

Apolinario Mabini, Isabelo de los Reyes, and the Emergence of a “Public”¹

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Abstract

The paper sketches the factors behind the emergence of a “public” in the late nineteenth century, and locates in this context the distinctive careers of Apolinario Mabini and Isabelo de los Reyes. The activities of Mabini and de los Reyes were enabled by the emergence of a “public sphere” in the colony, at the same time that their activities helped define and widen a sphere that had become more distinctly ‘national’ in character.

Complicating the Habermasian characterization of a “bourgeois public sphere,” the paper calls for a fuller study of the more popular agencies, sites, media, and networks in the formation of a public in nineteenth-century Philippines.

THEY are an odd couple. They were born in the same month and year (July 1864), studied for the same profession in the same university, and participated in the biggest event of their time, the anti-colonial struggle for independence. Yet, it seems that they never met. They were contrasting personalities, to begin with: on one hand, an Ilocano of the landed gentry in Vigan, energetic, individualistic, confident and reckless; on the other hand, the son of poor peasants in Batangas, paralytic, very private, and highly principled, almost puritanical.

If there is one quick lesson to be drawn from these contrasts, it is this: the struggle for independence was a complex, volatile event that encompassed divergent personalities and diverse forms of action, played out in social space that was heterogeneous and dynamic.

What was this “social space” like, in which Isabelo de los Reyes and Apolinario Mabini emerged?

The nineteenth century in the Philippines saw the appearance of a “public.” I take public (Latin *populus*, *publicus*) in the classic, commonly understood sense of a body of people bound by a common interest in problems of state and civic life, and primed to act on them (Habermas, 1974, 1991). Such a public emerges out of a set of enabling conditions that create space autonomous and apart from the state, space in which contact and communication of a certain speed and scale can take place.

I shall further specify this by speaking of a “national” or “proto-national” public that transcends locality (town, province) and limited sectarian affiliations in recognizing or claiming a community of interests spanning (in the case of Spanish Philippines) the entire colony itself.

The large factors that enabled the formation of a public in the nineteenth century were the expansion of the market economy and the colonial state, interrelating with such facts as population growth and urbanization, faster travel and communications, and increased educational opportunities. These phenomena were interrelated. The expansion of the economy after the opening of Manila to world trade in 1834 spurred the development of travel and communications; led to population growth and urbanization; and necessitated the expansion of the colonial bureaucracy and educational opportunities.

All these stimulated new needs and new ways of looking and acting in the world, and primed the appearance of sites and networks for critical-rational discourse in that space between the private individual and the state that Jurgen Habermas (1991) calls the “public sphere.” Such a sphere was new since it can only come about when people begin to critically disengage or distance themselves from a feudal monarchy, colonial authority, or church—institutions that do not allow for a “public” since their power is

given and unquestioned—and people begin to see themselves no longer as mere subjects but as free-thinking “citizens,” whether of the colonial state or an alternative order they would create out of it.

Following Habermas (1991), the existence of a public presupposes certain claims: that government be transparent and accountable (to use today’s idiom); that rationality instead of obscurantism govern public matters; and that citizens enjoy the rights of participation and “supervision” over government through the efficacies of “public opinion” built on the freedoms of information, assembly, and speech.

These were the claims at the heart of the nineteenth-century Filipino reform movement. To trace the emergence of a public in the Philippines, therefore, is to tell the story of the reform movement and the revolution that took place when this movement failed.

Here I would like to speak about how a “public” germinated in the time of Mabini and de los Reyes by focusing on the role of education, economic networks and occupational sites, the press and modern, voluntary organizations.

Education was an enabling factor in the creation of a public. The generation of Mabini and de los Reyes had educational opportunities that were not available to “natives” of an earlier generation. The number of schools had grown, and education was taking a more secular turn as the civil government assumed a more active role in a field that had been the almost exclusive preserve of the Church. Stimulated by the need for skilled manpower in a modernizing economy and bureaucracy, religious seminaries began to accept students who were not bound for the priesthood. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, University of Santo Tomas began to offer degrees in secular fields like medicine and pharmacy, jurisprudence, philosophy and letters, and the sciences. Between 1861 and 1898, some 40,158 students attended Santo Tomas. Eighty-nine percent of these students were enrolled in secular programs (34 percent in jurisprudence, 22 percent in medicine, and 22 percent in philosophy) (Mojares, 2006).

