The Philippines as tool-forged nation: Revisiting Nick Joaquin's use of Marshall McLuhan's Medium Theory to reconstruct colonial history

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Abstract

In his 2004 essay, "Culture as History," the late National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin, retold the colonial history of the Philippines through Marshall McLuhan's medium theory, framed in the famous aphorism "the medium is the message." Joaquin followed McLuhan's thought by positing that technology is behind the metamorphosis of the Philippines. Accordingly, this metamorphosis occurred between the 16th and 17th centuries with the arrival of tools, like the plow, from Spain that enabled the colonized subjects to improve their lot and forge their identity as Filipinos.

Joaquin and McLuhan's thoughts, conjoined in the former's essay, steered colonial history away from nationalistic currents, via objects, artefacts, or technology, towards a narrative of a tool-forged nation.

This paper examines Joaquin's suppositions on Philippine history by inquiring into the central role of technology in colonization and its contestation. By revisiting Joaquin and McLuhan's theories on technology, this essay delves into the challenge of understanding colonial history and the opportunities they offer for theorizing technology and society.

Keywords: *technology, colonialism, tools, technological imaginaries, SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities*

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Introduction

As scholars and writers, Marshall McLuhan and Nick Joaquin shared four things that raise the curtain in this essay. First, they were both Roman Catholic: Joaquin was born and raised as Catholic by his devout parents in Paco, Manila while McLuhan was converted at 26. Both valued their faith throughout their lives, although for McLuhan it was more of a private matter.

Second, Joaquin and McLuhan embraced literature as a lifeline. Joaquin wrote novels, short stories, essays, poetry, plays that won awards and were turned into theatre and films. McLuhan was trained in literary theory and criticism, and their traces are found in his metaphors, neologisms, analogies, and keen descriptions of media.

Third, Joaquin and McLuhan enjoyed fame and recognition from the 60s to 90s as writer and media guru respectively. Joaquin's body of work earned him the National Artist for literature award (1976) and the Ramon Magsaysay Award (1996) for journalism, literature, and creative communication. McLuhan is regarded as one of the important media theorists in the twentieth century. He is best remembered for the aphorisms—"the medium is the message" and the "world is no more than a village" (McLuhan, 1964/2003, p. 6). For having prophesied the internet, the Wired magazine's debut issue in 1993 named him its patron saint (Shachtman, 2002).

Fourth, both have a robust afterlife on the internet as shown by millions of the search returns in Google, as well as the discussions of their work by scholars and fans over X (formerly Twitter).

There was no record of a meeting between them but Joaquin's engagement with McLuhan came by way of an essay "Culture as History" in the book Culture and History (2004). While the essay is a minor work compared to Joaquin's other literary oeuvres, it is valuable in Media Studies because it uses McLuhan's work to deliver a cultural critique on the popular nationalist thesis of history which highlights the struggles of Filipinos against their colonizers (Guiang, 2021). For Joaquin, a nation emerges from an interaction with tools, thus clearing the path to perpetual innovation or simply put, modernity. He then asserts that the conjunction of colonization and tools calls for a reconsideration of history.

Joaquin's thoughts leave an impression that he beseeched colonialism, at least according to my students who read the essay. Instead of examining the essay through McLuhan's theory, they immediately doubted the weight of Joaquin's historical research, if not his amateur anthropology. The account of colonial history, if it must make sense, should deliver the facts, and rehearse the drama and spectacle of familiar heroes and villains. Thus,

in this framing of colonial history critical of Joaquin, McLuhan is taken out of the picture while his theory on technology was spared of scrutiny. The charge of facile historical writing was solely leveled at Joaquin.

This essay revisits Joaquin's deployment of McLuhan's theory to analyze the central role of technology in Spanish colonization of the Philippines. For Joaquin, Spain brought the tools to the islands, not only to make the natives productive but also to transform their habits of thinking about the world. Consequently, the natives, through the tools, acquired a sense of nationhood and modernity. Eminent scholar E. San Juan, Jr. (2018) noted that Joaquin turned to McLuhan as a source of his "scientistic reductionism" (p. 233) to account for modernity. It is not a charitable charge, but the critique shows the limitations of the conjoined theories that will be examined here.

The aim of this essay is to revisit Joaquin's imaginary of technology mediated by McLuhan's medium theory. These questions shape the discussion:

1. How does Joaquin draw from McLuhan's theory to sketch the history of colonialism in the Philippines through technology?
2. Did Joaquin manifest the tenuousness of McLuhan's theory criticized for its limited historical evidence, the looseness of social analysis, and technological determinism?
3. Does Joaquin's account of colonial history, through McLuhan, invite other sociotechnical imaginaries in theorizing colonial technology, given the limitations of their technological frameworks?

This essay proposes a rethinking of the role of technology during the early part of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines pace Joaquin and McLuhan. For methodology, I draw from Stephen D. Reese's (2022) work on using the power of explication. In a conceptual essay, the methodology is primarily a conceptual explication, which is thinking theoretically about the essence of a concept and its critical elements while engaging with theories that speak about the concept to be understood abstractly and theoretically (Reese, 2022). In this essay, I will discuss the concept of colonial technology and connect it with narratives or imaginaries of technologies. I likened concept to a tinder box that is ready to spark and singe theoretical imaginations through the work of exemplification and interpretation, as it ranges between one's own view and the world out there that contains numerous other views. For Reese, explication resembles an argumentation technique in rhetorics which is claim-and-evidence but conjoined by warrant. Concepts, as claims, relate to the broader social and media context, but the challenge is the interrogation of concepts for

how well they capture the complex, interconnected, and multi-layered reality (Reese, 2022). Explication, in this essay, anticipates gaps, new conceptual tools, omissions, and rifts. They are expected, but these should not constrain the process of re-visiting the concept of technology under colonialism.

