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Guns, Art, and Empathy

How Filipinos Opposed the Japanese Occupation (1942–1954)

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Independent research through Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program Grant

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As Japan occupied the Philippines from 1942 to 1945, anti-Japanese sentiment among Filipino civilians intensified, especially as the brutal Japanese soldiers policed and coerced civilians into cooperating with their new ruler. The Japanese asserted their power through public atrocities directed toward civilians and prisoners, as well as through the implementation of mass censorship to ease the dissemination of propaganda, promote Asiatic identity and association, and prevent the spread of Western ideas. In this paper, I argue that Filipino civilians found ways of expressing opposition to the Japanese during the occupation period: by (1) joining and participating in the activities of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Anti-Japanese Liberation Army) or Hukbalahap, (2) conveying symbolic messages of opposition through various forms of artistic expression, and (3) empathetically providing sustenance and support to American soldiers. I draw on examples from primary and secondary sources in my analysis. These three forms of opposition highlight the creativity and solidarity of the Filipino civilians, as well as the bitterness they felt toward their occupier during this period of restriction, chaos, and uncertainty.

Introduction

The Japanese military, as it occupied the Philippines beginning in 1942, declared to the Filipino society the end of suffering and a new period of prosperity. Such promises could not be taken to heart as the Filipinos continued to witness and experience the atrocities of the Japanese military. In the early period of the Japanese occupation, Filipinos watched the captured

Filipino and American soldiers during the so-called Bataan Death March. The sight of exhausted and sick soldiers for the Filipinos was an experience that triggered a collective emotion the Japanese dismissed. The Japanese continued to assert power by trying to control Filipino society especially since there were pressing issues the Japanese had to worry about, like the guerilla fighters hiding in the hills and the apparent shortages with commodities.

The Japanese military took several steps to overcome the apparent challenges in the Philippines by hunting down gue-



I wrote this research paper as part of my UROP-funded project. The research blossomed out of my curiosity with Asia, especially the relationship between the United States and the Philippines during the Pacific War. I hope to use the skills I have developed as I pursue my master's degree in Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

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rilla leaders through village raids, restoring a sense of normalcy, and launching cultural campaigns. The Japanese set out to the villages to conduct attacks which engendered fear, especially since the Japanese were abusive when interrogating the ordinary people. Additionally, entertainment and publications were restored to promote a sense of normalcy in the occupied areas. However, despite the restoration of these expressive outlets, they were done so were under Japanese censorship. Finally, the primary purpose of the cultural campaigns was to distract society from the apparent experiences of hardship and suffering during the Japanese occupation. It mandated the nation to participate in Filipino and Japanese customs and holidays. These programs, loathed by the Filipinos, were implemented through the help of mass censorship and close surveillance. Overall, the controlling mechanisms of the Japanese served as necessary tools in tackling the challenges the Japanese were facing in the Philippines.

Despite the authoritarian character of the Japanese, Filipino creativity flourished cementing national solidarity. Such solidarity helped Filipinos find their voice during the occupation period. Collectively, their perspectives, which form the backbone of this essay, create a narrative of Filipino perseverance. The dedication to opposing a new ruler reflects the people's relentless aspiration for the nation's independence. As a new occupier in the Philippines, the Japanese took the challenge of decolonizing the land, through the erasure of Anglo-American influence, while also reorienting the people to conform to Asiatic ideas and customs, by uprooting a pre-western identity or regional association.

How did Filipinos express opposition to the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945? My purpose in this paper is to discuss how Filipinos expressed their opposition to the Japanese through the analysis of existing records from Filipinos and Americans who lived through the Japanese occupation. As I provide specific examples, I argue that Filipinos expressed their opposition to the Japanese by joining and participating in the activities of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Anti-Japanese Liberation Army), or Hukbalahap, conveying symbolic messages of opposition through various forms of artistic expression, and empathetically providing sustenance and support to American soldiers. These expressions of opposition will allow us to understand the discourse of the Japanese occupation in the Philippines, especially as I provide my analysis of the secondary and primary sources. The integration of these unique sources, stories told not only by Filipinos but also by the Americans, offer a perspective on why the oppressed Filipinos had to persevere and unify during a time of restriction, chaos, and uncertainty.

In understanding the fuel of opposition, I first lay out the historical background of the Japanese occupation in the Philippines. From there, I discuss how Filipinos opposed the Japanese by dividing the body of the paper into three categories of opposition. First, Filipinos participated in guerilla operations

by taking up arms, organizing the villages, and performing underground tasks, of the Hukbalahap. Second, Filipinos expressed their criticisms, insults, and defiance through poems, illustrations, like comics and paintings, and stage performances. Finally, Filipinos showed empathy with the American soldiers by displaying their emotional support, providing sustenance, and helping soldiers escape imprisonment.

Filipinos opposed the Japanese by participating in guerilla activities.

