

Carlos Romulo, Rotary Internationalism, and Conservative Anticolonialism

If anyone did, Carlos Romulo lived a transnational life: born in the Philippines in 1899, he crisscrossed the Pacific and circled the globe countless times from 1919 to 1962 in various capacities, as a newspaper editor, ambassador to the United States, and eventually President of UN General Assembly. Even after his retirement as ambassador in 1962, he returned to the international scene when Ferdinand Marcos tapped him as Foreign Secretary, a post he held from 1969 to 1984. So closely did Romulo tie himself to the Philippines, the United States, and the United Nations that in 1944 he declared before the U.S. Congress that “no longer can we look at the Philippines and say: ‘This is Philippine earth, or this American.’ It is Fil-America; it is the new world, the El Dorado of all those who throughout history have dreamed of freedom.”¹ One of Romulo’s famous essays declared that “I am a Filipino,” but in his books he also acknowledged his *Mother America* and *My Brother Americans*. And by the end of his life, he was known as “Mr. United Nations.”²

But did Romulo live an *anticolonial* transnational life? As his granddaughter Liana Romulo said, “he wasn’t anti- anything!”³ Romulo certainly was not anti-American, despite U.S. colonial rule over the Philippines from 1898 to 1946. Rather, he followed the example of his father Gregorio and his political mentor, Manuel Quezon, both of whom transitioned from anti-American insurgents to working with the U.S. government while still trying to achieve

¹ Carlos P. Romulo, “The Jones Act – Foundation Act of Bataan,” *Congressional Record*, August 29, 1944, p. 2, in Box 1, Folder 16, Carlos P. Romulo Papers, University Archives and Records Depository, University of the Philippines-Diliman [hereafter CPR Papers, UPD].

² Carlos P. Romulo, “I am a Filipino,” *Philippines Herald*, August 16, 1941, available on the Philippine presidential website at <http://malacanang.gov.ph/75480-i-am-a-filipino-by-carlos-p-romulo/> (accessed April 28, 2021); *Mother America: A Living Story of Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1943); *My Brother Americans* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945). Romulo was widely known as “Mr. United Nations” by the 1960s: see “Documentaries Highlight Viewing Schedule on KLRN,” *Austin Statesman*, November 9, 1969, T16.

³ I spoke to Liana Romulo on January 5, 2017, in Manila.

Philippine independence. Because the United States committed itself to eventual Philippine independence in the Jones Act of 1916, Romulo took Philippine independence to be inevitable, and concerned himself with what that independence would look like. In so doing, he combined an idealistic vision of the United States – as committed to ending its rule in the Philippines – with a pragmatic politics of post-colonialism – trying to position an independent Philippines to survive in a hostile region.

Yet even as Romulo looked at U.S. rule in the Philippines through rose-colored glasses, he condemned colonialism elsewhere. Touring Southeast Asia in the fall of 1941, Romulo contrasted his idealization of a beneficent U.S. policy in the Philippines with perfidious European and Japanese empires, calling the ongoing Second World War a “conflict between rival imperialisms” and a “conflict between these imperialist powers and the one billion colored peoples whom they hold under subjection.”⁴ Romulo insisted that “imperialism must be destroyed together with [fascism]. Fascism and imperialism are but the two sides of the same coin.” Moreover, he saw the Philippines, as a colony poised on the brink of independence, as a vanguard “in the movement to liberate all the colored races in Asia.”⁵ Since Romulo attributed the Philippines’ imminent independence to the goodwill of the United States, he could unite a pro-U.S. stance with anticolonialism, in the Philippines and throughout the world.

This combination of idealism toward a colonial metropole, a commitment to ending colonialism, and a pragmatism about the form anticolonial politics should take presents historians of anticolonialism with a conundrum. What are we to make of figures like Romulo, a leader whose anticolonialism does not fit neatly into a vision of a clean break from the colonial

⁴ Carlos P. Romulo, “Billion Orientals Look to America,” *Philippines Herald*, September 15, 1941, 1. For “rival imperialisms,” see also Carlos P. Romulo, “Brown Democracy,” *Philippines Herald*, November 11, 1941, 14.