The concepts should be located somewhere within what Sheila Jasanoff (2015) calls "sociotechnical imaginaries" (p. 4), a term for a collectively shared visions of what a society could attain through science and technology. Originating from individuals or a social order, sociotechnical imaginaries can create political or technological projects designed from a hegemonic position either through consensus or force (Jasanoff, 2015). Thus, the generated concepts, are never neutral, even if defined in technical and operational terms, because they emanate from a particular power relation that is part of a sociotechnical imaginary (Jasanoff, 2015; Sefa Dei, 2006). I argue that colonization and its aftermath of postcolonial nation building are hegemonic projects that require sociotechnical imaginaries to stabilize and mobilize their subjects' support. Imaginaries could be technologically deterministic when they grant primacy to technology's role in transforming societies and relegating other factors to the background.

Imaginaries invite contestation, but I will return to this point later. For now, I want to underscore that my examination of sociotechnical imaginaries intends to capture and critique a view of technology, which is the task of this article in three parts. The first part discusses Joaquin's idea of introduction of technology in the colony using McLuhan's medium theory. I will discuss the contours of McLuhan's theory, exploring if it is up to the task of theorizing colonial technology. The second part critiques the historical juncture of Joaquin and McLuhan's frameworks in the context of a tool-forged nation. The third part explores the other critical sociotechnical imaginaries of anti-colonial scholarship that evaluates the limitations of both Joaquin and McLuhan's theories. Through a review of Joaquin's reconstruction of colonial history that turned to McLuhan's theory, this essay is an intervention into technology, postcolonial, and cultural studies by addressing questions on colonial identity in the Philippines through the politics of technology. The examination of views on technology transfer from Spain to the Philippines is crucial to understanding of how some scholars and writers approach question of modernity and colonialism, and its vestiges, given the presumed technological superiority of colonizer.

Joaquin and McLuhan

In his essay "Culture as History," Joaquin mined the first chapter of McLuhan's 1964's book, Understanding Media the Extensions of Man,

where the famous line "the medium is the message" appears, to argue for a development of an alternative history intimately linked with tools. For Joaquin (2004), this historical presentation was missed by historians who focused on the liberationist struggles against colonial rulers and not the history of culture. He notes:

> Culture has come to mean its loftier dicta (literature and the arts) that we have needed a Marshall McLuhan to remind us that the medium itself is the message. And the message is: metamorphosis. We are shaped by the tools we shape; and the culture is the way of life being impressed on a community by its technics. (p. 3).

Joaquin (2004) marked the development of the Filipino nation not during the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521, or the coming of the conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legaspi in 1565, but sometime in the 16th and 17th centuries when Spain introduced to the colony "revolutionary tools" such as the "wheel, plow, cement, road, bridge, horse-powered vehicles, money, clock, paper, book, and the printing press" (p. 7). The tools are the media of communication through which the natives interacted with their conquerors and among themselves. Joaquin even included Christianity among the tools—not in a derogatory sense, but because it is a medium, much like how McLuhan regarded clothing, the house, road, or money as a medium that transforms society. That these colonial tools brought marked changes to the islands, Joaquin named the period as "the epoch of the Filipino's metamorphosis through the media" (p. 7). In other words, Joaquin recognized that technology was the means by which Spain placed the islands, later named the Philippines, under political, economic and cultural domination for three hundred years.

Writing at a time before the term globalization was in vogue in the 1990s, Joaquin is part of the generation that witnessed how global capital, labor, commodities, and communication were becoming unified under the single market of capitalism. Despite the inequalities that this world domination entail, the virtual disappearance of borders through the ease of travel, liberalization of markets, and the speed of exchange in knowledge and cultures have lent the discourse of modernization with cachet among scholarly and literary circles (San Juan, 2023). Theorists of modernization that emerged in the 1960s and 70s include Anthony Giddens and Immanuel Wallerstein, but it was McLuhan who took cultural theory by storm for his views on electronic media popularized in phrases such as "global village," and "medium is the message." With his unorthodox ideas, McLuhan became an international celebrity for taking the modernization

theories toward literary and cultural directions, stripping them of politics, and laying them bare as mere consequence of technology (Carey, 2007).

The elision of politics in a colonial theory is problematic because it obscures hierarchies of the colonial order and could equate the use of tools as submission to colonialism. This theorizing comes from McLuhan's premise that the continued use of a tool or technology, which he uniformly termed medium, would impact the culture, social structures, and subjectivities of individuals. Joaquin's adoption of McLuhan's views to the foundation of the Filipino nation via colonial tools divorces colonial history from its violent genealogy, repressive history, and liabilities.

It was Joaquin who interpreted McLuhan's writings to historicize technology in the Spanish colonial era because McLuhan did not directly engage with colonial theory. However, analogous to McLuhan's linear type of thinking, colonial diffusion of technology is behind the growth of pre-modern society so that a tool, like the plow, impacts food production that supplies the household and the colonial administration. A critical analysis would reveal that the rationale behind the adoption of the plow is not so much as domination of nature to increase food supply as the extraction of tribute which is a system of surveillance and coercion of the colonizer (Headrick, 2010). Simply put, the motive behind technological innovation is colonial conquest.