Pressed with an emerging problem, the weakening allied forces and the advancing Japanese military in the Philippines, sparked peasant leaders, including the Communist Party, to form a coalition with other resistant groups (Agoncillo, 2001, p. 22). In fact, in 1941, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas or PKP (Communist Party of the Philippines) presented an official declaration of support to Quezon and the United States (Maceda, 1996, p. 112). The resistant groups, primarily anti-colonialism, such as the mentioned PKP, League for the Defense of Democracy or LDD, Kalipunang Pambansa ng mga Magsasaka sa Pilipinas or KPMP (National Society of Peasants in the Philippines), Aguman ding Malding Talapagobra or AMT (General Workers' Union), and Katipunan ng mga Anak Pawis or KAP (Association of Toilers), had perceived the Japanese as another imperial power, greedy to take over the Philippines (Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 97). Such perception inspired the formation of a united front. Hence, their coalition would birth the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon, a centralized and unified resistance against the Japanese. During the occupation period, the Hukbalahap would serve as an option for Filipino civilians galvanized to resist or escape the atrocities of the Japanese. The presence of the organization encouraged civilians to participate in the activities of the Huks by taking up arms, organizing the villages, and performing secret operations.

Following the formation of the Hukbalahap in March 1942, the townspeople, including those in the barrios, quickly organized into squadrons, ready to fight the Japanese aggressors (Taruc, 1953, p. 73-75). The squadrons, which consisted of one hundred men each, became the basis of the Hukbalahap. These squadrons were further divided into platoons and squads (Taruc, 1953, p. 67). Interestingly, the Hukbalahap appealed to the Filipinos because the Huks leaders, experienced from previous peasant movements, were able to mobilize the society. By September of 1942, the number of squadrons had dramatically increased from five to thirty-five. It became so difficult to supervise the growing number of squadrons that the Military Committee of the Hukbalahap had to divide Central Luzon into five Military Districts (Taruc, 1953, p. 80).

The Huks' first order of operation was to secure arms by ambushing bandit groups or collecting weapons abandoned by the allied forces. By the end of 1942, the Huks had collected

about two thousand arms (p.77). The armed guerilla fighters attacked the areas where Japanese collaborators, such as the puppet constabulary and local officials, who carried out the bidding of the Japanese, were located (p. 78). The collection of arms and supplies became a routine for every successful attack or raid. Note that from these operations, both Filipinos and Japanese experienced significant casualties. Based on an oral account, the Huks killed more than twenty thousand Japanese, including spies and collaborators (Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 93). Finally, by September of 1944, the Huks could rely on fifty thousand armed fighters, with a mass base of half a million people, to resist and build an offensive line against the Japanese (Taruc, 1953, p. 177).

The call for mobilization from the Hukbalahap was targeted to all Filipinos, regardless of religion, social status, political affiliation, or gender. Women, in particular, took up important roles that were crucial to the Hukbalahap. Many of the women were emboldened to join the resistance against the Japanese since they were forced to choose between two options: to resist or be abused by the Japanese (Lanzona, 2009, p. 36). Many women fled their villages and joined the resistance against the Japanese as they experienced first-hand and heard stories of the atrocities of the Japanese. For example, two women recalled fleeing and choosing to live with the Huks in the hills after the Japanese raided their villages (p. 41). Thus, for many, especially women, the arrival of the Japanese equated their lives being disrupted. Overall, although many joined the Hukbalahap to help with the resistance against the Japanese, other civilians were forced to join the Huks because they feared the atrocious Japanese.

Not every guerilla member engaged in a physical altercation with the Japanese. There was the Cultural Information Division (CID) or Propaganda Core of the Hukbalahap which task was to organize the villages (Maceda, 1996, p. 133). Women, in particular, made up the majority of the Propaganda Core (Lanzona, 2009, p. 50, 56). They were used as the face of the organization when entering the villages because they appealed to the mass. The CID entered the villages as performers and would invite the villagers to watch their plays. Their performances, called flying meetings, were short as they consisted of spoken word poetry, short drama, and a concluding speech (Maceda, 1996, p. 135). The music played, like the emotional song "Condiman ng Pagkaulila," and skit performances became the instruments that won the sympathy and the heart of the masses. Some guerilla performances that were "invariably" anti-Japanese were done in front of the Japanese who watched the shows thinking that the Filipinos were having a festival (Lanzona, 2009, p. 60). The performances that the Hukhalahap staged in the villages were more than just entertainment. They captured the hearts of the people and convinced them to support the Huks who were fighting the enemies of the Filipino nation, which were the Japanese.