An aspect of education at this time (and one not well-studied) was the proliferation of privately-initiated, non-Church schools called *latinidades*, the most advanced of which offered the equivalent of a college education.² By the 1890s, there were some 1,888 such institutes in the Philippines, no less than 28 of them in Manila and its suburbs. While the high authorities complained that many of the latinities were run by “incompetent teachers and university flunkers,” it is important to note that these were schools mostly run in private homes by Filipinos and could thus operate outside the close surveillance of church and state.

While colonial education was often characterized by Filipino nationalists as medieval, the fact is that for all its defects it opened up spaces for modern, critical thinking as a result, whether intended or unintended, of school instruction or as a vital side-product of the opportunities created by young people from different localities coming together to interact and learn, whether in or outside the classroom.

Proof of the value of these opportunities can be found in Mabini and de los Reyes, who (unlike the better-known propagandists) were educated within the colony.

De los Reyes attended an Augustinian seminary in Vigan, then Manila's San Juan de Letran at the time Mabini was there, and (like Mabini) earned a degree in law at Santo Tomas. Mabini's case is more exemplary. He attended latinity schools in Batangas, particularly that of the Tagalog priest Valerio Malabanan, a school the historian Fidel Villaroel calls "the most respectable center of secondary education in the country, outside Manila" (Villaroel, 1979, p. 14). Mabini had a discontinuous education because poverty forced him to suspend his studies at various times to work as houseboy, teacher, and law clerk. He taught in Malabanan's school and other *latinidades*, and in 1893 opened a school of his own in Intramuros. Such was his determination that he earned his bachelor's degree and teacher's certificate at San Juan de Letran (1881-87) and licentiate in jurisprudence at Santo Tomas (1888-94), and was admitted to the bar in 1894.

Another axis in the emergence of a public were the economic networks and occupational sites created by advances in domestic travel, a diversifying urban economy, and expanding colonial bureaucracy.

The expansion of economic activities and the colonial bureaucracy fueled a great deal of population movement in the nineteenth century. Increased mobility was an important factor in the formation of a public since travel was a medium through which people shared information and ideas, recognized common interests, and formed networks. Benedict Anderson (1983) has pointed to the circulation of civil servants and the exodus of students to Manila and other urban centers as factors in the rise of an "imagined" national community. There were other movements. T.H. Pardo de Tavera (1925) cites the travels to the national capital of economically empowered *principales* from the provinces as a factor in the rise of a new political consciousness:

On returning to their *pueblo*, they took in their hearts and minds the germ of what was subsequently called subversive ideas and later still "filibusterism"... Already the "brutes loaded with gold" dared to discuss with their curate,

complain against the *alcalde*, defend their homes against the misconduct of the lieutenant or sergeant of the police force.... Their money permitted them to effectively defend questions involving money first, then, those of a moral character. (p. 151)

The value of these travels is shown in the case of Isabelo de los Reyes who frequently commuted between Manila and Ilocos in the course of his varied employments as publisher, journalist, and trader of commodities, as well as Apolinario Mabini's own move from Batangas to Manila. A fuller study of the spread of the revolution in the provinces will show the important role played by people who moved, such as civil servants, traders, soldiers, and seamen. Anecdotal data, for instance, point to the role of seamen as agents in the spread of the revolution to places like Cebu, Butuan, and Surigao.

In addition to travel, a "public" also germinated in the occupational sites created by an expanding economy and bureaucracy. Of particular interest were sites where current events and matters of government were routinely discussed, like government houses, newspaper offices and printeries, trading firms, and factories.

Mabini's case is particularly instructive. While a law student (1888-94), he worked as a clerk in the court of first instance in Intramuros, and later assistant to the clerk of court, Numeriano Adriano, who invited him to work in his notarial office in 1892. It was his work as assistant to Adriano that introduced him to a network of liberals and *progresistas* who descended from the 1872 *Comite de Reformadores*, and were linked to each other because they were in the same profession, lived in the same neighborhood or district, or were kin or provincemates.