⁵ Carlos P. Romulo, “Indonesians’ Struggle for Liberty,” *Philippines Herald*, October 29, 1941, 13.

power in every form? Historians have wrestled with this question in relation to figures who sought to transform French and British colonial subjects into citizens within global states, such as Annie Besant, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Senghor.⁶ Whereas these leaders sought to preserve a direct institutional link between metropole and colony – creating a British Commonwealth state, departmentalizing the French Antilles, or federating French Africa with the Hexagon – Romulo insisted on Philippine independence, global decolonization, *and* future cooperation with the United States. While Besant, Césaire, and Senghor sought to reform empire through an altered union between metropole and colony, and through the political economy of socialism, Romulo wanted his country to become truly independent from the United States while retaining economic and political friendship, especially through a capitalist political economy.⁷

If Senghor and Césaire relied on federalism and socialism as the modes to transform imperial relationships, Romulo looked to affective ties, ones of fraternity and friendship.⁸ As an arena for such affective ties, Romulo turned to the transnational community of the “club,” a place where people and even nations – former colonies and former colonizers – could meet as equals. Like Winifred Armstrong, the subject of Lydia Walker’s essay in this volume, Romulo believed he could work through existing institutions and build transnational relationships to make incremental anticolonial gains. Thus, for Carlos Romulo, the international club could serve

⁶ See, for example, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); and Mark R. Frost, “Imperial Citizenship or Else: Liberal Ideals and the Indian Unmaking of Empire, 1890-1919,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 5 (October 2018), 845-873.

⁷ Other recent works on transnational anticolonial activism have privileged the socialist political economy as the arena of focus: Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2021); Michele L. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), 15 makes the connection that affective ties “confound the manichean logic of colonization by preventing anticolonial nationalism from resolving itself into pure oppositionality.”

as a place to mobilize for anticolonial purposes, beyond the nation-state. The key, then, was getting into the club.

Not all of Romulo's contemporaries viewed his transnational politics as anticolonial. Jawaharlal Nehru, writing to his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, dismissed her election as President of the UN General Assembly in 1953 on the grounds that "a place which Romulo has occupied ceases to have value," referring to Romulo's presidency in 1949/50.⁹ After the Bandung Conference of 1955, Indian diplomat Subimal Dutt wrote back to Delhi that the Philippine delegation led by Romulo "had completely and unequivocally identified themselves with American policies and attitudes in International affairs."¹⁰

But to presume that Romulo was not a "genuine" anticolonialist because he did not reject U.S. global leadership or because he did not embrace a broadly radical agenda would be to presume an unchanging, core "anticolonialism." Instead, as historians of anticolonialism, we recognize that the very idea of anticolonialism – like colonialism itself – was a site of contestation by activists across the world throughout the twentieth century. Anticolonialists used different definitions of their projects to explain to themselves and to different audiences how and why they made their decisions.¹¹

In this essay I will examine Romulo's non-radical vision of anticolonialism, which he hoped would transform a world of empires into a world of equals meeting in a club. Due to Romulo's embrace of a liberal political economy, privileging business and entrepreneurial freedom, at a time when globally such economics were associated with more conservative

⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, March 10, 1953, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers, 1st Installment, Subject File 47, p. 124, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹⁰ Subimal Dutt to Secretary-General of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 25, 1955, p. 3, F.1(37)-AAC/55(S), National Archives of India, New Delhi [hereafter NAI].

¹¹ For a discussion of anticolonialism as a broad tent, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

politics, I characterize his ideological position as “conservative liberalism,” following Lisandro Claudio.¹² This pro-business liberalism led Romulo to see the Rotary Club, a U.S. business-based fraternal organization, as a clear expression of his ideal for a world order after empire.

Anticolonial Americanism?

Carlos Romulo was born in Camiling in central Luzon on January 14, 1899, just nine days before the ongoing Philippine Revolution’s leaders would declare an independent Republic at Malolos.¹³ By the end of the year, the Republic’s erstwhile allies in the U.S. government had begun a bloody war of conquest in the archipelago.¹⁴ During the 1899-1902 war, Romulo’s father fought the Americans as a guerrilla, and Romulo’s grandfather endured torture from U.S. soldiers seeking information. However, as a child with little memory of these events, Romulo’s American teachers wooed him to embrace the English language, U.S. ideals, and the occupation.¹⁵ Even his guerrilla father eventually accepted the occupation, becoming an official within the new colonial apparatus and a friend to one of the many American couples sent to the Philippines to inculcate in students just like Romulo the lessons of U.S. benevolence and greatness.¹⁶ Romulo’s birth alongside both an independent Philippines and its U.S. occupation,

¹² I use “conservative liberalism” to acknowledge Romulo’s complex position within a global conception of Left and Right politics – conservative in the sense of anti-Communist and anti-socialist, especially later in his career, but liberal in the sense Lisandro Claudio adapts from Ramachandra Guha to characterize anticolonial liberals’ combination of hopefulness, patriotism, and attention to mediating institutions: see Lisandro E. Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-Century Philippines* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 7-8. As the attention to mediating institutions attests, the influence of Burke and a global notion of conservatism needs to be acknowledged even in this definition of liberalism, as further indicated by the prominent role of Burke’s notion of “place” in Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 35-36.