Engaging with McLuhan, without Joaquin for now, means grappling with his pithy concepts to explore the complex relations between technology and society. In "The Medium is the Message," the opening chapter of Understanding Media, McLuhan tried to explain the aphorism that suggests the subordinate role of message to medium. McLuhan did not provide cogent explanation of the phrase "medium is the message," thus leaving the readers to doubt their interpretation and scholars to liberally elucidate its possible meanings (Levinson, 1999; Gordon, 2010). However, there could be three possible meanings of the phrase, the medium is the message. First, the message of a medium is not the content per se but includes other activities that account for the cultural impact of a particular medium. McLuhan clarified what he meant by the phrase via the example of the electric light, which is being used for all sorts of activities, including brain surgery, baseball and night travels. He argued that these activities are the "content" of the electric light (medium) as they cannot take place without the electric light. This is another way of saying that the content has "less impact than the medium itself" (Gordon, 2010, p. xv). For McLuhan (1964/2003), it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.

Second, the aphorism could also mean that the medium or media are the methods and materials, as well as the techniques and energy that go into the use of a particular technology, alongside the idea that technology undergoes modification and adaptation. Returning to electric light example, McLuhan (1964/2003) said the message of electric light is total change. Given this assumption, technology, which is interchangeable with medium in McLuhan's sense, offers a possibility of mastery of any tool, given its widespread use. In Understanding Media, McLuhan analyzed several adaptable objects that are not directly related to communication, such as the wheel, bicycles, roads, clothes, airplanes, and clocks, but he nevertheless designated them as media. Media became McLuhan's catch-all term for tools, technologies, and communication systems whose use enable human interaction and mediate between humans and their societies.

Third, the aphorism also considers medium as extension of the human body, as in clothes extending the skin, housing extending the body's heat, and bike and cars extending the feet. In other words, a tool or technology is an extension of a human being (McLuhan, 1964/2003, p.19). McLuhan (1964/2003) illustrates an inapparent extension through games which extend human awareness and experience through playing. The simulations of real life in games are extensions of the social selves to permit participation of many people (McLuhan, 1964/2003). In this analysis of games as extensions, McLuhan brings an intangible dimension to prosthesis, and thus widens the sense of media for social analysis.

In all, McLuhan's (1964/2003) idea of a medium is all about materials (tools) and the methods (techniques) that are inseparable from each other, forming an environment where they could alter habits and consciousness to undermine old outlooks. In his words, "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale, pace, or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (p. 8). With this argument, there is always an impression that McLuhan privileged technology over social factors, leading to a charge of technological determinism.

Technological determinism defines human-technology relations in which "technology is understood to have effects on society while technological change is the principal determinant of cultural change" (Slack & Wise 2005/2015, p.51). Technology not only determines culture, but its presence also brings certain effects in significant ways, i.e., enlightenment and democracy. However, technological determinism is criticized for suggesting that technologies realize the goals set by humans whose role in transforming society is easily dwarfed by the part played by technology (Aydin, 2021).

Among McLuhan's critics are Marxist theorists like Raymond Williams and Andrew Feenberg who both engaged with theories of communication and technologies. For Williams (1980/2005), McLuhan conflated the uses and the social relationships surrounding technology "irrespective of the whole complex of social productive forces and relationships within which they are developed and used" (p. 52). By giving primacy to medium over message, McLuhan has rhetorically isolated "medium" from the whole historical, social, and material process. In other words, for Williams, McLuhan has neglected the contextualization which rests on the assumption of social inequality.

Meanwhile Feenberg pays attention to the political possibilities of technology which McLuhan elided. Feenberg's theory of technology underscores the missing agency in the relationship with technology that is possible when people mobilize and resist that which defines and determines them, a process he calls "democratic rationalization" (Feenberg, 1999, p. 105). This politics of technology holds that while technology dominates nature and humans, it can also be democratically transformed (Kellner, 2017). For Feenberg (1999), technology is not a predetermined destiny but a permanent site of struggle.

What Williams' argument brings is its relevance when examining colonialism's drive to plunder and extract resources from the colony. Colonial plunder comes in various terms: for Marx (1990), it's called primitive accumulation; for David Harvey (2010), it's accumulation by dispossession; and for Ellen Meiksins Wood (2017), coercive dispossession. The three similar concepts argue that colonization was responsible for the deaths, systematic theft of lands and other forms of economic coercion, e.g., forced labor. Colonialism is also responsible for creating social hierarchies in relation to the concentration of property and dispossession of colonial subjects. Marx (1990) termed it "primitive accumulation" because it preceded capitalism, and was "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (pp. 874). In this manner, technology is part of the vicious dispossession taking place in the colony.

Harvey's (20056) concept of accumulation by dispossession modifies Marx's concept of primitive accumulation. While Marx only described accumulation that took place during a transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, Harvey argues that accumulation by dispossession is also an ongoing process in the context of globalization, or when capitalism became the dominant economic power globally. Then and now, accumulation by dispossession attempts to stabilize a colonial society that is facing a challenge of legitimacy for extracting tribute from inhumane incidents of production (Harvey, 2006; Gregory, 2006).

Wood's (2017) notion of coercive accumulation is also derived from Marx, but she highlighted it as the extra-economic means of the imperial authority sustained by a monarchy rooted in feudalism in Europe that is simultaneously political and economic in power. The feudal system is fragmented and constructed around fealty, bondage, and personalized coercive power but it is compelled to consolidate itself against peasant resistance (Wood, 2017). Exported to colonized territories, coercive accumulation is the appropriation and coercion of the colonized who were introduced to tools to enhance their productivity (Wood, 2017). It is in this manner that surplus value was extracted from direct and once subsistence producers who experienced sustained exploitation under a colonial empire.

Aside from supplying the elements through which colonial societies could be analyzed economically and politically, the theories of Marx, Harvey, and Wood, emphasized that theorizing about those societies should pay attention to specific historical processes. This reminder is salient in the context of Spanish colonization of the Philippines because extracting tribute is a form of primitive accumulation to stabilize colonial rule. Technological change is a way to end the unstable conditions in the colony by increasing food supply. However, there are limits to this innovation because exploitative relations, with or without technology, is detectable. For Harvey (2006), it is "hard to predict the course of technological change" (p.120).