Mabini's employer and mentor, Adriano was a friend of Marcelo del Pilar and Domingo Franco, and had his office in a building in Ongpin owned by another reform-minded lawyer, Doroteo Cortes. His office was a meeting place of activists like del Pilar, Deodato Arellano, and Timoteo Paez. Adriano, Franco, and Cortes were part of the small, covert group called *Comite de Propaganda* organized in October 1888 by del Pilar, who was about to flee the country for Spain to escape arrest for his political activities (Rizal, 1989; Laurel, 2011). It was in the *Comite de Propaganda*, which financed and circulated liberal, anti-friar propaganda, that Mabini would become involved in the reform movement called *La Propaganda*.

Then there was the press, a factor central in the formation of a public. If Mabini entered political work through professional and personal networks, de los Reyes entered the public life through journalism.

The proliferation of printed matter was the most visible sign and medium of an expanding public sphere in the late nineteenth century. A total of 98 periodicals made their appearance between 1874 and 1894, against only 38 founded in the Philippines for the entire colonial period prior to 1874 (Retana, 1991). Most of these were small, short-lived papers, with circulation figures (which are always difficult to get) perhaps ranging from a few hundreds to a few thousands. In 1891, Manila had thirteen printing presses, nine bookshops, and fifteen newspapers and magazines (Mojares, 2006). Provincial papers also appeared in Vigan (1884), Iloilo (1884), and Cebu (1886).

It was not just a case of numbers. The character of journalism changed. Print was no longer a religious monopoly. Creoles and natives had become not just printers but publishers, editors, and writers. The earliest newspapers in the Philippines, like *Del Superior Gobierno* (1811), were no more than compilations of government decrees, church regulations, and commercial notices, items meant to ensure compliance and the flow of market information. There was little space, if at all, for “public opinion.” By the late nineteenth century, however, newspapers were no longer just purveyors of news and information but “a mediator and intensifier of public discussion” (Habermas, 1974, p. 53).

The appetite for “news” and “opinions” is indicated by the proliferation of manuscript newspapers. Wenceslao Retana (1991) (in listing Spanish period newspapers) says: “I consider it a difficult task to give a complete list of the manuscript newspapers that have circulated in Manila, since if we take into account the number that the students were writing in 1887, the list should be long” (p. 192).

Books, chapbooks, and printed ephemera (like *pasquines* and *papeles de volantes*, or posters and leaflets) appeared in increasing numbers. Despite censorship, books by authors like Voltaire and Rousseau circulated in Manila through bookstores and private channels. It was precisely government’s anxiety over the circulation of morally and politically “dangerous” materials that the *Comision permanente de censura* was established in 1856.

There were currents of anti-colonial sentiments in local newspapers despite censorship. In 1890, Rizal noted that articles have appeared in the press with “a certain ironic flavor or bitter sarcasm that has slipped despite the vigilant and jealous prior censorship” (Rizal, 1972a, p. 191). “There is nothing like oppression,” (p. 209) he says, “to make the mind work; the greater the pressure the greater the explosion!” (p. 210). And then again: “Indeed, there are cruel sarcasms; there are ironies in the Philippines that are not suspected in Europe! The Tacitus, Voltaires, Byrons, and Heines abound there unknowingly” (p. 213).

Rizal may have exaggerated but it is important to point out that the Propaganda Movement was not carried out only in Spain but in the Philippines. Isabelo de los Reyes may have been the most prolific journalist of this period, writing for newspapers not only in Manila but in Ilocos and the Visayas (Thomas, 2006). He circumvented censorship by using many pseudonyms, playing on the rift between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and using such tools as irony and sarcasm (as Rizal noted of journalism at the time). He wrote on a wide range of topics: Filipino representation in the Spanish Cortes; equal rights for natives and Spaniards; the curtailment of the friars' powers; and the need to widen secular education and people's awareness of their political rights. He worked to foster the civil and political consciousness that prepared the ground for greater demands that would eventually lead to a struggle for independence.

The influence of newspapers extended beyond readers; they were relay points in the oral transmission of news, gossip, and rumor. In the virtual space of books and newspapers, people in the urban centers imagined others like them and created that "imagined community" that was the nation.

