

Into the Frontier



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Studies on Spanish Colonial Philippines

In Memoriam Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo

Edited by Marya Svetlana T. Camacho

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Ma. Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo:
Forging *Filipinismo*
in Andalusia and in Spain

Antonio García-Abásolo

If we analyze Spanish historiography on the Philippines, we can discern two stages. The first would extend from 1898 until around 1950, by which time the generation of Spaniards familiar with the Philippines, some of whom had lived in the Islands, was no longer around. The second period, covering 1950 up to the present, began in Spain with the recovery of some materials in Philippine historiography, particularly those pertaining to the history of Hispano-Filipino colonial art, by historians specializing in Latin America [*americanistas*]. One of the most renowned Philipinists [*filipinistas*] was Pedro Ortiz Armengol, former ambassador of Spain to the Philippines, who inherited the long tradition of diplomats interested in historical research. But systematic research using unpublished sources, developed in the academic environment defined by the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) [Spanish National Council for Research] and the university, has been led by Prof. Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo in Andalusia.

She began her research on the history of the Philippines in Seville, producing works that paved the way to the doctoral dissertation she defended in the University of Madrid in 1955. In 1956 she published a study titled “Manila: Notas sobre su evolución urbana” which won the Luis Vives award of the CSIC. In 1959, the Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos (School of Hispanic American Studies) published her work *Arquitectura española en Filipinas*

(1565-1800). In the foreword by her mentor Prof. Diego Angulo Íñiguez, there is a passage that reflects very well what that book signified in Spanish historiography on the Philippines:

Before 1930 the scenario for a Sevillian student who wished to contribute to the task of continuing and remaking the history of America and the Philippines was not encouraging; [but] they had reason to feel especially obliged to carry out that task because of the extraordinary privilege of having the Archive of the Indies so close by. Without professors trained in research to guide them, save some exceptional cases, without a library on the Americas which offered sufficient guarantee of complete information, it was quite risky to embark on research. Precisely one of the most neglected areas in our studies on the old Indies was the Philippine Islands. . . , where by the force of events and exhaustion brought on by the passing of time, our language agonizes, and many of our venerable edifices constructed by Spaniards were totally or partially ruined, the victim of the cataclysm of the last world war.¹

In 1965 she became a research fellow at the Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos and in that same year she published her work *La Real Compañía de Filipinas*, which had been awarded a prize by the Bank of Spain in 1960. A task which Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo considered of fundamental importance in her lifetime was the management of the library of the Escuela in Seville, entrusted to her by Prof. Vicente Rodríguez Casado and Prof. José Antonio Calderón Quijano. This library became one of the major centers of information in Hispanic American studies in Europe.

In 1970 she started to work at the University of Granada as senior lecturer, and in 1975 became professor at the University of Córdoba where she stayed until retirement in 1987. In both universities she carried out a plan of supervised research on the

¹ María Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo Spínola, *Arquitectura española en Filipinas (1565-1800)* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1959), vii-viii.

governors of the Philippines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on Philippine colonial institutions. Although it was not completed, the research filled in a marked historiographical gap. The panorama that Professor Angulo Íñiguez drew in 1955 had changed remarkably in more than thirty years of research on the Spanish period in the Philippines. Professor Díaz-Trechuelo became the most renowned Philippinist in Spain due to her scholarly work as well as to the formation of what can be considered as the Andalusian school of researchers specializing in the Philippines [*filipinismo*], with Córdoba as its center today. Within Spain and probably outside too, this school has been and is the most active in research about the history of the Philippines during the Spanish period. At present the University of Córdoba offers a subject on Philippine history and a doctoral course on the Spanish Pacific. It is hoped that this teaching and research activity remain vibrant, even though currently the Spanish university is immersed in a situation of confused change and bears the burden of uncertainty about its future.

For the continuance of historiography on the Philippines in Andalusia and in Spain, the presence of the Philippines and the Spanish Pacific in the academe is a very important determining factor being a source of continuing contributions to research. For many years, work focusing on the Philippines has been reduced to those of Andalusian universities, particularly in Córdoba, and Madrid. In the nineties other universities entered the scene of Spanish filipinismo: the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and the University of La Coruña. In Barcelona and La Coruña there is preference for Philippine economic history in the nineteenth century.

Philippine studies has grown in the past twenty years or so, but it is also evident that its marginal situation relative to Hispanic American studies has not changed. A new marginalization has emerged, this time particularly vis-à-vis contemporary history. The situation is not anecdotal because ordinarily the possibilities of

embarking on a research area, about the Philippines or any other topic, are limited to researchers of consolidated academic standing. At any rate, it is also to be remembered that the Philippines was a frontier within the Spanish empire, and it is understandable from this perspective that within Hispanic American studies it should share the same level of interest with other frontier regions in the American continent.

Each one of these centers of filipinismo in Spain pursues a specific and independent research area, but all are in agreement about the recognition Prof. Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo deserves for recovering Spanish presence in the Philippines. In fact, her work is being continued in these centers by researchers who had met her in the university and by those who had known her through her historiographical work.

Another stimulus to filipinismo in Spain has been the commemoration of the first centenary of Philippine independence, which has led the Spanish government to remember Spain's protagonism in Asia for more than three centuries. Likewise, the Philippine government's interest in the close historical relationship between Spain and the Philippines is reawakening. In 1997, the Spanish Ministry of Culture implemented the Spanish Program for Hispano-Filipino Cultural Cooperation. Since 2003, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, in collaboration with other government agencies, has organized the celebration of the Philippine-Spanish Friendship Day. In 2005, the Tribuna España-Filipinas was celebrated as a bilateral forum for representatives of the two countries, while in November 2008, the Philippine Secretary of Education Jesli Lapus announced that Spanish would be restored as a subject in the Philippine educational system.

These policies of rapprochement between Spain and the Philippines entail the need to recover shared history. Hopefully decisions like these will result in greater support for the work of historians by both governments, providing a better foundation for

political rapprochement. In a sense, those who maintain the effort to study Philippine history during the Spanish period follow the spirit of Jose Rizal who, during his years in Spain and with Pedro Paterno's help, set out to work and publish some books to show the Spaniards how the Philippines was.

What brings the two countries closer is shared history. This is reflected in the words of Prof. Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo when recalling her first visit to Intramuros in 1977, more than twenty years after having begun her research using Philippine documents in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville.

As I walked on the streets of Intramuros, I experienced true excitement on seeing the reality of those walls with their gates and ramparts, and those streets I knew so well on old Spanish maps. . . . There, behind those walls, Spaniards lived for more than three centuries.²

Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo was a great academic in love with historical research, but above all, she was a person with deep Christian roots, always concerned to work with spirit of service towards others. This has left a deep imprint on those who knew her, colleagues as well as disciples and students, an imprint that is especially valuable for a University that is losing the marks of its identity.

² Ma. Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo López-Spinola, *A la mitad del camino* (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1997), 127.

