmologies [...] only enact dichotomies when you look at them one at a time, not when you compare them in the geohistorical confines of the modern/colonial world system. (Mignolo 2000, XXV)

This quote helps us better understand the process at work when cultural tendencies converge in Balbuena's stanzas or in writings based on Legazpi's

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36 This translation is found in Earle (2003, 14).

travels in Asia—a process that undermines established notions and simplistic binaries. The network of “connected histories” succeeds in “re-mapping” the global sphere by placing the Mexican nation at the center of the world, hence displacing the axis of power, since Spain (fictionally) loses its privileged status as soon as its products are considered equivalent to those of other territories in terms of value.

Legazpi’s legacy is also undeniable beyond the written page. Thanks to the Manila galleons, for instance, he created an immense web of economic, religious, and cultural connections that are part of “globalization’s origins” (Mann 2011, 19). This trade route, nevertheless, had varying impacts. On the one hand, from the Spanish perspective, Manila prospered: “[I]hat city has flourished as much as the best of all the cities in those regions” (Morga 2004[1609], 337). Further, the links between many geographical areas were consolidated, a phenomenon that Andre Gunder Frank describes in the following manner: “[I]he Europeans *bought* themselves a seat, and then even a whole railway car, on the Asian train” (Frank 1998, 277)—actions that made possible the rise of the West. On the other hand, it facilitated trans-Pacific slave trade (see Seijas 2014, 75), had fatal consequences for the Philippines at the human and ecological levels, and opened the way to the “Homogenocene”; that is, a biological era in which “unlike substances [...] create a uniform blend” (Mann 2011, 17).<sup>37</sup>

Other “connected histories” would later develop between the Philippines and Hispanic culture. To mention a few, a Chinese-Filipino printer at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Tomas Pinpin, taught the principles of Spanish to his partners who only spoke their native language and published, among other manuscripts, the *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* (Art and Rules of the Tagalog Language [1610]) by Francisco Blancas de San José, “the most comprehensive codification of the Tagalog language” (Rafael 2005[1988], 26-27). Some bilingual authors, like the poet and translator Gaspar Aquino de Belén, produced religious poems in tagalog. The famous newspaper *La Solidaridad* (published in Barcelona from 1889 to 1895) was an efficient tool for the promotion of Filipino independence, and José Rizal’s distinguished works—especially *Noli me tangere* (1887)—had a considerable repercussion on the Spanish readership for denouncing the abuses of colonialism and complementing the well-known documents about this territory written by European explorers and historians, such as Antonio de Morga. It is crucial to emphasize that Legazpi’s hybrid depictions are merely a starting point in the set of complex discourses

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37 On the effects of the Manila-Acapulco galleons, see also Valdés Lakowsky (1985).

that appear in these heterogeneous narratives.

## CONCLUSIONS

Legazpi does not explicitly refer to Columbus, Cortés, or other chroniclers of the New World in his writings. However, the similarities between these and those of his probable textual predecessors reveal that if the early accounts of America are not actual “models”, they clearly resonate in his representation of the Philippines. The most striking instances that evidence a certain cultural relationship are the terms that were originally used to identify the natives of what we now call Latin America –“Indians”– and the vocabulary that belongs to an ancient Mexican context –“*escaupiles*” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 213)– which Legazpi must have learned during his stay in New Spain. There are more subtle points in common: for example, like Columbus, the Basque governor intertwines the environmental and economic lexical fields to show that the “discovered” land is full of potential (to the degree that it becomes a cliché) and comparable to Spain, although the concrete goal –spices and precious metals– is always postponed, imagined, and out of reach. The manner in which both authors portray the indigenous peoples they encounter is also equivalent: according to them, they have powerful, vigorous bodies and are almost endowed with the characteristics of animals –ambiguous descriptions that present the Other as both physically admirable and morally inferior, and therefore serve to justify the Spanish conquest. As for their behavior, they are sometimes “treacherous” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 202; 1911[1567], 236) and mischievous individuals who must be civilized by the Cortesian model of the conqueror, namely a leader who is tirelessly faithful to the king, devoted to financial gain, and dedicated to bringing the Catholic faith to the lands he visits –a model that explains the religious leitmotifs.

Therefore, in Legazpi's texts, as a result of his firsthand observations, the “Indians” do not fit into the category of the Noble Savage that was predominant in Columbus's diary and letters. Though they are allegedly “savages” (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199), they are definitely not as innocent and generous. Moreover, in the scenes of trade, an unusual element arises: the laughter of the natives, who by playing tricks on the Spaniards (Legazpi 1911[1565], 199) somewhat destabilize the colonial discourse and prove that they too possess a sort of agency. There even seems to occur a moment of “equal” power relations between the Europeans and the local chiefs, notably during the apparently successful encounter with Sikatuna

and other lords. In this episode, the peaceful negotiation of a social contract is supposedly much less violent than the meetings between the Spanish conquistadors and Moctezuma (who was imprisoned immediately after his meeting with Cortés) or Atahualpa (who was slaughtered in the battle of Cajamarca –one of the reasons why it has been idealized as the first treaty of friendship between the Spaniards and the Filipinos. However, it does not succeed in erasing the inequalities between the Basque explorer and the Asian *datus*, or the ethnic Other in general (and, by extension, the Spanish empire and its Pacific colonies). As I mentioned, the ravaging damages caused by the Spanish conquerors in the Philippines have been clearly demonstrated by Newson’s research.

Such discursive differences may be attributed to the particular purposes of the selected documents and their contexts. In short, while Columbus and Cortés sought to confirm that their undertakings were successful (the former, to show a profit on the Crown’s investment, and the latter, to convert his treason into royal service, mostly in his *Second Letter*), Legazpi needed to underscore the obstacles encountered in order to receive material support. In addition, a few decades after the first explorations of the New World, his gaze would not have appeared credible if it had been as idealistic as in the Columbian portrayal of the earthly Garden of Eden or Cortés’s representation of a perfect Tenochtitlan. Also unlike Cortés, he could not describe the splendors of an immense empire in a pragmatic and ordered style. As Newson explains, the Philippine reality was distinct: “[B]y the time the Spanish arrived, Visayan society was undergoing a process of significant change. Like much of Southeast Asia, the political landscape of the Visayas was one of scattered small polities” (Newson 2009, 58) –a patent contrast to the monumental realm of Moctezuma.

It is also important to note that Legazpi’s writings were favorably received in the New World. The account of his expedition in the anonymous *Letter from Sevilla* recalls the impressive depictions of riches in Marco Polo’s masterpiece at the same time that it announces and expands the complex network of “connected histories” between Spain, America, and Asia that has continued to grow until today. In sum, the present article has contributed to shed new light on the field of Hispanic colonial studies by broadening it and suggesting that there is still much to explore with respect to the Spanish discursive invention of Asia, especially in this global age that finds some of its roots in colonial encounters such as the ones analyzed here.

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