The emergence of a Filipino public is further indicated in the appearance of modern, voluntary organizations. The most important of these was Freemasonry. No institution in colonial Philippines expressed as directly the idea of the European Enlightenment as a moral and political project. While the first native Masonic lodge in the Philippines, *Nilad*, was established only in 1891, by 1893 there were thirty-five Masonic lodges in the country, nine in Manila and some in Visayas and Mindanao.

It is easy to see why Freemasonry attracted the local intelligentsia. Masonic lodges were "schools" of Enlightenment thought, forward points of a "modernity" apart from traditional forms of authority. Resolutely civil and secular, oriented towards ideas of republicanism and constitutionalism, Freemasonry was a model for what colonial society was not. As Margaret Jacob (1991) says of Freemasonry in Europe, lodges were "microscopic civil polities, new public spaces, in effect schools for constitutional government" (p. 20). They were forerunners of what we now call "civil society."

Proscribed and forced to lead a subterranean existence, lodges expressed values of comradeship, an aura of learnedness (meetings invoked thinkers like Voltaire and Montesquieu), and an ethicality that mystified lodges as "temples" in which "new persons" were formed. In the Philippines, lodges were cells for nationalist, anti-friar agitation; discussion groups that tackled issues like representation in the Cortes and the teaching of Spanish; nodes in diffusing libertarian ideas; and (being an international organization) a vehicle for enlisting European support. So alarmed were the authorities over

the spread of Freemasonry that lodges bore the brunt of Spanish repression upon the outbreak of the revolution.

Almost all the leaders of the Filipino reform movement were Masons. They were instrumental in organizing support for del Pilar's *La Propaganda* (1888) and in establishing what may be called the first Filipino political party, Rizal's *La Liga Filipina* (1892), and the groups formed after the *Liga*'s breakup.

Mabini's career sheds light on the emergence of these groups. In part because of his association with men like Numeriano Adriano and Domingo Franco, he joined the Masonic lodge *Balagtas* in March 1892 (when he was still a law student). He was present at the founding of *Liga Filipina* in 1892, and was among the leaders in attempts to revive *Liga Filipina* in April 1893, which failed and was dissolved in October 1893 because of the growing rift between those who were still committed to the reform agenda of *Solidaridad*, and the militant Andres Bonifacio faction that was already girding for armed action. In contrast to Bonifacio, Mabini stayed with the "reformists" and helped in organizing *Cuerpo de Compromisarios*, under Adriano's leadership in 1894, and was active as the *Cuerpo*'s secretary in communications with del Pilar and fund-raising for *Solidaridad*, until May 1895 when, in the face of a government crackdown and growing dissension among Filipinos, it was decided to close down *Solidaridad*.

Upon the revolution's outbreak in August 1896, Mabini was arrested. At the time he was already a paraplegic confined in San Juan de Dios Hospital (he already had the signs of a developing paralysis as early as January 1895). His medical condition saved him from being executed by the Spanish authorities—as his friends and mentors Adriano and Franco were in January 1897. He was released after a general amnesty in May 1897. Though he had disclaimed any connection to the Katipunan, he had at this time cast his lot with the revolution and in January 1898 left Manila for Laguna to join Paciano Rizal, a general in Aguinaldo's forces after Rizal's execution. Mabini said that it was the public's show of support for the revolution that convinced him that this was the just and necessary course of action to take.

It is at this point that Mabini rose to prominence as an intellectual leader of the revolution and the republic. In January 1898, he started to issue the writings (*El verdadero decalogo*, *Primer saludo al pueblo Filipino*, *Programa constitucional de la republica*) that exhorted popular participation in the struggle, analyzed the revolutionary situation, and laid down the civic, moral, and parliamentary requirements for an independent republic. He continued to write and publish, steadfast in his role as intellectual guide, even after his capture by the Americans in December 1899 and exile in Guam (1901-03), until his death in 1903. I shall not dwell on this, the most

public stage of his career since this is well documented in the studies of Teodoro Agoncillo (2003) and Cesar Adib Majul (1964).

