

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

<Book Review>

Irene Villaescusa Illán

Axel Gasquet and Rocío Ortuño Casanova, eds. *Transnational Philippines: Cultural Encounters in Philippine Literature in Spanish*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024.

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1, April 2025, pp. 204-208.

How to Cite: Villaescusa Illán, Irene. Review of *Transnational Philippines: Cultural Encounters in Philippine Literature in Spanish* edited by Axel Gasquet and Rocío Ortuño Casanova. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, April 2025, pp. 204-208. DOI: 10.20495/seas.14.1_204.

Link to this book review:

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2025/04/vol-14-no-1-book-reviews-irene-villaescusa-illan/>

View the table of contents for this issue:

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2025/04/vol-14-no-1-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

Subscriptions: <https://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

For permissions, please send an e-mail to:

english-editorial[at]cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp



Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

References

- Bray, Joe and Evans, Ruth. 2007. Introduction: What Is Textual Culture? *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation* 2(2): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.2979/tex.2007.2.2.1>.
- Calasso, Giovanna and Lancioni, Giuliano. 2017. *Dār Al-Islām/Dār al-Ḥarb: Territories, People, Identities*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. <https://brill.com/display/title/33828>, accessed November 11, 2024.
- Johns, A. H. 1996. In the Language of the Divine: The Contribution of Arabic. In *Illuminations: Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, edited by Ann Kumar and John H. McGlynn, pp. 33–48. Jakarta: Weatherhill.
- Kooria, Mahmood. 2022. *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shafi'i Texts across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean*. Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106825>.
- . 2019. Languages of Law: Islamic Legal Cosmopolis and Its Arabic and Malay Microcosmoi. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29(4): 705–722. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186319000191>.
- Prange, Sebastian R. 2018. *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast*. Cambridge Oceanic Histories. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108334860>.
- Ricci, Ronit. 2011. *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*. South Asia across the Disciplines. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Transnational Philippines: Cultural Encounters in Philippine Literature in Spanish

AXEL GASQUET and ROCÍO ORTUÑO CASANOVA, eds.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024.

Readers, students, and scholars interested in Southeast Asian literature will be gifted with an unusual account of the history of the Philippines born from an exploration of works written in Spanish about the Philippines and by Filipino authors. Taken together, the 12 chapters of *Transnational Philippines* reveal the logic of colonial and postcolonial ideologies, the processes of assimilation and emancipation, the entanglement of the Philippines in global networks of trade and culture, and the impact of these on the literary traditions that followed the encounters among Spain, Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico, the United States, and the Chinese and Japanese peoples in the Philippines. The breadth of the book's temporal scope (from the sixteenth century to the Japanese occupation in World War II) and the diversity of the textual genres examined (missionary chronicles, travelogues, poems, essays, novels, and short stories) provide a fundamental historical overview of the subject and a compelling argument for understanding the Philippines as a transnational space.

This volume expands on existing works dedicated to the analysis of transnational aspects of Filipino culture, such as Denise Cruz's study of the construction of Filipino femininity through cultural contact across the Pacific in what she calls the "transpacific filipina" (*Transpacific Femi-*

nities: The Making of the Modern Filipina, 2012) and Irene Villaescusa Illán's understanding of Filipino nationalism in literature written in Spanish as a transcultural phenomenon that explains the national and international entanglements that shaped this literary tradition in the early twentieth century (*Transcultural Nationalism in Hispanofilipino Literature*, 2020). The major contribution of *Transnational Philippines* to the field of Hispano-Filipino studies as a transcultural space is its refusal to understand the textual production of Philippine literature written in Spanish according to conventional literary genres and within the boundaries of national literatures.

The volume contributes to several fields at whose intersections it comfortably stands: Spanish Asian studies, the global Hispanophone, transpacific studies, and Global South studies. Moreover, the book succeeds in breaking down the rigid categories of national and even world literatures: the former is disrupted by the book's consideration of the post/colonial context of the Philippine tradition between empires—the Spanish and the US-American—in literature written in Spanish; and the latter by questioning the dynamics between a presumed center (peninsular Spain) and other peripheries (Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico) in the production of what has been called the Hispanic Philippines. More important to this reviewer is the book's break with the dichotomy of Hispanism into peninsular and Latin American fields of study, as stated in the introduction. This rupture in the field opens up new questions and forms of inquiry that destabilize the canon and seek to diversify existing and dominant perspectives on Spanish colonialism and Hispanic studies.