Harvey's (2006) recognition of limits of technological change brings us to Feenberg's notion of an agentic relationship of humans with technology or the chance for resistance within the expanding system of hierarchical control which includes technical domination. Protest could be prominent and large-scale, like a revolution, but who knows what unrecorded everyday disobedience have taken place, and with accretive and subversive impact over the long haul. For example, rather than accepting the tool, like the plow, the colonized resisted tributes and produced only what is necessary for their consumption. Feenberg's (1999) concept of democratic rationalization refers to collective responses when people reflexively confront the frameworks of control, thus enacting the promise of a democratization of technology. In other words, what Feenberg had in mind (the control over technology as part of the means of production) is perhaps key to a liberated future.

Bringing a cast of theorists on technology in this essay shows that the conceptualizations of technology by Joaquin and McLuhan have gaps that need filling. Marx, Harvey, Wood, and Feenberg have conceptual tools that would make the examination of a tool or technological innovation

deal with larger theoretical insights. The latter were intended to prevent theorizing from falling into technological determinism.

Technological determinism has attended McLuhan's arguments throughout, according to his critics. The same techno-human relation should be ascertained in Joaquin's (2004) work which established colonialism as the condition of "man's metamorphosis through media" (p. 6). However, to narrow down the critique of Joaquin's suppositions to just McLuhan's technological determinism might miss out the nuances in Joaquin's argument on culture. For example, he credited the "mediation of the West," for the Philippines' recognition among its Asian neighbors who, despite their developed civilization, did not bother to "Asianize" the islands before the Spaniards came (p. 42). Joaquin's essay offered a narrative of society through a tableau of tools to understand the colonial past in a positive light. However, in reading Joaquin's essay, one should not only pay attention to the "theory of tools" but also to the "theory as a tool" simultaneously posited.

A "theory of tools" is a form of a narrative to make sense of how technologies can be simultaneously social and technical, and the implications for their design, use and practice. It's the story about technology retold in many ways within the interpretative experiences of humans who construct meanings (Harman, 2010; Loeve et al., 2018r). The truth claims are configured within the arguments and explanations about technology. Whereas the theory of tools is an interpretive device to understand technology, the "theory as a tool" is both a metaphor and a theorizing approach where the conceptual systems are far from fixed but "refined in a dialogue with the objects in question" (Reckwitz & Rosa, 2023, p. 24). It is more of a heueristic that is concerned with testing out terms and concepts drawn from empirical materials to generate new insights (Reckwitz & Rosa, 2023). As the metaphor of tools goes, tools are useful and nimble but only for certain situations, thus "theory as a tool" is often in flux given its limited generality, conceptual ambiguities, and analytical cul-de-sacs (Reckwitz & Rosa, 2023, p. 25). With the two approaches combined, we say that Joaquin constructs a narrative of the technological evolution of the Philippines from the colonial times, with the paradoxical aspect of objects and practice assigned with a significance in line with hegemonic interest he favored. In other words, Spain's colonial narratives are revealed in Joaquin's essay.

A Tool-Forged Colony

Right at the beginning of his essay "Culture as History," Joaquin proposed a study of technology as history of culture through the account of objects like plow, cement, bridge, clock, book or printing press, which were all introduced by Spain that colonized the Philippines in the 16th century. As he argues that these tools were responsible for the metamorphosis of the colonized, Joaquin then suggests that colonization should not be seen as the arrival of the West to our islands but the inauguration of civilization-as-modernization. The plow not only improved farming but gave rise to fraternal tool-users who shaped their identity through their relationship with their tools. Thus, craft communities are precursors of the nation, leading Joaquin to argue that "(t)he plow did not 'corrupt,' it begot, the Filipino" (Joaquin, 2004, p.17).

Another example is masonry. Joaquin considered masonry a medium, which means a skill or environment in McLuhan's sense. Filipinos learned masonry from the Spaniards and this skill was responsible for the construction of churches and cathedrals made of stone, brick, and marble, some of which are still standing to this day. The stone churches are an achievement for "a people without ancient tradition of architecture and engineering, a people so identified with bamboo and nipa..." (Joaquin, 2004, p. 15). Joaquin suggests that tools play a major part in subjugating the pre-colonial subjects. Moreover, the tools conveyed a sense of superiority because there were no existing instruments of production comparable to those introduced by Spain. In other words, Joaquin offered the trope of modernization and efficiency as rational for colonization and which he conflated with the construction of the Filipino identity.

Joaquin cast colonization as a civilizational force, primarily due to the arrival of tools that marked the emergent modernity of the colony. Echoing McLuhan, Joaquin (2004) said: "We are being shaped by the tools that shaped us; and culture is the way of life being impressed on a community by its technics" (p. 3). With the idea that the tools brought material and social betterment to the colony, Joaquin appears to dissociate the absolutist colonial rule by offering a narrative of innovation.

In Joaquin's (2004) rendition of the plow, as an allegory of colonial agricultural progress, he justified subjugation because it led the pre-colonial subsistence economy to become self-sufficient in rice (the staple food), and eventually an export economy. Joaquin attributed food sufficiency in the colony to technical revolution in the 16th and 17th century, with the introduction of the plow, the use of carabao, the development of the industry of sugar, coffee and tobacco, the appearance of roads and bridges.