¹³ Carlos P. Romulo, *I Walked with Heroes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 9.

¹⁴ For a useful narrative summary of these complex events and their aftermath, see Michael H. Hunt and Steven I. Levine, *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 10-56.

¹⁵ Romulo, *Heroes*, 30–33, 45, 48, 55, 58.

¹⁶ Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, *Educating the Empire: American Teachers and Contested Colonization in the Philippines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 16-17 on the pedagogical project; 237 on Louis and Winnie Baun’s friendship with Gregorio and Maria Romulo.

his early embrace of the English language, and an idealized vision of America made him a living representative of the Philippines' complex geopolitical position in the early twentieth century.¹⁷

Romulo's father Gregorio, one of the last in Camiling to swear the oath of allegiance to the United States, became an enthusiastic part of the U.S. regime, serving as a town councilor, mayor, and eventually the governor of Tarlac province. Supportive of the U.S. establishment of a public education system, he moved his family to Manila to allow his children to attend the new Manila High School, where Carlos excelled as an orator, joining two debate teams, and delivering a prize-winning speech on "My Faith in America."¹⁸ In high school and at the U.S.-established University of the Philippines, Carlos also spent time as a cub reporter for several English-language newspapers. During his reporting he met the former guerrilla Manuel Quezon, now one of the main leaders of the Nacionalista Party pushing for independence under 1916's Jones Act, whereby the Woodrow Wilson administration had committed to an eventual U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines.¹⁹ In July 1918, he led a march of 300 angry students to the offices of a U.S.-owned newspaper in Manila to protest what they saw as a racist editorial. Romulo directly confronted the offending editor, and the students won a retraction of the article.²⁰ Thus, for Romulo, "faith in America" and pushing against U.S. colonialism went hand in hand.

Romulo extended the many educations he had received in the Philippines by traveling to the mainland United States under the pensionado scheme, whereby U.S. officials hoped to train

¹⁷ For Romulo's self-description of his Malay and Spanish heritage: Romulo, *Heroes*, 13.

¹⁸ Romulo, *Heroes*, 52, 57, 72–74.

¹⁹ On Romulo's budding relationship with Quezon, see Augusto Fauni Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 12–13. On the Jones Act, see Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 352–63.

²⁰ Romulo, *Heroes*, 105–8; Steinbock-Pratt, *Educating the Empire*, 265–68.

loyal cadres to run the Philippine state.²¹ Romulo attended Columbia University from 1918 to 1922, taking masters' degrees in foreign trade service and comparative literature.²² In 1920 he joined with several Philippine students in the United States to form the Filipino Students' Federation of America (FSFA), and Romulo served as the editor of the FSFA's journal, *The Philippine Herald*.²³

Romulo's editorship of the *Herald* from November 1920 to December 1921 provides a concise snapshot of his political thinking in all its tensions, many of which would continue throughout his career. On the one hand, Romulo's love for America is evident, expressed as "Americanism," in an inversion of the racialized idiom "one hundred percent Americanism" associated with the ongoing Red Scare and revival of the Ku Klux Klan at the end of Woodrow Wilson's presidency.²⁴ In the *Herald*, Romulo refused racial definitions of American-ness while still affirming his faith in Americanism. He founded his faith ultimately in the common man and in the country's democratic ideals.²⁵

Romulo always decried any attempt to call into question U.S. motives in the Philippines, holding firm to the promises of 1916 that independence was just around the corner: "America does not forget promises made. Washington and Lincoln would indeed turn in their graves if

²¹ For a detailed treatment of the pensionados, see Adrienne Marie Francisco, "From Subjects to Citizens: American Colonial Education and Philippine Nation-Making, 1900-1934" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2015), chaps. 4-5.

²² Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile*, 9, 206n20.