In order to break with the existing geopolitical categories of Hispanic studies, the book's editors—Axel Gasquet and Rocío Ortuño Casanova—approach the corpus from a post-national perspective that aims to overcome the constraints imposed by national borders, linguistic boundaries, and generic categories (p. 7). The chapters demonstrate a fair attempt to question what constitutes a literary text and to suggest new ways of understanding it. What can we learn from reading travelogues, chronicles, and memoirs as fiction or as examples of life writing? The affordances of (discursive and comparative) close readings of missionary chronicles and state decrees, for example, challenge official histories and show what John D. Blanco rightly points out: that “the crown and the church agreed to *represent* the conquest” (p. 32) rather than retell it. The volume shows how hybrid genres such as biographies, letters, essays, opinion columns, folklore, and travel books are exemplary case studies in literature, alongside the novel, for understanding the social microcosms that national imaginaries create and for challenging dominant colonial histories with nuanced literary analysis.

More specifically, the three chapters that appear in Part 1, “The Transnational Grounds of Philippine Literature in Spanish,” are crucial to understanding the extent to which religion, language, and commerce were intertwined in the Spanish colonial administration of the Philippines. Blanco's chapter shows how the Spanish administration and the Church deliberately modeled the discourse of the “spiritual context” from conquest to pacification of the territory. Paula C. Park argues that contact between the “peripheries”—Mexico and the Philippines—created a sense of

belonging to a global Hispanic community. Finally, Marlon James Sales suggests that linguistic contact created a new language for Filipino expression that is not only a form of untranslatable translanguaging but is cognitively mediated by a perpetual state of translation.

In Part 2, “The (Re-)Conquest of History,” Ana M. Rodríguez-Rodríguez, Luis Castellví Laukamp, and Rocío Ortuño Casanova cross the fine line that separates fiction, myth, and history in canonical texts. Rodríguez-Rodríguez exposes the bias of Francisco de Combes’s *Historia de Mindanao y Joló* (History of Mindanao and Jolo) (1897) and shows the complexity of the relationship between Christian and Muslim encounters in the context of the Philippines, where the alterity of the *indio* is replaced by that of the *moro*. Castellví Laukamp argues that one of the earliest chronicles of the Philippines, written by the Spaniard Pedro Chirino, should be understood as a form of *Christian marvellous* (through fairy tales and utopian images of natural resources and people) consciously echoing Alejo Carpentier’s *lo real maravilloso* (magical realism). Crucially, Castellví Laukamp shows how Chirino’s marvellous accounts were criticized by the *ilustrados*, thus pointing to the existence of a sophisticated literary genealogy that rewrote history according to the inevitable ideological shifts that occurred across centuries. This is also what Ortuño Casanova shows with a focus on the turn of the twentieth century through the different representations of the legend of the Chinese pirate Li-Mahong in the work of Isabelo de los Reyes, Cecilio Apostol, and Antonio Abad, which construct and deconstruct the figure of the (Chinese) pirate either as the invasive “yellow peril” or as a romantic hero embodying ideals of freedom that echo other Hispanic and Western traditions.

Part 3, “Modernity and Globalization,” includes two articles that show how music and folklore are dynamic practices that not only reproduce and maintain local and indigenous traditions and practices of hearing and seeing the world through various cosmovisions but also help to capture the hybridity and agency of people in creating their own. More specifically, Kristina A. Escondo’s reading of the works of De los Reyes and Adelina Gurra as folklore reveals the interventions of these writers as transcultural agents. Escondo shows how these authors’ preoccupation with representing old and new (pre- and postcolonial) practices of everyday life as folklore produced two types of texts: ethnographic essays (De los Reyes conceived of folklore as an anthropological science) and short stories that captured oral traditions. meLê yamomo’s chapter in this section explores how journalism and literature were spaces for auditory and musical experiences (he even discusses concrete examples of musical references in José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* [Touch me not]) to argue that they served to create a “listening public sphere in globalizing Manila” (p. 176).

Part 4, “Anti-colonial Writings in the Colonial Language,” shows the consolidation of the Spanish language as an anticolonial tool that served, on the one hand, to shape—through metaphors of the body and health—the narratives of nation and migration shared by the Puerto Rican author José Julian de Acosta, the Cuban José Martí, and the Filipino Trinidad Pardo de Tavera (Ernest Rafael Hartwell), and, on the other, to return the colonial gaze to Spain in the travelogue of the

Filipino *ilustrado* Antonio Luna on his travels to the metropolis (Cristina Guillén Arnáiz). Drawing on philosophy, Hartwell extends the concept of biopolitics to these post/colonial contexts as a way of historicizing the concept; the chapter puts the Foucauldian concept in dialogue with what can be understood as its Latin American counterpart: Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power. Hartwell argues, through three case studies, that processes of migration between colonized territories occur both as assimilation and as disruption of the national body by a migrant subject who is a laboring body (*brazo*), a spiritual patriot (*de corazón*), or a forked tongue (*lengua*). In the same section, Guillén Arnáiz's chapter furthers the debate on the subversive potential of resisting language-cultures, specifically by highlighting Luna's sharp tongue (in Filipino Spanish) to describe Spain and the Spaniards in *Impresiones* (Impressions) (1891). In line with one of the aims of the book, Guillén Arnáiz shows how travel writing functions not only as a lens through which others may be seen, but also as a form of autoethnographic writing in which "the Filipino colonial subject, always observed, takes on the voice of the narrator" (p. 220).