However, Joaquin's account can be contrasted by other historians'

analysis of pre-colonial Philippines in relation to inhabitants' access to food. Historian William Henry Scott (1982) noted a considerable variation of economic standards among communities, such as foraging forest dwellers and swidden farming people, with the latter having enough surplus to accumulate Chinese porcelains to become heirloom pieces rather than for everyday use. Scott asserted that pre-colonial societies developed with unlimited access and use of land. Uneven development characterized the agricultural production during the Spanish colonial rule throughout, even up to the nineteenth century when the colony was opened to world trade by exporting sugar and tobacco to Europe (Schmidt-Nowara, 2006). The rise of estates for intensive agriculture for export to Europe benefited the Spaniards and entrepreneurial mestizos. This suggests that tools and machineries for agriculture may have been enjoyed only in some areas, (e.g., Luzon and Negros), while the rest of the country relied on peasant production, but they were not spared from exaction of tributes, rents, taxes and forced labor which became unbearable and led them to evade payment or commit atrocities and rebellions (Agoncillo, 1956/2002). I argue that with the uneven development of the colony, it is not possible to construct a single grand narrative of a tool-forged nation in collusion with the colonialists' one-sided claim of civilizing mission without articulating the historical narrative of the colonized people

At this point, the limitations in McLuhan's modernization theory echoed by Joaquin become apparent. Their shared premise that technical necessity directs the development of society is tenuous without reference to the social conditions. Feenberg (1999) argues that progress cannot be solely attributed to either technical or economic efficiency but on the "fit" between devices and the interests and beliefs of the various social groups. He meant that a tool must be appraised in relation to the social environment, and not solely on its intrinsic property, i.e., technical efficiency. Given Feenberg's reservation, it is expected that there are different interpretations of technology by different groups in society that have differing relationships to technology with other social groups. To put it in another way, ideology enters the technical sphere in the same way that it suffuses the economic, political and cultural spheres.

There is no consensus on the appraisal of technology in colonial Philippines during colonial times. Joaquin's rumination on the tools introduced by Spain to stimulate progress in the colony is highly contrasted with the assessment of then eminent propagandists, now heroes, against Spain in the nineteenth century, namely Jose Rizal and Graciano Lopez Jaena. In his annotations of Antonio Morga's Sucesos de las islas Filipinas, Rizal provided a counter narrative to Morga by arguing that pre-colonial

natives lived better than those colonized under Spain. Encomienda, a colonial system of labor and land grant, was not a testament to Spain's benevolence or enlightenment but, according to Rizal, the cause "of the backwardness into which we have fallen" (Rizal, 1890, as quoted in Schmidt-Nowara, 2006, p. 165). Lopez Jaena's well-applauded speech, which assessed the Barcelona Universal Exposition in 1889, noted that the exhibits from the Philippines showed backwardness and inferiority, in an international fair that showcased the marvels of science and technology (Lopez Jaena, 1994). The displays on the primitiveness of Filipinos were used to contrast Spanish modernity. Nonetheless, Lopez Jaena confirmed that the general backwardness in the Philippines was caused by the Spanish friars. He said: "The friars are the omnipotent factor of ruin, backwardness, and miseries of those Islands of Oceania. In their hands are the valves of knowledge, science and morals but they teach fanaticism, they imbue idiocy, they corrupt the people as they teach" (Lopez Jaena, 1994, p. 11).

Although Joaquin (2004) did not mention Rizal and Lopez Jaena, he seemed to have been indirectly repudiating them when he put forward two arguments that supported McLuhan's medium theory: first, the West came with tools that altered the culture in the colony and, second, the coming of the West was not disastrous and neither had it corrupted Filipinos and their true culture" (p. 10). What Joaquin also wanted to highlight is that technology constructs a nation's identity and culture. "Before 1521 we could be anything and everything not Filipino; after 1565 we can be nothing but Filipinos," wrote Joaquin (2004, p. 1). In relation to other countries, it is only after the "mediation of the West" did Asian countries see the Philippines in a different light. For example, China considered the Philippines "no longer a frontier village but a civilized town" (Joaquin, 2004, pp. 43) after overcoming technological ignorance. Joaquin belabored in his essay that Filipinos became Asian only after they were civilized by the West through their tools. Simultaneously, Filipinos became Westernized and Asianized through colonization. It is shown in food, like adobo and pan de sal, that were neither Western nor Eastern but derived from both (Joaquin, 2004). For this double movement, Joaquin posed a rhetorical question that seemed to challenge Rizal and Lopez Jaena: "Shouldn't we therefore revise our idea that this colonial period meant the 'corruption' of our Asian soul?" (p.44).

Philippine hero and patriot Apolinario Mabini (2022), in what could be a retort to Joaquin in another time, wrote how immiseration was carried out by religious congregations who acquired extensive landholdings through deceit. What started as a gift of the produce to maintain good relations with priests became obligatory; eventually, the religious orders

appropriated the land of natives and turned them into tenants (Mabini, 2022). The natives did not complain because of fear of reprisals from Spanish colonial officials that were easily bribed by the religious orders. In other words, the plow and other tools for production are part of assemblage through which primitive or coercive accumulation were carried out.

In his assessment of other mediums, such as paper and printing technology, Joaquin maintains the argument that if not for Spain, Filipinos would never have writing and reading instruments. Despite their contacts with the Chinese, who were using paper, and Indonesians and Arabs, who already had a book culture, pre-colonial Filipinos were still using tree barks to write in the 16th century (Joaquin, 2004). He added: "But within thirty years (of being colonized), we took the first step into paper culture, print culture, and book culture" (p. 33).

Later studies would debunk claims that pre-colonial Filipinos were far from literate. An account of pre-colonial writing shows that such was in extensive use and open for transformation (Woods, 2017). The pre-colonial communities were neither illiterate nor reliant solely on oral culture because they possessed a writing form, which we now call baybayin, that may have come from other cultures in Asia that have technologies of writing. Pre-colonial writing was done on non-permanent materials like leaves and barks of trees. However, this kind of writing served a different purpose, as noted by one Spanish account on the Tagalogs: "They have neither books nor histories, and they do not write at length except missives and notes to each other" (Quirino & Garcia, p. 1958, quoted in Woods, 2017, p. 34).