Isabelo de los Reyes followed a different path. He was not, by temperament, a joiner. There is no reference to his having joined a Masonic lodge, or participated in *Liga Filipina* or *Cuerpo de Compromisarios*, although he contributed articles to *Solidaridad* and carried the ideas of the Propaganda in the periodicals he published, like *Lectura Popular* (1890-91). The statements about his participation or non-participation in the revolution are contradictory (Mojares, 2006). His oppositional sentiments, however, were well-known, and he was arrested in February 1897 and confined in Bilibid, during which he boldly sent a *memoria* to the governor-general in April 1897 that listed the people's grievances and blamed the friars' abuses as the cause of the revolution. His self-confidence undiminished, he offered his services to go to the field and negotiate for the rebels to surrender in exchange for concessions from the government.

Amnestied in May 1897, he was rearrested after he presented to the governor-general another insubordinate *memoria*. He was promptly deported to Spain and kept in a Barcelona prison for seven months. Released in January 1898 but barred from leaving Spain, he did not return to Manila until October 1901. All through this time, he stayed active in writing, publishing, and agitating against the U.S. occupation; consorted with anarchists and socialists (an education he would bring back with him to Manila where he helped spearhead the country's labor movement); and played a role in the efforts to organize the Philippine Independent Church. He was all over the place, his appetite for the public life undiminished until his death in 1938.

In sum, economic, technological, social and political transformations in the nineteenth century created a public space that enabled the emergence of intellectuals like Mabini and de los Reyes, space that they would themselves widen. They were intellectuals of contrasting types. De los Reyes was the maverick, gadfly and provocateur, whose brashness and ambition sometimes exceeded his abilities but whose exercise of intellectual freedom inspired many, and whose work, particularly in the field of culture, remains most relevant today. Mabini was the studious, deliberate and principled intellectual who combined moral passion and technocratic knowledge in theorizing the form and substance of an independent Filipino government.

Yet, despite their prominence, Mabini and de los Reyes were both social outsiders, viewed as such by the high *ilustrados* of the period. A struggling, little-known lawyer of peasant stock when he rose to be Aguinaldo's adviser, Mabini was mistrusted by the likes of T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Pedro Paterno,

and Felipe Buencamino. Locally-educated Ilocano upstart, de los Reyes did not have the kind of respect Rizal or Pardo de Tavera had as intellectuals.

In mapping late nineteenth-century public space, it is not enough to focus on intellectuals like Rizal, Paterno, Pardo de Tavera, or even Mabini, who operated at the high levels of policy and propaganda. It is important to look at what the historian Robert Darnton (1982), in the case of the French Revolution, calls the “literary underground” of the revolution, the activities of obscure, “petty” intellectuals in the urban and rural centers of the country. There were *ilustrados*, like de los Reyes and Marcelo del Pilar, who worked both ends of the spectrum and are extremely interesting for this reason, but we need to do more work on intellectuals of the type represented by Andres Bonifacio, who embodied the broader base of the emergent, nineteenth-century public (Mojares, 2013).

Empirical studies done on the social or “class” profile of dissenters and revolutionists clearly indicate the importance of what may be called the “middle or lower-middle sector” in local society.

Perhaps the earliest of this kind of study was done by Wenceslao Retana (1892), in an article on the signatories of the manifesto presented in the 1888 anti-friar demonstration in Manila.³ Largely neglected (perhaps because it aimed to discredit the demonstration), the article investigates the 810 signatories. Retana shows that 218 were fictitious, deceased, underaged, or did not know what they had signed, and he dismisses the remaining 592 as “fodder cutters, scribes, laborers, fishermen, carpenters, tailors,” and that 384 “do not know Spanish.” What Retana, however, did not choose to highlight was that (from his own data) 305 of the 592 were past or present *cabezas de barangay* and 18 were or had been *gobernadorcillos*. What he also obscures (given the prejudices of the time) is that in the colonial economy, occupations like scribes or even tailors, carpenters, and *zacateros* were not necessarily lowly. What Retana discounted were in fact influential members of the urban petty bourgeoisie and rural gentry of greater Manila.