In Part 5, "Narratives of the Self and World War II," the final two chapters arrive at the Japanese occupation of the Philippines to complete the book's timeline and to explore the porous genres of travel writing and testimony as forms of life writing. David R. George Jr.'s nuanced close reading of Antonio Pérez de Olaguer's travelogues successfully demonstrates that the identity of traveler/narrator is not a stable category that produces one or the other, but a constant exercise in entering and leaving different identities. Supporting his case study, George complicates the idea of Hispano-Filipino identity written with a hyphen by wondering about another form of identitarian split represented with a slash: Spanish/Filipino. Sony Coráñez Bolton adds a final argument to understand the significance of textual production in Spanish at the end of the colonial period, culminating in the horrific genocide of World War II. The argument is that José Reyes's book *Terrorismo y Redención* (Terrorism and redemption) (1947) "saves Philippine modernity from Japanese occupation, but also secures the morality of a US imperialism as saviour and legitimate executor of rational violence through atomic science" (p. 280). For this reviewer, the significance of this last chapter lies in its recognition of gender violence, with a section devoted to the role of Filipino women during the war (as subjects of care—nurses—but also as objects of comfort for Japanese soldiers). The parallels that Coráñez Bolton draws between the representation of gender violence in Reyes's testimony and Catholic martyrdom are fascinating. This leads me to comment on what are, in my opinion, two absences in the book: a careful consideration of women's writing (which is nonetheless advanced in the introduction) and of the intersections of gender and colonialism, with the exception of Coráñez Bolton's chapter and occasional references within other chapters.

In conclusion, this edited volume challenges Eurocentric perspectives on Hispanic studies and offers a new way to study the Philippines from a Hispanic transpacific perspective, without dismissing the role of Chinese and Japanese peoples in the Philippines, in order to understand the archipelago as a transnational territory. Each chapter is an enjoyable read as a piece of the puzzle

of Philippine history and its literary heritage and can easily be studied on its own. Together with its Spanish-language counterpart, *El desafío de la modernidad en la literatura hispanofilipina (1885–1935)* (The challenge of modernity in Hispano-Filipino literature [1885–1935]), also edited by Gasquet and Ortuño Casanova but published by Brill, it becomes essential reading for anyone interested in a critical study of Philippine literature written in Spanish and how it participates in the history of the Philippines.

Irene Villaescusa Illán

Literary and Cultural Analysis Program, University of Amsterdam

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0564-7383>

Contesting Indonesia: Islamist, Separatist, and Communal Violence since 1945

KIRSTEN E. SCHULZE

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2024.

Many academic publications—in English and Indonesian—have discussed the issue of postindependence violence in Indonesia. However, with a few exceptions, none focuses on the study of violence and its link to the ideas of national belonging as well as imagination and contestation over the Indonesian state. Previous studies have generally examined violence in a fragmented manner, with scholars treating cases of violence along separate themes with different academic debates that do not necessarily speak to each other. This is what makes *Contesting Indonesia* noteworthy and distinctive not only for its depth of content and robust argument but also for its conceptual/theoretical framework and solid methodological approach. For example, the author, Kirsten Schulze, does not use only the existing (secondary) literature but also draws upon fieldwork, oral narratives, and a range of written primary sources as well as direct interviews with 474 diverse informants (scholars, peace activists, actors of violence, etc.) spanning over more than twenty years. Schulze genuinely and luminously connects, “synthesizes,” and repackages varied existing academic works on violence in postindependence Indonesia into a single theme: the contest for the state’s national imaginary and belonging.

To back this notion, Schulze draws upon the concepts and theories of several leading scholars, including the “imagined community” of Benedict Anderson, the “invented tradition” of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, and the ideas of belonging from Ernest Gellner and other noted scholars. She also includes select cases of postindependence violence: Islamist violence (i.e., Darul Islam and Jemaah Islamiyah), secessionist revolts (i.e., East Timor and Aceh), and interreligious conflicts (i.e., Christian-Muslim communal violence in Poso and Ambon). As the author rightly