With the support and sympathy of the villagers, the Hukbalahap members were able to establish the Barrio United Defense Corps (BUDC) or Sandatang Tanod ng Bayan (Maceda, 1996, p. 135). The BUDC became a secret converted version of the Japanese-established Neighborhood Association, which played a role in the rationing system and in keeping families under close watch with each other (Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 94-95). Hence, although the villagers with the BUDC appeared submissive to the Japanese, they were actually in support of the Huks (Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 95; Lanzona, 2009, p. 49). Additionally, the most critical role of the BUDC was to ensure that the Hukbalahap gained the full support of the villagers. A loyal village was crucial to the Huks because they provided necessary resources, like food and money, and helped circulate information for the organization (Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 95; Taruc, 1953, p. 49). Thus, villages known with BUDC were safe areas for guerilla fighters as they could take refuge in them (Lanzona, 2009, p. 40). Overall, Filipinos opposed the Japanese occupation by secretly supporting the Hukbalahap.

Other guerilla members or supporters had other tasks crucial to the Hukbalahap. Women, in particular, took roles as nurse aids, either in the Hukbalahap camps or in their homes. They also worked within the administrations as secretaries. Since the Huk camps offered mass schools for students who were interested in the Hukbalahap, there were teaching jobs available for those experienced in the field (Taruc, 1953, p. 119). Youth members also had their share of educating the adults, for example, teaching the adults in the areas of hygiene (p. 122).

Another essential task that Hukbalahap members were assigned was delivering messages between neighboring villages and guerilla members (p. 121). Although both men and women shared the role of courier, the task was generally assigned to women, especially since the Japanese least suspected women of participating in guerilla activities (Lanzona, 2009, p. 60-61). To ensure that the letters they carried did not fall into the hands of the enemy, the women would hide them in their baskets or inside their blouses. Otherwise, they had to memorize the content or swallow the entire letter if the Japanese soldiers began suspecting them (p. 61).

Aside from the communications networks, another critical piece within the organization was the intelligence department. Everyone, including children, had a role in the information or communication system (Taruc, 1953, p. 120-121; Kerkvliet, 1977, p. 94). The intelligence network was so efficient that specific details were relayed to the Huks (Taruc, 1953, p. 121). To elaborate, women would seem like they were gossiping when, in reality, they were collecting information about the Japanese. Finally, coordinated warning signals between the villagers contributed to the communications system of the Hukbalahap. For example, visual and audio signals, like white bed sheets and the hacking of bamboo, were used to warn villagers and guerilla fighters of the presence of the Japanese (p. 122).

Another example of the importance of collaboration among the Huks would be during the harvest time. The members would coordinate with each other to prevent the Japanese from accessing the harvests of the villagers (p. 125). Overall, the Huks outsmarted the Japanese by using elaborate yet discreet tactics. These tactics, done in opposition to the Japanese, reinforced the relationship between Hukbalahap members, especially those in the villages.

The success of the Hukbalahap in mobilizing and unifying the Filipinos, apparent by the mass base of the organization near the end of the occupation period, solidified the bitterness Filipinos felt toward the Japanese. This sentiment was transformed into the collective actions of the Huks by taking up arms, winning the support of the villagers, and partaking in guerilla roles, either within the Huk camps or in the villages. These actions share a commonality in that they had to be secretly executed, especially in the towns under Japanese surveillance. Otherwise, the Japanese would have quickly suppressed the Hukbalahap rebels upon discovery. Hence, Huk members risked their lives by being a part of the organization, which shows that Filipinos strongly felt a need to resist and oppose the Japanese occupation. It is also important to note that the Hukbalahap was successful in organizing the mass because it took advantage of the fragile emotional state of the Filipinos during the occupation period. The feelings Filipinos carried were amplified through the music and cultural performances of the CID. Such performances gave room for solidarity to flourish, convincing the Filipino society to support and join the fight against the Japanese occupiers. Overall, during the Japanese occupation, many Filipinos feared the Japanese and felt ambivalent about their future. Despite these apparent feelings, the Hukbalahap provided a sense of safety, comradery, and responsibility for every ordinary Filipino, which pulled the society to its cause.

Filipinos opposed the Japanese by creatively expressing themselves.

At the beginning of the occupation period, between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese sought to bring a sense of normalcy to the Philippines by redirecting the people's attention in the cultivation of a pre-Western identity. Such a goal incited a process of mass brainwashing: by carrying out cultural campaigns and isolating the nation through media censorship. Hence, during the Japanese occupation in the Philippines, although a few publications, like the *Tribune* and *Lidayway*, as well as entertainment, like movies and theater performances, were restored, they were done so under Japanese surveillance. The Japanese deployed various mechanisms to regulate the spread of information and ideas in the Philippines. One particular example was the requirement to register with the authorities

and obtain Japanese-issued permits and licenses (Jose, 1992, p. 13; Terami-Wada, 1990, p. 291). It was revealed, however, that despite Japanese restrictions, Filipinos were able to utilize the creative platforms, provided or supported by the new occupiers, to express their opposition to the Japanese. Hence, Filipinos expressed their opposition through creative writing (poems), illustrations (comics and paintings), and verbal communication (theater plays). These expressions were executed by the creative language and symbols which helped surpass Japanese censorship, allowing Filipinos to defy and criticize the Japanese during the occupation period.