²³ Romulo participated in a preliminary meeting on February 25, 1920, in New York; the FSFA was formally created during the YMCA's annual convention in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, in June 1920: "Minutes of Preliminary Meeting: In Re the Proposed Organization of a Filipino Students' Federation in the United States," *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 1 (November 1920): 4.

²⁴ Though Romulo did not write the article, one piece in an early issue of the FSFA *Philippine Herald* explicitly engaged with Filipinos' relationship to the "One hundred per cent. American"-ism of 1920: Gaudencio Garcia, "Americanism and the Philippine Question," *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 1 (November 1920): 12.

²⁵ Carlos P. Romulo, "What Constitutes America's True Greatness," *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 4 (March 1921): 11. In the same issue, he wrote about "Our Faith in America," and summarized his view of democracy: "democracy in its essence is nothing but a mutual respect for mutual rights and it cannot long survive the disregard of other people's rights and liberties" (15).

America should fail to redeem the pledge she has given the Filipino people!”²⁶ In one remarkable passage, he conducts a conversation with the statue of George Washington at Trinity Church in downtown Manhattan, which comes to life to debate with Romulo about U.S. policy. As the statue resolidifies, it leaves Romulo with a promise of U.S. goodwill: “Right and justice you deserve... And remember – you have – my best – wishes.”²⁷ Augusto Espiritu, the most careful analyst of Carlos Romulo’s writings about America, notes that in many of his endorsements of Americanism, “he would begin with a glowing apostrophe to America, then follow this with frank criticism of its present-day policies, and conclude with a reaffirmation of America’s benevolence.” Since Romulo’s Americanism “transcended [America’s] immediate historical mistakes,” he could always resort to his ideals about the country without ignoring the realities he decried.²⁸

Woodrow Wilson embodied Romulo’s idealized Americanism, and Romulo’s time in New York coincided with a Filipino “Wilsonian moment” akin to the global phenomenon described by Erez Manela. After the passage of the Jones Act, and especially due to the sympathy for independence expressed by Wilson’s Governor-General in the Philippines, Francis Burton Harrison, Philippine nationalists had high hopes for immediate independence after the Armistice of 1918. The Philippine Congress considered sending a mission to Paris, but instead chose to send its delegates to Washington. Arriving in April 1919, they missed Wilson, who was in Europe, though he did cable them to assure Filipinos that “the Philippine problem was not foreign to the purpose of his trip to Europe.” Speaking before Congress in June 1919, Manuel Quezon linked the desires for Philippine independence to the new world order he hoped Wilson

²⁶ “America and the Philippines,” in “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 2 (December 1920): 33.

²⁷ Carlos P. Romulo, “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 6 (May 1921): 19.

²⁸ Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile*, 14. Espiritu makes this observation about an article Romulo published on his return to the Philippines, “The Tragedy of Our Anglo-Saxon Education” (1923).

would achieve, listing Philippine preferences in order as independence under the League of Nations, or if no League, under guarantee by the great powers; “but if that should not be possible, [we] want independence anyway.”²⁹

While the 1919 Philippine Independence Mission was soon overshadowed in Congress by the fierce debates over the Treaty of Versailles, Carlos Romulo was enamored by the idea of the League of Nations, and by internationalism generally.³⁰ After the Senate defeated the Versailles Treaty, Romulo still expressed hope that the United States would join the League. He attached a great deal of importance to the League, in similar language which he would later apply to the United Nations, as “this hope of small nationalities, this flickering star to which the eyes of millions of subject peoples are fixed, this fruition of Tennyson's noble dream.” As in 1945, for Romulo in 1921 such a global international institution was needed for survival: “War-worn, battle-scarred Humanity craves for it. It must exist.”³¹ At the end of Wilson’s term in March 1921, Romulo lamented that Wilson “had reaches of imagination and vision far too advanced of his age.” In Romulo’s eyes, Wilson became a Christ-like figure “upon whom were laid the well-nigh crushing burdens of an agonized world,” emerging from the battle “a broken man,” betrayed by his own country.³²

Romulo would apply the same agonistic and messianic language to the figure who linked his Americanism, Philippine patriotism, and internationalism: José Rizal, the patriot poet and martyr of 1896.³³ Romulo had always celebrated his links to Rizal, who nearly became his

²⁹ Bernardita Reyes Churchill, *The Philippine Independence Missions to the United States, 1919-1934* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1983), 16 and 20; 9-15 on the planning for the delegation.