People in this same social formation would be the initiators of the revolution. In a major study of the Katipunan, *The Light of Liberty* (2013), Jim Richardson identifies the occupation of 136 Katipunan activists in Manila on the eve of the hostilities (1892-96), from over 200 names that have survived in archival records.⁴ Significantly, the largest occupational groups consist of 45 government employees (many of them clerks) and at least 18 commercial firm employees (like Bonifacio), mostly clerks and agents. They constitute almost half of the 136 identified by Richardson. The other half were employed in diverse urban occupations: 15 *tabaqueros*, 14 *imprensa* workers (typesetters, lithographers, bookbinders), and 28 bookkeepers, blacksmiths, mechanics, jewelers, tailors, barbers, petty tradesmen, and

others. Nine were local officials (*capitanes, tenientes*); three were high professionals (lawyer, physician, pharmacist); and three students. Not a single Katipunan member (Richardson points out) was a peasant.

The available categories of “class” are not quite precise enough for the case of nineteenth-century Manila, and the problem is further compounded by the lack of hard data.⁵ The available evidence, however, strongly indicate the social composition of the initiators of the revolution, While the initiators can be described as largely proletarian and petty-bourgeois, or of the “middle-middle” or “lower-middle” strata, they are definitely not of “the lowest stratum of society” (as Agoncillo and others sometimes claim). They are distinctly urban, literate, and well-plugged into the circuits of the state and modern sectors of the economy. They created an organization that was “at the core a modern, forward-looking organization, rationalist and secular” (Richardson, 2013, p. xvii).

The same findings are borne out in Michael Cullinane’s (2014) detailed study of the initiators of the revolution in Cebu City in 1898. Cullinane examines 234 participants in the first phase of the revolution in Cebu (December 1897-August 1898), tracking their identities and relations in terms of kinship, occupation, work place, education, and others. He finds that of the 234 participants, 187 (a high 80 percent) are related by kinship, and 128 had varying levels of secondary education. The factor of occupation and work place is equally significant: 129 are *empleados* (salaried employees in government or private firms) or *principales* (local office holders, like *cabezas de barangay* and *gobernadorcillos*), or both. Hence, Cullinane concludes that *oficinas* and *casas tribunales* were the key sites in the revolutionary conspiracy in Cebu.

These studies afford us with a profile of the most active elements in an emerging Filipino public.

Tracing the history of political dissent in the Philippines—from the Creole mutinies in the 1820s and the Cavite mutiny of 1872, to the founding of *La Propaganda* in 1888 and the Katipunan in 1892—affords us with a view of the numerical expansion of the public, its changing social composition, and the diversification of its channels, sites, and agents of communication.

It is interesting to note, in the case of Manila, the importance of such work sites as the printing press and the tobacco factory. Richardson lists among the first Katipunan members 14 printing press workers (10 of them employed in the *Diario de Manila* press) and 15 *tabaqueros* (14 from the German-owned *El Oriente* tobacco factory in Caloocan). They are the biggest groups of activists coming from a single work site. This is not entirely surprising. Employed in the country’s first modern factories, tobacco workers had organized mutual aid groups (*gremios*) in the late nineteenth

century. Press workers, particularly *cajistas* (who also figured prominently in the popular manifestation of 1888), were skilled, literate artisans whose work in producing newspapers and books strategically placed them at an axis in the circulation of news, ideas and opinions (Scott, 1992; Kerkvliet, 1992).⁶

But in provincial areas like Cavite, Bulacan, and Cebu, where one does not have the sizeable concentrations of urban occupations one finds in Manila, propertied village and town officials and *principales* were leading elements in political organizing. It is thus that in the shift of the center of resistance from Manila to Cavite, for instance, the complexion of the revolution also changes.

The Habermasian notion of a “bourgeois public sphere” has to be broadened and complicated by taking into account economic and political conditions in the Philippines in the late nineteenth century. Such conditions, for instance, blur the distinctions between public/private spaces and formal/informal channels of communication.

Public and private spaces were not strictly demarcated (as in Paris or London), as shown in the fact that Masonic and Katipunan meetings had to be conducted in private homes, and political discussions took place under the cover of domestic soirees or *tertulias*. In the provincial towns, where Spanish presence was relatively thin and state surveillance not as intense, there were more open spaces for oppositional activity. Hence the references, for instance, to Marcelo del Pilar and colleagues in Malolos doing propaganda work in cockpits, funeral wakes and other gatherings, and even in convents and town halls.