In restoring a sense of normalcy in the Philippines, the Japanese encouraged artistic expressions to not only promote their objectives, like the ideas of Greater East Asia Co-Prospersity Sphere, but also to distract the society from the "tension and suffering" experienced during the time (Pilar, 1992, p. 149). It is revealed, however, that a few artists were able to depict the economic and social crisis unfolding in the Philippines during the occupation period. These expressions were forms of opposition to the Japanese because they deviated from the guidelines that the Japanese promoted. By exposing the harsh conditions brought by the war, which the Japanese were responsible for, Filipino artists and content creators were able to share, either directly or indirectly, their criticisms about the Japanese.

Some poems depicted the harsh city life, which contradicted the theme majority of the Filipino writers during the occupation period portrayed. A poem published on *Lidayway* in 1944, titled "Katubusan, Nasaan Ka?" by Mabini Rey Centeno, reflects the suffering that Filipinos were experiencing while chained under a new ruler (Agoncillo, 2001, p. 593). Another poem was published in 1943 titled, "Nangangailangan: Isang Mamimili" by Manuel P. Bautista which "alludes to the 'buy-and-sell' racket in referring to the miseries of war victims" (Lumbera, 1990, p. 54). The poem shares the perspective of a seller whose desperation, in search of a buyer, is felt through the lines, "sino ang bibili? Lapit ang tatawad." or in translation, "who will buy? Come and bargain the price" (p. 54). Lastly, a poem published in 1944 called "Tula sa Tagatulak ng Kariton" by Pedro S. Dandan describes a pushcart-man who is symbolic "of a nation groaning under the burdens of war" (p. 54). These three poems portray the harsh reality that Filipinos were experiencing during the Japanese occupation. Their messages were successfully conveyed through the use of figurative language, as it allowed the poets to express their criticisms of the Japanese whose promised duties were to alleviate the suffering of the people. With promises left unfulfilled, Filipino writers were discontent and had ironically been let loose.

The *Tribune*, coined the "mouthpiece" of the Japanese regime, also became a medium where Filipino artists criticized and opposed the Japanese occupation (Agoncillo, 2001, p. 562). Despite the apparent Japanese censorship, Filipino comic cre-

ators were able to insert counter-propaganda content. They attacked the solutions of the Japanese, whose purpose was to help solve the food and supply shortage during the occupation period. Chue (2005) described the method of the Filipino artists as a “solution-subversion approach” because not only were they creating propaganda for the Japanese, but they were also criticizing the Japanese (p. 88). A comic artist, under the name GAT, was behind the series “The Philosopher of the Sidewalk,” which repeatedly made fun of the solutions that were promoted by the Japanese.

An example, published in 1942, emphasizes the limited availability of commodities in the Philippines during the occupation period. The “Philosopher” in the comic is shown waiting in a long line. When he finally reaches the end of the line, he discovers that rice was the only item he could purchase, implying a tone of disappointment (p. 78). Two other examples of the series, both published in 1942, portrayed defiance to the food substitution of the Japanese. The first comic was about the Philosopher who showed his preference to cow’s milk, even in its scarcity, as he patiently waits “for the cow to yield milk” until he falls asleep. The other comic strip implied that Filipinos would be unwilling to accept mangoes as an alternative to fruit jams, especially since they are “uncooperative” or stubborn with the idea (p. 83).

Additionally, there was a particular comic that indirectly insulted the Japanese. Published by Ros in 1942 was “Now I’ve Seen Everything,” which insulted the Japanese for being “bow-legged.” The insult is highlighted through the captions implying the misfortune of the Japanese if they had to wear shorts, which would expose their legs, as suggested by the authority to save on soap (p. 79). Hence, although the Japanese had full censorship over newspapers like the *Tribune*, a few Filipino comic strip creators were able to express their opposition to the Japanese by criticizing or insulting the Japanese and their programs. Understanding the message of the comic artists requires a literal and metaphorical lens, mainly because their subtle messages were meant to be discreet. Overall, Filipinos displayed defiance to the Japanese by creatively expressing themselves through a medium that was supposedly controlled by the Japanese.

Besides the comic strips in the newspapers, there were also artworks, dated between 1942 and 1945, that criticize the Japanese as they similarly portray the harsh conditions experienced by Filipino society during the occupation period. Amado Dela Cruz’s “Food Is Where You Find It” depicted food shortages during the occupation period as the characters in the painting, who seemed to be in a hurry, placed “crops in containers” (Pilar, 1992, p. 154). Ricarte Puruganan had two entries for the 1944 art exhibition sponsored by the Japanese. The first one was the “Mass Burial at Capas,” which portrays the dead bodies of soldiers. The second painting was the “Railroad Scene,” which depicts the chaos in a railroad track as peo-

ple ran frantically; some trying to get on the train while others were pushing their carts and carrying their loads for departure (p. 154).