³⁰ Romulo followed Rabindranath Tagore’s tour of the United States in 1920, and he was particularly fascinated by the Greek statesman Eleftherios Venizelos: see “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” 36–38; Romulo, *Heroes*, 254.

³¹ Romulo, “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” February 1921, 17.

³² Carlos P. Romulo, “W.W.,” *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 4 (March 1921): 30–31.

³³ For an example of Romulo’s tragic view of Rizal, focusing on “his wonderful example of self-sacrifice,” see “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” 33–34.

cousin by marriage. Romulo even wrote a play in his youth for the celebration of Rizal Day (December 30, the anniversary of Rizal's execution in Manila in 1896) in his hometown of Camiling.³⁴ Romulo described himself as a Malay and an Asian, as Rizal and the revolutionary generation had, as part of an argument for a Filipino version of pan-Malayism, the unity of the Philippines with Malaya and the Dutch East Indies against European colonialism.³⁵ Speaking in 1951, Romulo called Rizal a practitioner of "humanist nationalism" and "constructive nationalist," which Romulo saw as compatible with internationalism.³⁶ For Romulo, Rizal brought together anticolonialism and internationalism.

But Romulo also linked Rizal to his own Americanism. Romulo highlighted a letter to the editor which described Rizal as a synthesis of American and Filipino liberalism. The writer, Manuel L. Carreon of Minneapolis, claimed that Philippine independence would be due to the policies of "this great country" (the United States), which had "fertilized" the "spirit of liberalism" sown by Rizal, with the current generation "reaping the harvest." In Rizal's exemplary death, the writer found the explanation for "the splendid cooperation between Americans and Filipinos."³⁷

While Rizal might not have been so sanguine about the United States as Romulo was, Romulo did share Rizal's passionate anticolonialism. Despite his Americanism, Romulo could

³⁴ Romulo, *Heroes*, 46–47, 64.

³⁵ Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Tracing Origins: 'Ilustrado' Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves," *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 3 (August 2005): 605–37; Rommel A. Curaming, "Rizal and the Rethinking of the Analytics of Malayness," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2017): 327–28, 331–33. At least in his formulation of pan-Malayism in 1961, Romulo aligned almost exactly with contemporary Malay and Indonesian formulations: Romulo, *Heroes*, 23–24; Joseph Chinyong Liow, *The Politics of Indonesia-Malaysia Relations: One Kin, Two Nations* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 34, 38–40, 45–46, 52, 54–56, 75. For the definitive treatment of the complexities of Asianism in the turn-of-the-century Philippine Revolution, see Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation*, chaps. 2–3.

³⁶ Carlos P. Romulo, "Rizal – Asia's First True Nationalist," radio broadcast on December 29, 1951, 1-2, Box 26, Folder 283, CPR Papers, UPD.

³⁷ "Rizal and America in Philippine Progress," *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 3 (February 1921): 29–30.

be a stringent critic of U.S. policy. In March 1921, Romulo published an editorial on the first page of the *Herald* to decry comments the former president made in support of the incoming Harding administration rolling back the Wilson-era expansion of Filipino self-government. More explicitly than elsewhere, Romulo acknowledged the basis of U.S. power in military strength, noting that “she can impose her will even against the consent of the governed,” but called for “that much-vaunted American Liberty” which recognized its own limits: “Indeed, ‘it is excellent to have a giant’s strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.’” Romulo even darkly foretold a day when Filipinos like himself might be “shorn of our faith in American democracy and American institutions.”³⁸

In the very same issue, Romulo warned Americans against their own government leading them into imperialism, which he called “war smouldering,” “at war with democracy.” In addition to overt military and diplomatic pressure, he decried Taft’s “dollar diplomacy,” which “leads to economic imperialism. Economic imperialism is the forerunner of force, of conquest, of wars.” Even in this critique, Romulo expressed his faith in the American people, since he insisted “Americans hate imperialism,” and Americans “spurned” its “violence to some of the soundest fibre and tissue of the American democratic organism.” This made U.S. imperialism all the more insidious, though, since its supporters – whom Romulo did not identify – “disguised” it: “Imperialism comes in the form of preparedness,” of a standing army and a creditor nation. “Others call it protection of nation trade and interests. But the ugly look of the wound can’t be concealed.”³⁹

Romulo’s faith in Americanism, and his belief in its inextricable link to a global anticolonialism as demonstrated in the Philippine case, would provide the narrative he would use

³⁸ Carlos P. Romulo, “May the Day Never Come,” *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 4 (March 1921): 1.