The Spanish friars built on the literacy of their new colonial subjects for religious conversion by publishing the first catechism texts in pre-colonial script even as they also introduced the Roman alphabet, first as translation for baybayin, and later as full text (Woods, 2017). Baybayin was adopted up to the 18th century, for religious purposes and for legal documents in the form of signatures and notations for sale of land (Woods, 2017). These are proofs of the pliability of the ancient writing technology whose demise came with hegemony of Roman alphabet and its use as movable type in printing presses introduced by Spain.

As to books, the mass circulation and readership of books just like in Europe did not happen because of censorship of the Catholic Church and the Spanish colonial administration. In other words, the colony had none of the "typographic man" or "print culture" that McLuhan sketched in his work The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962). The colonial presses predominantly produced novenas, catechism, miracles of saints and other religious pamphlets. While newspapers were published but they were also subject to

strict censorship, and the staff were in danger of being exiled to Marianas (present-day Guam) when they displeased authorities. On the absence of press freedom, Lopez Jaena (1994) said: "The local press published only the news furnished by the government and what 'the red pencil' tolerates" (p. 113).

Joaquin's concern over writing and reading are not missing from pre-colonial tradition. Not only did pre-colonial oral culture hold a community together by sustaining rituals, language, aesthetics, laws, and punishments, it also played a crucial role in articulating a distinct identity harnessed in the colonial struggle. Thus, it's no wonder that oral culture was obliterated through assimilation, evangelization, and enforced forgetting.

In the above discussion on pre-colonial writing technology, this essay wants to point out that Joaquin's deployment of McLuhan's theory has weakness because it suggests that the Roman alphabet is a superior technology of writing. Medium theorists like McLuhan posit that dominant forms of technology in history undergo changes, such as from spatial to visual, and from communal to atomist individualism (Stamps, 1995). However, print technology could also be analyzed in the sense of the medium as the message: "This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (McLuhan, 2003, p. 19). Following McLuhan and against Joaquin, one can say that the content of the Roman alphabet of colonial Philippines is baybayin because the "message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (Joaquin, 2004, p.8). The same could be applied to other practices, tools, and symbols that Joaquin discussed in his essay. On that account, Joaquin appears to have missed McLuhan's more nuanced analysis of the reciprocal relationship between mediums when he assigned a superiority of the Roman alphabet over the baybayin script.

Postcolonial studies are a minefield of conflicting perspectives, and what Joaquin's narrative offers is just as contentious because of his turn to McLuhan. Later archeological and historical studies can provide fresh lens through which the past can be understood. Thus, critical frameworks are needed to underpin technological narratives.

While Joaquin's metamorphosis argument is pliable enough, it is limiting because it is premised on technological lack (Joaquin, 2004). He appears to be affirming the superiority of the Western colonial culture and invalidating the pre-conquest knowledge. Joaquin's essay articulates and defends the Spanish origins of the Philippines by asserting the superiority of tools and facets of culture that all justify colonialism and its consequences. The absence of implicit critique of nationalist history,

which presents a dialectical understanding of colonial relations, led the discussion to represent culture essentialized into some tools.

Situating Joaquin's essay within postcolonial studies, particularly the account of power and technology in the emergence of a nation, invites a critical gaze to show its limitations on knowledge and knowing. A rereading of Joaquin is important because it prods one to think about the effects of Spanish colonization long after its nominal end.

Postcolonial studies' aim is to decolonize minds, and this means "working with resistant knowledge and claiming the power of local subjects' intellectual agency" (Sefa Dei & Kempf, 2006, p. 11), to counteract Western knowledges that are deeply embedded in the historiographies of colonized people. When examining a technology narrative like Joaquin's, one challenges the exclusions and silencing of a people's history and culture in a text. At the same time there is value in looking at the multi-faceted dimensions of pre-colonial culture that were considered inferior, when Spain imposed its authority and technology over knowledge, language, and culture on the territories it conquered, and which are known to persist to this day.

Imaginaries of Technology

Constructing the colonial history of technology is a complex enterprise that no single theory, however rich, popular, or multivarious would suffice. Joaquin's "Culture in History" essay exhibits gaps that accost the readers to challenge their analytical resources. I will now provide some resources to explicate the larger meaning of technology in history.

Joaquin's (2004) essay tries to provide a grand theory of tools as a narrative of colonial technology by using McLuhan's theory to diverge from the nationalist current of history. For Joaquin, the arrival of the cross and the plow brought overall peace and progress to the colony, not so much dispossession and injustices that nationalist historians maintained. The plow, which is the emblem of modernity for Joaquin, represents the civilizational mission of the colonizer but, in his essay, the instrumentalization of the tool and the exploitation of the tool users receded into the background.

Colonialism requires a civilizing mission, and this is often accomplished through religion, technology or science, and brutality. The promise of saving souls and partaking of progress justify the exploitation of humans and natural resources with the use of technology. However, as history showed, the introduction of technology to the colony had uneven impact, with some innovation benefitting some people more than others. This happens because technical imperatives are bound up with relations

of power—contexts which Joaquin deftly eschewed. They revealed the confluence of class and race as a pattern of labor extraction.

Towards the end of the piece, Joaquin (2004) highlighted the hybridity that Filipinos must embrace as identity, which has long been a feature of the country's cuisine and aesthetics. However, hybridity has been accepted by Filipinos for some time as shown, for example, by how mixed-raced progenies are admired because the more popular standard of beauty has immensely favored a mestiza. For San Juan (2004), the notion of hybridity offers limited frames for understanding the imperatives of exploitation, commodification, and objectification embedded in the neoliberal and free market ideologies.