Simeon Saulog’s “Conspiracy,” dated 1943, showed men huddled together under a lamp post. Pilar describes the painting as, “The faces and gestures of the characters are picked up by dingy yellow highlights as if to hint at their defiant intentions” (p. 154). These paintings, dated during the Japanese occupation, were expressions of defiance to the Japanese because, just like the poems and comics, they showcased misery and suffering brought by the war. Hence, these paintings contradicted one of the goals of the Japanese in the Philippines, which was to display to the Filipino nation the optimism still possible under Japanese rule.

Stage performances held in theaters, where Filipinos deprived of entertainment flocked, became a venue for Filipino actors, directors, and scriptwriters to express opposition to the Japanese. There were instances when actors blurted lines that contradicted the “new order.” For example, a scriptwriter admitted during an interview conducted years after the war that expressions of opposition had been inserted in script lines when such an opportunity would arise (Bonifacio, 1992, p. 143–144). The same scriptwriter confirmed that an actor said the following words, “Talagang sumosobra na,” which indirectly describes the Japanese as being abusive to Filipinos. Interestingly, the audience would respond in agreement (p. 145). It was also noted that another actor, during a play, recited lines about the arrival of General McArthur who was given a Filipino name, Mang Arturo or Mister Arthur (p. 145).

Additionally, a prominent stage director during the time also admitted to allowing an actor to utter indirect insults about the Japanese. The actor blurted out that Filipinos were becoming “bow-legged,” just like the Japanese, due to the burdens that they were currently facing in life (Terami-Wada, 1992, p. 133). Finally, the same director purposely hired a well-known actor to play the role of a guerilla fighter in a propaganda play that was put together by the Japanese. The actor’s words of defiance in the show would, again, serve as a catalyst, causing the audience to cheer in approval (p. 133). Therefore, expressions of opposition to the Japanese authority were deliberately inserted in the stage performances. Their expressions were embedded with deep meanings clear to the Filipino audience. Finally, they became powerful tools that conveyed the sentiment Filipinos felt about the Japanese occupation, as well as reminded society that the Japanese were the enemies.

The association of symbolic meanings was not limited to verbal expressions. Objects and sounds were used during the stage performances, which amplified the emotions the audience, actors, and those behind the curtains felt during the occupation period. One example was the Katipunan flag, a symbol of the Filipino revolutionary fighters who fought for the nation’s independence during the Spanish and U.S. coloni-

zation of the Philippines. The Katipunan flag was shown at the end of the *Tandang Sora* play, and its impact was most apparent by the reaction of the audience as they rose from their seats upon seeing the flag (Terami-Wada, 1992, p. 133). There was also a stage singer, a member of the Philippine Artists League, who would sing *Bakit* or *Babalik Ka Rin* to signal or warn guerrilla fighters in the audience of the arrival of Japanese soldiers to the theater (p. 134). Hence, the purpose of the theaters was far from just being an entertainment venue for the ordinary Filipinos during the Japanese occupation. They became a platform where artists and performers were able to express their opposition to the Japanese. The performances, attached with symbolic meanings, expressed through spoken words, objects, or songs, fostered the emotions Filipinos felt during the occupation period. Thus, through time, a sense of solidarity and unity to oppose the Japanese was nurtured.

The Japanese aspired to restore a sense of normalcy in the Philippines during the occupation period from 1942 to 1945. Hence, entertainment and mass media were reinstated under Japanese control. Ironically, Filipino artists were encouraged to use the creative platforms to express and share their creativity, though within the approved guidelines and objectives of the Japanese. However, despite apparent censorship, Filipinos took advantage of the creative venues to express their opposition to the Japanese, as highlighted through the mentioned poems, illustrations, and theatrical plays. Additionally, these expressions of opposition reiterated, depicted, and communicated the pain and suffering Filipinos were experiencing during the occupation period through the creative media, which were controlled and promoted by the Japanese. Hence, the Japanese failed to distract the society from the worsening conditions in the Philippines and had instead helped to sustain the emotions Filipinos carried during the occupation period. Finally, although the Japanese had the advantage to reach out to society and disseminate propaganda through their cultural campaigns, they failed to control creativity completely. A reason for this is perhaps because creativity is not meant to be restricted. Censorship did not stop Filipino creativity from blossoming. Instead, creativity itself helped Filipinos surpass Japanese censorship. Overall, Filipino artists utilized the power of figurative language and symbolism, incorporated within the expressions understood by the society, to defy and oppose the Japanese occupation.