³⁹ Carlos P. Romulo, “America - Imperialist?,” *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 4 (March 1921): 17.

throughout his career to simultaneously praise and critique U.S. policy. For Romulo, Americanism and anticolonialism went hand-in-hand, even when the United States was sometimes the target of his own anticolonialism. Thus, almost as soon as Romulo returned to Manila from New York in 1922, Quezon snapped him up as assistant editor of his Manila-based *Philippines Herald* and brought him back to the United States as part of an Independence Mission lobbying Congress.⁴⁰ Romulo continued to return to the United States throughout the 1920s, including on another independence mission in 1924.⁴¹ In addition to working for Quezon, Romulo was a professor of English at his alma mater, the University of the Philippines, and in 1928 he led his student debate team on a U.S. tour, challenging American collegians on the question of Philippine independence.⁴²

If Romulo's Americanism tempered his anticolonialism, it was in the direction of a pragmatic recognition of the Philippines' status as a "small country" in the global balance of power. Back in 1921, Romulo had noted that the Philippines needed to develop its own military to prepare for U.S. withdrawal, and urged anticolonial leaders to be frank with the public that "a lot of self-sacrifice and self-denial is the price of national liberty."⁴³ At that time, Romulo and other Filipino students were calling for an internationalized guarantee of Philippine neutrality, or a U.S. protectorate, to solve the security problem.⁴⁴ Romulo was clear-eyed about the limitations this would present, drawing an explicit parallel to the "colonialism by contract" situation produced by the same arrangement in Cuba under the Platt Amendment.⁴⁵ Romulo's concern

⁴⁰ For Romulo's membership of the 1922 delegation as its publicity agent, see Churchill, *Philippine Independence Missions*, 429.

⁴¹ Romulo, *Heroes*, 170.

⁴² "University Of Philippines Sends Debaters To States To Promote Better Relations," *The China Press*, February 26, 1928, 4.

⁴³ Romulo, "Editorial Incidence and Reflection," February 1921, 15.

⁴⁴ "Filipino Students Ask for Independence," *PH-FSFA* 2, no. 1 (November 1921): 5.

⁴⁵ Eliseo Quirino, "Cuba's International Status," *PH-FSFA* 1, no. 4 (March 1921): 24–25. Romulo solicited this article to "furnish some illuminating data for serious thought and consideration" amid "the discussion by the Filipino

about the independent Philippines' vulnerability to invasion and domination – first by Japan, in the 1930s and 1940s; then by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China from 1945 forward – would drive his acceptance of alliance with the United States as the best international situation the Philippines could hope for almost forty years.⁴⁶

Rotary Anticolonialism?

Yet to portray Romulo's Americanism as purely realist would also be too simplistic. As his words on the floor of Congress from 1944 indicate, Romulo saw a deep connection between the United States and the Philippines formed by historical circumstance, even destiny, which could not be ignored. How Romulo framed this connection – as a partnership, characterized by service – places his anticolonialism and Americanism into an even broader category, of an idealized international order based in civic cooperation. That is, for Romulo, if the United States was ushering the Philippines out of a relationship based on empire, and if other countries should follow suit, then the international order which should be ushered in would correspond to a club, or what Mrinalini Sinha has called "clubland." This "'clubland' as a whole served as a common ground where [elites] could meet as members, or as guests of members, of individual clubs," in "an intermediate zone between both metropolitan and indigenous public spheres." The club could begin within the colonial framework, and yet transcend it, because clubs "simultaneously marked the colonizer as uniquely 'clubbable' and recognized the potential clubbability of the colonized."⁴⁷

leaders of the kind of independence that the Philippines should seek from the American Government" (25, editor's note). "Colonialism by contract" is from Emily S. Rosenberg, "The Invisible Protectorate: The United States, Liberia, and the Evolution of Neocolonialism, 1909-40," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 191-214.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Carlos P. Romulo, "The Philippines Look at Japan," *Foreign Affairs* 14, no. 1 (January 1935): 476-486.

⁴⁷ Mrinalini Sinha, "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (October 2001): 489 and 492.