Commodification accentuates the difference derived from the mixing of cultures illustrated by stardom and beauty contexts that abound. Hybridity could be a symptom of two things: first, the inability to dialectically think of connections and mediations, and second, the failure to draw up a conjunctural crisis as a form of resistance against colonialism and later, capitalism (San Juan, 2004). Hybridity reveals the tension and histories of domination that should not be glossed over as a national phenomenon.

Benedict Anderson offered a nationalist imaginary on technology when he underscored the importance of the media in forging a nation out of the seriality and differentiation of the colonial past. Anderson's groundbreaking book, *Imagined Communit*y (1983/2003) established a connection between technology, language, and capitalism to create an imagined community which laid down the basis for a modern nation. Print capitalism means the mass production of texts like books, newspapers, and other printed materials that are also sold and exchanged as commodities (Febvre & Martin, 1976/2010). Emergent nations rely on print capitalism for post-colonial reconstruction because it makes it possible for people to think about themselves and relate to each other in many ways. For example, a newspaper of general circulation can unify its readers through its agenda-setting capacity that defines what kind of news is relevant or not. Printed materials shaped the consciousness that would make possible Filipinos or the Philippines. It also made possible the mass production of literature, grammar books, and the adoption of lingua franca, which was often determined by the choice of languages spoken in the center of power.

Anderson's (1983/2003) discussion of the census, the map, and the museum is similar to his arguments on print capitalism's capacity of unifying a nation. The numbers, grids, and exhibits rendered concrete the imaginations of a people about their origins and their future as a nation. This delineates boundaries and designates symbols quantifiably. The geographical, juridical, and cultural representations offered by the census,

map, and museum became widely accepted because of their reproducibility, not just in the books and textbooks but also postage stamps, postcards, calendars and the like (Anderson, 1983/2003). Anderson suggests that it was not the objects per se that unify a nation and create a national identity as such; rather it is in "the style of imagining" (p.185) of these material objects that concretize the idea of a nation.

The difference between Joaquin and Anderson is in their grammar of nationalism. Like Joaquin, Anderson (1983/2003) recognized the possibilities of technology once they are part of social groups' consciousness and cognition. However, the differences between Joaquin and Anderson should be emphasized. First, their work examined different periods: Joaquin showed the workings of technology in colonialism, while Anderson showed the role of technology at the cusp of liberation from colonialism. Second, they diverged on the importance accorded to technology: Joaquin provides the validation of colonial hegemony, while Anderson anticipates the contestation of dominant hegemonies. Lastly, while both underscored the crucial role of technology in organizing societies, Joaquin had overplayed its agency by overstating the capacity of technology as the main agent of economic, political, social, and cultural change. For Anderson, the idea of a nation is shaped by the way people have imagined and acted on it.

Anderson (1983/2003) developed a useful narrative of how politics, culture, history, through mediated subjectivity that is of the media, configures national identity. However, this framework is also fraught with hegemonic and ideological tensions over the discourse of nationalism, thus giving an idea that an identity is far from set. Nevertheless, Anderson has led the way to think about other factors at stake, other than technology in constructing a nation. Thus, Anderson's notion of imagined community has opened a nation's political and cultural lives to various trajectories and futures that anticipate contestation and reconstruction of the idea of nationalism.

Anderson's (1983/2003) arguments on technology as media, in the case of newspapers can be included here as it talks about seriality which is a condition of possibility in the construction of a national identity. What Anderson's concept of seriality and reproducibility brings to this essay is the recognition that the colonial imaginary of technology is impossible to fix, analogous to the way that newspapers operate. Anderson's argument on seriality proceeds from a recognition of a newspaper's function and effects. As a technology, newspapers tend toward uniformity by standardization of its language and practice such as the news gathering routine. At the same time, its format is recognizable, i.e., printed newspapers have certain

features that readers readily recognize. But the general likeness stops there. No two newspapers, in terms of editions, content, and newsroom practices are ever the same, especially when they mix up their form with their vested interests.

Anderson's thoughts laid bare Joaquin's technological determinism derived from McLuhan. Anderson seems to suggest the opposite—indeterminism—which could provide further critique of technology in which the primary intention of tools is to facilitate colonial conquest. However, I detect a danger in indeterminism because it could become an ideological justification for authoritarianism, in the sense of technological control, populism, xenophobia, and surveillance.

In his essay, Joaquin (2004) appears to grant neutrality to the tools introduced by Spain to transform the colony into a civilized and modern society at that time—that is, to be like the Western homeland of the colonizer. The tools were there to improve farming, mobility and public works of the colony; they assumed no other uses other than what they were intended for. Thus, if we are to reflect on these tools, recollection should focus on the part they play within the technical system. In the same way that when considering the colonizers that brought the tools, the assessment should dwell on their intention, which is to supplant pre-colonial culture deemed backward. This view of technology considers tools primarily to serve the colonial society. By setting out the ideas of Joaquin, McLuhan and their interlocutors, this essay suggests a decolonizing framework in the tradition of critical theory.

Feenberg's (2018) critical theory of technology looks at the values embodied in technology. These values, he said, are socially specific, with the means and ends bound up with each other. Feenberg (2018) notes: "In critical theory, technologies are not only seen as mere tools but also as frameworks for ways of life" (p. 63). Following Feenberg, a tool-forged colonial Philippines is a different society from one that acquires its tools from any other means. This is because the values embodied in the technical framework of a colonial society tell of different social consequences than that of society whose technical framework admits democracy and self-determination. Feenberg's (2018) critical theory of technology allows the possibility of reflecting on such choices and submitting them to democratic judgment. This means examining the context of the technological intervention if greater access and participation in the design, use and goals of technology are possible. Obviously, these conditions are limited, if not absent, in the colonial society where absolutism frames the presence and utilization of tools that Joaquin mentioned. Freedom, whether of individual or collective, was not realized from the colonial technological project that

would have paved the way to the realization of a creative and equitable tool-forged nation.