The Japanese censorship incited Filipinos to cultivate stronger feelings of opposition, especially since it did not stop Filipinos from expressing themselves creatively. There was no doubt that restriction on creativity was a challenge for Filipino artists. They had to be extremely creative to achieve their artistic goals. From the examples that were mentioned, Filipino artists had to be deliberate on the symbols and language they used so that their messages surpassed Japanese censorship and were received by their audience. The reactions of the au-

dience reaffirmed the intentions of the artists. Therefore, both Filipinos and Japanese used the available creative media to deploy their agendas: for the Japanese to assert their power and for Filipino artists to unify their nation.

Filipinos opposed the Japanese by empathizing with the Americans.

Although Manila fell into the hands of the Japanese in early 1942, the American and Filipino forces held out for several months in Bataan and on a small island offshore of the peninsula called Corregidor. By April 9, 1942, the Japanese troops captured Bataan and Corregidor by May 7, 1942. After the fall of Bataan, the captured allied forces were ordered to march the long distance to Camp O'Donnell where they would be imprisoned. It would be known as the Death March as many of the captured soldiers suffered or died during the journey. However, the horrific scenes of American and Filipino soldiers suffering—exhausted, disease-ridden, amputated, hungry, and parched—during the march were unfolding before the eyes of the Filipinos. It was through this context that Filipinos became convinced that the Japanese were the enemies of the people. Accordingly, being aware that the American soldiers were fighting beside fellow Filipinos, and on Filipino soil, inculcated in the minds of the people the idea that the Americans were sacrificing their lives for the Filipino nation. This reinforced the notion that the U.S. was an ally who was deserving of the Filipino people's loyalty. Despite threats from the Japanese and the display of punishment of uncooperative civilians, Filipinos consistently defied the Japanese by empathizing with the Americans. The Filipino people showed their empathy by expressing their emotional feelings, providing sustenance, and other means of support to the Americans.

To illustrate this phenomenon, I draw on examples from the accounts of four American soldiers who survived the war in the Philippines. The first is William Edwin Dyess, an officer of the U.S. Army Air Force who was among those fortunate enough to escape the war in the Philippines and the first American prisoner of war to tell his story in the U.S. The second is Ernest Miller, a commander of the 194th Tank Battalion who lived through the Japanese occupation. The third and fourth, Bernard T. FitzPatrick and Richard M. Gordon, were American soldiers who were imprisoned in the Philippines and later sent to Japan. Their stories share similarities, not only through the events these soldiers experienced, but also because they reveal how Filipinos showed their empathy toward the American soldiers.

The actions of the Filipino bystanders during the Bataan Death March, as recounted by the four American soldiers, were a form of opposition to the Japanese during the occupation period. The stories of the soldiers depict Filipinos risking their

lives to give the exhausted and parched soldiers food and water. For example, although Gordon only superficially mentions Filipinos giving food and water to the captured soldiers, the three other accounts elaborate on how the Filipinos defied the Japanese through these empathetic actions (Gordon & Llamzon, 1999, p. 97, 99, 101). For instance, some Filipino bystanders directly handed out food to the captured soldiers. During the march, near Abucay, FitzPatrick remembered boys and women giving rice cakes, bananas, and all sorts of snacks to the soldiers (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 68). Then, from Orani to Lubao, he described a boy who “darted behind one of the guards and passed like a flash . . . thrusting a small watermelon” into the hands of an American soldier (p. 71). Similar actions by Filipinos would be witnessed again during the march by FitzPatrick as a boy and an old man placed food in his hand (p. 72–73). Dyess, on the other hand, noted direct interactions with Filipinos while imprisoned in Cabanatuan. For example, he recalled Filipino families living near the prison camps who slipped food over the fences (Dyess, 2002, p. 126). Overall, the sight of suffering soldiers elicited the instinct of the Filipinos to provide help and support by giving the soldiers food or water. Even when Filipinos were aware that they were defying the Japanese by empathizing with the captured soldiers, they chose to risk their lives.

There were Filipinos who were determined to give food and gifts to the captured soldiers, especially since they witnessed the critical conditions of the captured soldiers during the Bataan Death March. Hence, Filipinos resorted to another method: by throwing or showering the food at the soldiers. At Lubao, Dyess noted food being showered from an upper window which, upon sight, encouraged Filipino bystanders to toss food at the captured soldiers (Dyess, 2002, p. 90). Miller recalled a similar case. In his account, it reads, “We began to see Filipino civilians along the road . . . covertly tossing raw turnips at us” (Miller, 1949, p. 225). Two of the accounts noted, during the train ride from San Fernando to Capas, that there were Filipinos who aimed at the trains and threw food, like bananas, tomatoes, and sugar canes, at the soldiers (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 74; Miller, 1949, p. 229). Miller would witness similar action from the Filipinos when he was relocated from Camp O’Donnell to Cabanatuan (Miller, 1949, p. 246). Some of the accounts also recalled, during the trek through Capas, how there were Filipinos lined-up on the roads tossing bags of food containing rice cakes and fruits at the soldiers (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 117; Miller, 1949, p. 229). The empathetic actions of the Filipinos, to provide food to the captured soldiers, equated actions that risked their lives. Despite the danger they were putting themselves in, they knew that their empathetic actions, to provide even a small amount of food, could save other lives. Thus, these expressions of opposition to the Japanese were acts of bravery and kindness.