For Romulo, it was Rotary's particular values – which included racial equality and community service, with community explicitly construed to transcend the nation-state – which made it “clubbable,” and a model for relations among different peoples. The Manila Rotary Club was not racially exclusive, unlike the (initially) whites-only social clubs Sinha describes, though Romulo had experienced exclusion from such clubs in the 1910s.⁴⁸ (Romulo also saw and was occasionally subjected to color bars during his time in the United States from 1919 to 1922.⁴⁹) In addition to transcending the color bar, Rotary attracted Romulo with its ethos of equality and service among members.

Rotary began as a Midwestern U.S. businessmen's club in 1905 with a distinctly internationalist perspective, and it expanded into the Pacific along with U.S. commerce and colonial power.⁵⁰ The club began as a rotating (hence “Rotary” and the club's wheel emblem) lunch meeting of local businessmen, establishing an egalitarian ethic, and quickly evolved into an exportable model of local clubs gathering businessmen around the broad ideal of service. From the generic “service,” Rotarians focused on four “objects”: “club service” through “the development of acquaintance” and “the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations as

⁴⁸ Romulo, *Heroes*, 96–99 and 115–120 for discrimination in Manila. The Manila Club had Filipino leadership along with U.S. businessmen from its beginning, with Alfonzo Sy Cip the inaugural vice president and Gregorio Nievo an inaugural director: “Rotary in the Philippines,” *The Rotarian*, May 1919, 231; “Manila Internationalizes Itself,” *The Rotarian*, July 1919, 30.

⁴⁹ Romulo, *Heroes*, 132–133, 136–139, 143, 145–148, and 151–154 for Romulo's various encounters with the racialization of himself and others in New York, including William Howard Taft's intervention to break his engagement to a white woman.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the excellent dissertation by Brendan M. Goff, “The Heartland Abroad: The Rotary Club's Mission of Civic Internationalism” (Ph.D., University of Michigan, 2008), which uses the Tokyo Rotary Club as a case study. See also Brendan Goff, “Philanthropy and the ‘Perfect Democracy’ of Rotary International,” in *Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society: Projecting Institutional Logics Abroad*, ed. David C. Hammack and Steven Heydemann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 47–70; Su Lin Lewis, “Rotary International's ‘Acid Test’: Multi-Ethnic Associational Life in 1930s Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (July 2012): 302–24; Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 127–37; Vivian Kong, “Exclusivity and Cosmopolitanism: Multiethnic Civil Society in Interwar Hong Kong,” *The Historical Journal* 63, no. 5 (December 2020): 1281–1302. On Rotary in Cuba, see Maikel Fariñas Borrego, “District 25: Rotary Clubs and Regional Civic Power in Cuba, 1916–1940,” in *State of Ambiguity: Civic Life and Culture in Cuba's First Republic*, ed. Steven Palmer, José Antonio Piqueras, and Amparo Sánchez Cobos (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 231–50.

an opportunity to serve society”; “vocational service” through “adopting and encouraging higher ideals and better practices in his profession”; “community service,” “by doing his good-sized bit as a neighbor and a citizen”; and finally, “international service,” or “the achievement of understanding, good will, and international peace through a world fellowship of business and professional men united in the Rotary ideal of service.”⁵¹

Writing about the Americanization of Europe after the Great War, Antonio Gramsci drew attention to the spread of Rotary Clubs as an extension of an American “ideology” and “civilization,” even if this was only “an organic extension and an intensification of European civilization.” Gramsci analogized Rotary to “Free Masonry without the petit bourgeois and without the petit-bourgeois mentality.”⁵² Elsewhere Gramsci identified Rotary as “a particular ideology...born in a highly developed country [which] is disseminated in less developed countries,” thus “functioning as international political parties which operate within each nation with the full concentration of the international forces.”⁵³ While Gramsci overstated the operational power of Rotary as an organization, he did perceive the internationalism inherent in its concept and social basis, and in its spirit, which Romulo would often highlight.

American businessmen founded the Manila Rotary Club, the first in Asia, in 1919, while Romulo was in New York.⁵⁴ Americans dominated the Club’s membership, though Filipinos constituted about one third of the membership.⁵⁵ Even though Romulo would not join the Manila club until 1931, during his time in New York he wrote about the importance of club membership,

⁵¹ Derived from both “World-Wide Rotary,” *The Rotarian*, February 1923, cover; and “Four objects cover whole Rotary field: Service club has four-fold work program,” *Austin American*, April 26, 1942, A8.

⁵² Antonio Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 318 and 286.

⁵³ Gramsci, “The Modern Prince,” in *Selections*, 182 (main text and footnote).