We also need to correct our bias for print (in part because it is what survives) and remind ourselves that print represents only a very tiny part of the total body of political discourse at any time. Oral forms of communication—from verses, songs, and theatrical performances, to rumor, gossip, and daily conversations, in sites like factories, playhouses, gaming parlors, and taverns—are important in constituting “public opinion.”

The revolution was a key moment in the history of the public. Since revolutions are not just about warfare but are “schools” of learning, the Philippine revolution would energize, widen, and make visible a public. This public however, as the revolution itself demonstrates, was not a unified one (contestation, after all, is what defines a public).

Trained as a physician, Jose Rizal frequently used medico-physiological metaphors, such as the health of a body’s circulatory system in creating conditions of liberty and progress. In 1889, he spoke of the importance of the Filipino intelligentsia in the political emancipation of the Filipino. He said: “This class whose number is increasing progressively is in constant

communication with the rest of the islands, and if today it constitutes the brains of the country (*cerebro del pais*), within a few years it will constitute its entire nervous system and demonstrate its existence in all its acts” (Rizal, 1996, pp. 434-435).

This may be an idealizing statement of how the social body works and may be contested for the primacy it assigns to a central, controlling intelligence, but it is an important statement. If indeed society is conceived as a nervous system, and the “public” is another name for this system, the functioning of this system—in the time of Mabini and de los Reyes, and in ours as well—continues to demand our understanding.

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Notes

¹Keynote paper read at the conference on “Intellectuals, the Public Arena, and the Nation,” marking the 150th birth anniversary of Apolinario Mabini and Isabelo de los Reyes, University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 22-24 September 2014.

²The role of Latinity schools as relatively autonomous sites is suggested by Wenceslao Retana’s complaint that *profesores de latinidad* were among the leading elements in the anti-monastic movement in the Philippines. A Board of Public Instruction was created in 1865 to supervise and upgrade secondary schools. They were placed under the supervision of Santo Tomas (which became the official Bureau of Secondary Education). No one can open a secondary school without the title *profesor de segunda enseñanza* conferred by Santo Tomas; these schools can offer only the first three years of secondary education; and the remaining years needed to complete a bachelor’s degree have to be completed at Santo Tomas or any of the four “first-class” secondary schools at the time (Letran, San Jose, Ateneo, and Bacolor). First-class secondary schools offered a five-year program leading to a bachelor’s degree, which was conferred after an examination by Santo Tomas, the only degree-granting institution in Spanish Philippines.

³In the 1888 “popular manifestation,” demonstrators marched through the streets of Manila and presented to the Manila governor a manifesto addressed to the Queen, bearing 810 signatures, calling for the suppression of the religious orders. It triggered a government crackdown and the arrest of prominent citizens.

⁴The sample from the period covered—from the time the Katipunan was conceived in 1892 to the eve of the revolution in 1896—is large since the membership of the Katipunan has been estimated at only 300 prior to March 1896 (when *Kalayaan* came out).

⁵Occupational categories tell only part of the story since they may be imprecise and a person may have a work history across two or more occupations. Teodoro Agoncillo (1996), for instance, stresses the “extreme poverty” of Bonifacio’s parents (a “couple of no means”). Other sources, however, claim Bonifacio’s father was a tailor, a boatman who operated a river ferry, and a *teniente mayor* (vice-mayor) of Tondo, and that Bonifacio’s mother was a supervisor (*cabecilla*) in a tobacco factory. Bonifacio himself worked as clerk-messenger, agent or broker, and *bodeguero* of foreign merchant firms. Lacking specifics, it is difficult to assess what these meant (a *bodeguero* may be a warehouse clerk or supervisor rather than a manual laborer). Moreover, the status of certain employments must be taken in the context of the time. To be a clerk in a foreign merchant house, a forward point in the colonial economy, was not lowly or “common.”

⁶A *gremio de litografos* already existed around 1870, and the first printers’ strike took place in 1872 in San Fernando, Pampanga. *El Oriente* tobacco factory had a history of strikes in the early twentieth century.

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