As stated earlier, besides food, Filipinos also tried to alle-

viate the thirst of the captured soldiers with water. The four soldiers recalled Filipinos placing cans, buckets, and jars of water on the sides of the road for the captured soldiers (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 68, 71; Dyess, 2002, p. 97). For instance, Gordon remembered Filipinos, “Men, women, and even children would leave five-gallon containers of water alongside the road” (Gordon & Llamzon, 1999, p. 101). Miller elaborated by saying that the buckets of water, which were stationed outside the houses of the Filipino civilians, would be refilled when they ran out or after the Japanese had knocked them over (Miller, 1949, p. 231). There was an instance when Filipinos, behind the back of the Japanese, procured buckets of water after Miller made the request (p. 221–222). Besides water, Miller also enjoyed a fruit-drink prepared by Filipinos at a train station (p. 259). These examples of Filipinos providing sustenance to the captured soldiers, as remembered by the Americans, contribute to a narrative of Filipinos defying the Japanese during the occupation period, especially since the Japanese deprived their prisoners of food and water. Additionally, these examples only reaffirm the perspective of the Japanese during the occupation period as being atrocious. Overall, these empathetic actions of the Filipinos emphasize how, during the Japanese occupation, the Americans won the hearts of the Filipinos.

Aside from providing sustenance, Filipinos found other means of lifting the spirits of the captured soldiers. For Dyess, there was an instance when he was given a smuggled-cigarette by a Filipino, which contained a note saying: “Be Brave. You will soon be free.” (Dyess, 2002, p. 113). Such notes provided hope, which helped boost the morale of the imprisoned soldiers. Miller, on the other hand, recalled a “Mr. Filipino” who received U.S. radio lines. Mr. Filipino had willingly relayed the information he received to the American soldiers (Miller, 1949, p. 255).

In contrast to the Filipinos grieving during the Bataan Death March, there were Filipinos, as recounted by the Americans, who displayed their signs of support to the captured soldiers. A reoccurring signal was the V hand-sign, which stood for victory. FitzPatrick was one among the men from Camp O’Donnell who was chosen to help the Japanese restore or build bridges in the Philippines. Hence, FitzPatrick was able to see beyond the prison camps and, to some degree, interact with Filipino civilians. While in Manila, he saw a Filipino barber make a V sign using his scissor while a Japanese soldier was getting his hair done (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 123). Additionally, FitzPatrick noted, several times in his account, Filipinos smiling at him as if to reassure him of their loyalty (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 124, 131, 135). Miller recorded this similar experience in Manila, on their way to a ship that would take them to Japan, saying, “. . . we constantly saw Filipinos quietly placing their hands to their faces. The index finger and the one next to it would form a V!” (Miller, 1949, p. 259–260). Dyess had also witnessed these signs a few times

in Manila. The first time was when he was summoned for interrogation. On the way, Dyess saw Filipinos showing their V signs, which he described as “signs of friendship and encouragement” (Dyess, 2002, p. 142). The hand gesture would be seen again when he left Manila for Davao (p. 149). Filipinos showed their support to the captured soldiers through their V signs, notes of encouragement, and smiles. These signs, which were expressions of opposition to the Japanese occupation, imply the optimism and hope Filipinos had during a period where the nation felt oppressed and silenced.

The most dramatic display of empathy by Filipinos was helping Dyess escape imprisonment in the Philippines. What might have given Dyess the idea to escape was most likely his earlier experience during the Bataan Death March when he witnessed a Filipino who tried to hide three American soldiers in his covered horse-drawn cart (Dyess, 2002, p. 92–93). For Dyess, it was logical to ask for help from Filipinos familiar with the corners of their homeland. Hence, as Dyess and his other American imprisoned soldiers planned their escape, they decided to recruit two viable Filipino convicts: Ben and Victor (Dyess, 2002, p. 168). The assistance of the two Filipinos, who could have just abandoned the Americans as the Japanese soldiers pursued them, in navigating through what seemed to be the inescapable jungle of Davao reflects the collaborative efforts between the Americans and Filipinos to escape the brutal Japanese.