While focusing on media as communication, Raymond Williams shared a common thread with Feenberg, which is the critical theory tradition that engages with Marx and theorists from the Frankfurt School. Williams' (1980/2005) argument that the means of communication are also the means of production is clearer than McLuhan's medium-is-the-message aphorism. The means of communication ranged from language to media infrastructure consisting of meanings and instruments of production tools, machines and technology, and labor. The means of communication, however, are more than devices or media; they are also means of social production. The latter simply means that there are humans relating to each other, something that some bourgeois paradigms simply regarded as unproblematic senders and receivers of message, or passive users of tools or technology. Among these paradigms are the positivist inquiries on new media, the audience effects theories and McLuhan's medium theory. For Williams, such paradigms conceal social relationships that might influence the social conditions of reception and consumption of media. McLuhan, for example, fused uses and relationships and had them determined by technological goals of modernization, "irrespective of the whole complex of social productive forces and relationships within which they are developed and used" (Williams, 1980/2005, p. 52). What Williams endorsed is a historiography that is mindful of the development of the means of communication, including the especially active historical phase which include current developments in a particular society. Thus, the intervention that Williams proposed was giving attention to the forces of production or laborers that are wielding the tools in the context of uneven development of the colony.

McLuhan's theory, and reflected in Joaquin's essay, considers technologies as extensions of the human body or prostheses (McLuhan, 1964/2003; Joaquin, 2004). For McLuhan, any invention or technology is either an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies. Newspapers, with their view of the world, extend the nervous system while an over stimulation from reading can bring about auto-amputation. The latter simply means tuning out from the strain or pressures of engaging with the social environment. Joaquin used the concept of prosthesis to argue for the use of tools (extensions) and not to be overwhelmed by it and its use (auto-amputation). However, Joaquin did not bring the concept further to bear on his arguments on colonial history of the Philippines.

A more radical theory than McLuhan's theory of technology as prosthesis comes from Bernard Stiegler (1998). Unlike McLuhan's idea

of extensions or prosthesis, which is also shared by Joaquin, technical prosthesis does not conform to means-ends rationality, i.e., colonization. Stiegler, following Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, considers extensions as incalculable and unknowable conditions. This means that there is no absolute congruity between the goals and uses of technology, making technology susceptible to slippage, indeterminacy, and subversion. This condition destabilizes the situation so that resistance could ensue.

Stiegler (1998) constructs an argument that we understand history through the interplay of the past, the present, and technology. Stiegler argues that the experience of the past and of the present is possible through an external object and technical prosthesis, or a tool. By this he meant that the tools are not just seen as solely instruments with a purpose because they also contain traces of historical past and individual memory, or what Stiegler calls "technical consciousness" (p.151). For Stiegler, a tool is a memory. A tool contains sedimented memory; the material object conserving memory and meanings. He calls the phenomenon of this sedimentation and projecting the past into the future "epiphylogenesis" (p. 177) of humans, or the process by which the serial articulation of human life is retained or stored within a technical system. If we return to the plow, it was more than a tool for growing food; it also embodied the Spanish colonial commands that shaped the colonized subjects for 300 years. In other words, the tool cohered with the colonial system, whose logic is control and plunder of the colony, that eventually seeks its incorporation with the extractive global economic system.

The other imaginaries of technology, from Marx, Feenberg, Williams, Anderson, to Stiegler, stand as critiques and supplements to Joaquin and McLuhan's theory of tools, and especially Joaquin who ventures into the theory as tools. They offer frameworks that examine technology from a non-deterministic framework and do not take for granted the emergence of other conceptions of a nation. They all enrich the discussion on the theory of technology in the colonial era of Joaquin via McLuhan, thus contributing valuable insights into the importance of technology in media and cultural studies, and the craft of history itself.

Conclusion

In his engaging and panoramic essay of the colonial history of technology, Joaquin relied on the dominant but already repudiated narrative of colonialism as a civilizing culture of which tools are introduced to a backward group of people. The natives are seen as having limited capacity of knowing that they can only improve through Western knowledge. This narrative of invalidation continues to shape the social imaginary,

competing with the nationalist and post-colonial narrative. However, the nationalist current's influence may have also waned in the wake of social and institutional acts of forgetting that are too many and complex to be elaborated here. What is worrisome is when Joaquin's colonial imagination of technology is stretched from the past to the present to shape the narratives of new media technologies as well as the nation's vision of a technological future. The likely danger lies in merely accepting the commands of technological corporations, experts and authorities that include profit accumulation, dispossession, and surveillance.

This essay, which is an interrogation of Joaquin and McLuhan thoughts, attempts a decolonization which Sefa Dei and Kempf (2006) described as (re)claiming the power of local subjects' agency to highlight the resistance to a "domination in the past, contamination of the present, and the stealing of a people's future" (p. 11). Bringing in some critical imaginaries of technology and counterposing those of McLuhan and Joaquin's would not only highlight the differences but also take the insights gained to a level of epistemological critique. By looking into Joaquin's claim of the technical genesis of the Philippines, the possibility of counter-knowledges and resistance have remained inevitable to do away with domination that resists eradication.

What makes this rather extended explication worthwhile is the chance to engage with Joaquin, McLuhan, and other imminent theorists of technology to revisit the Philippines' colonial history. Bernard Stiegler (1988) said the technics (knowledge and tools) is often the unthought. I believe the issue is of high stakes because of the disquiet it arouses then and now.

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