The Japanese soldiers, who witnessed the empathetic expressions of the Filipinos, were enraged and reacted, punishing the uncooperative Filipinos. The accounts of the four American soldiers reveal similar reactions from the Japanese as they perceived Filipinos to be empathetic with the captured soldiers. For instance, the Japanese denounced and forbade the Filipinos who insisted on giving the soldiers food, water and other gifts (Dyess, 2002, p. 90; FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 72). Additionally, there were cases when the Japanese would chase Filipinos who offered food and water to the captured soldiers (Dyess, 2002, p. 95; Miller, 1949, p. 229; FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 71). The four accounts also recalled how the Japanese responded to the empathetic expressions of the Filipino bystanders: Filipinos were clubbed, slugged at, and even beaten to death (Dyess, 2002, p. 90–91; FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 72). Miller included, in his account, Filipino children being murdered by the Japanese after displaying their V signs in front of the Japanese soldiers (FitzPatrick & Sweetser, 1993, p. 261). A Filipino cart-driver who tried to hide the American soldiers in his cart, as noted by Dyess, was whipped to laceration (Dyess, 2002, p. 93). Overall, these four accounts agree that Filipinos risked their lives by providing their help and support to American soldiers during the Japanese occupation.

By empathizing with the captured soldiers, as recounted by the four American soldiers, Filipinos were expressing

their opposition to the Japanese. The four accounts reveal similar narratives of Filipinos being emotionally supportive at the sight of the captured soldiers, as well as giving food and water to the captured soldiers during the Bataan Death March, which was the procession of the defeated allied forces to Camp O’Donnell. The sight of suffering soldiers during the Bataan Death March may have incited a sense of guilt among the Filipino bystanders.

Hence, by helping the captured American and Filipino soldiers, the Filipino sideliners were trying to alleviate feelings of pain and sorrow, which they carried during the Japanese occupation. This would justify the lengths Filipinos took to help the captured soldiers, especially during the Bataan Death March. Such an explanation would be limiting, especially since the Filipinos themselves were feeling the harsh conditions of the Japanese occupation: a period of oppression and economic hardships. Despite these circumstances, Filipinos continued to help the captured soldiers even with their meager resources. Filipinos, during the Japanese occupation, showed their support and kindness to the captured soldiers. These gestures were witnessed and recorded by American soldiers. Accordingly, through their accounts, Filipinos are acknowledged and remembered for their acts of bravery. After all, the American soldiers would not have been able to write their stories without the efforts of Filipinos during the Japanese occupation.

Conclusion

Filipinos expressed their opposition to the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, from 1942 to 1945, through these three categories. First, Filipinos opposed the Japanese by joining and participating in the activities of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People’s Anti-Japanese Liberation Army) or Hukbalahap. The Hukbalahap members took up arms, organized villages, and performed underground tasks. Second, Filipinos opposed the Japanese by expressing themselves through poems, illustrations—like comics and paintings—and stage performances. These creative expressions criticized, insulted, and defied the Japanese. Finally, Filipinos opposed the Japanese occupation by empathizing with the American soldiers. Filipinos displayed their empathy to the captured soldiers by showing their emotional support, providing sustenance, and helping soldiers escape imprisonment. Overall, the majority of the expressions of opposition necessitated being executed covertly and discreetly, especially in areas where the Japanese were present. Otherwise, the Japanese would have retaliated by punishing the Filipinos who executed these acts of opposition.

The primary purpose of these expressions was to validate the emotions Filipinos felt during the occupation period. As discussed through the examples presented, feelings of bitterness, pain, and sorrow amalgamated into forms of resis-

tance. In the case of the Hukbalahap, it garnered mass support because the Huks, who were assigned to organize the villages, staged performances that helped amplify the emotions Filipinos felt during the Japanese occupation. The creative expressions, on the other hand, reiterated and communicated to Filipino society the harsh reality of living under the Japanese occupation. While, finally, Filipinos gave in to their emotions and risked their lives to help the captured soldiers. Thus, the continual expression of opposition executed discreetly, not only sustained the feelings of the Filipinos, but it also resonated with the people that their collective efforts could accomplish: to resist and rise above the Japanese. Overall, these expressions of opposition served to unify and instill a sense of solidarity throughout the Filipino nation, allowing the society to hope for the better.

The expressions of opposition to the Japanese occupation, a time of censorship, uncertainty, and hardship, portray Filipinos as brave, kind, and creative, emulating a diversity of human reactions. Filipinos showed their bravery as they risked their lives, their kindness as they gave what little they had, and creativity as they achieved beyond the conventional meanings of communication. Finally, the Japanese occupation of the Philippines may have left a scar on many Filipinos, but I believe that these scars will serve as a reminder that the collective efforts of Filipinos, to rise against the oppressive, authoritarian Japanese, was a historical moment when the people aspired to take their nation's destiny into their own hands.



Cropped U.S. News Service Photograph of Filipino guerrillas under the command of Captain Jesus Olmedo by Unknown U.S. Army Photographer https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Filipino_Guerrillas_Under_Captain_Jesus_Olmedo_Come_Out_To_Meet_7th_Division_Command_Post_For_Conference_With_Major_General_A.V._Arnold_Cropped.jpg

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