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Cities in Motion*, 128.

⁵⁵ Romulo, *Mother America*, 43–44; Romulo served as the Manila Club’s president in 1935, and Rotary International’s Third Vice-President in 1937-1938: “Rotary’s New Board of Directors,” *The Rotarian*, July 1937, 42.

noting that members of a club needed to “discipline ourselves to submerge our ‘ego’ and develop a spirit of tolerance and mutuality.”⁵⁶ This submersion of self into mutuality mapped onto Rotarian notions of submerging the national into an international consciousness.

Once Romulo did join the Manila Club in 1931, he used his newspaper, the *Philippines Herald*, to promote the club as a fraternal family. Rotary would build “goodwill and constructive cooperation between and among the peoples of all countries” by the quiet diplomacy of “awakening...the ideal of service, the attitude of thoughtfulness of and helpfulness to others” and then connecting these awakened souls “into a fellowship, a friendly comradeship,” as “a world citizen in the realm of social relations.”⁵⁷ A past Rotary International vice-president stated one of the group’s goals as “to help develop a world-consciousness among men; to broaden their minds and widen their horizon.”⁵⁸ An accompanying article reprinted from the *London Rotarian* offered a sort of Rotarian credo for internationalism among nations, in which “the dominating purpose of any nation ought to be the service for the common good and through the common good of one’s own nation the service to the common good of all nations.”⁵⁹

This ideal heavily influenced Romulo’s conception of the Philippines and its place as a postcolonial state in Asia. Shortly after the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, providing for the inauguration of a self-governing Philippine Commonwealth to become an independent republic in 1946, Romulo participated in a business good-will mission to southern China, which a Chinese delegation reciprocated in December 1934.⁶⁰ The *Herald* took the opportunity of the Chinese delegation’s visit to offer a new vision of Asian relations, through

⁵⁶ Carlos P. Romulo, “Why Filipino Associations Fail,” *PH-FSFA* 2, no. 2 (December 1921): 16.

⁵⁷ “‘World Citizens’ of Rotary,” *Philippines Herald*, January 10, 1934. Romulo served as the Manila Club’s president in 1935, and Rotary International’s Third Vice-President in 1937-1938: “Rotary’s New Board of Directors,” *The Rotarian*, July 1937, 42.

⁵⁸ Wm. de Cock Buning, “Rotary’s International Task,” *Philippines Herald*, January 31, 1934.

⁵⁹ C. DeLisle Burns, “A New Definition of International Service,” *Philippines Herald*, January 31, 1934.

⁶⁰ “Elizalde, Campos, Romulo to Shanghai,” *Philippines Herald*, June 18, 1934.

what it called “an Oriental State” bringing together “groups racially at variance...to work out the wellbeing of a common spirit,” grounded in both “the statesmanship of Confucius” and “the Christian ideal of peace and good-will.” The editorial looked forward to “permanent peace in the Orient” based on each country recognizing that “there is no predestined master...among us in the Far East.”⁶¹ Only two months later, Rotary International’s Pacific clubs held a regional conference in Manila, which the *Herald* likewise took as an opportunity to promote a “mission of amity” to lead East Asia “to come to a truce, to pause in an interlude of cheer and camaraderie, in an effort to reconstruct our commercial circumstances upon new lines of service.”⁶²

By analogizing states to individual persons, among whom “there is no predestined master,” the club could transform from a site of enacted social equality to a model of what Romulo would call “a more enlightened internationalism.” Romulo described this new internationalism at the University of Notre Dame in December 1935, when he received an honorary degree along with President Franklin Roosevelt. Romulo used the occasion to describe the perils and opportunities the Philippines would experience as it emerged as an independent but weak member of international society. Romulo rejected a model seeing “the State as a political and economic, rather than a moral, entity,” noting that even under an absolutism like Louis XIV’s, by declaring “‘I am the State,’ he at least made the State a responsible person.” By seeing the state as a person, Romulo hoped that “the Congress of nations” could govern itself through morality rather than diplomacy, insisting that “we learn to apply to nations the same principles of morality we apply to individuals,” and thereby “that nations, as well as men, are created equal before the law.”⁶³

⁶¹ “A Vision of the Orient,” *Philippines Herald*, December 18, 1934.

⁶² “Rededicating Rotary,” *Philippines Herald*, February 2, 1935.

⁶³ Carlos P. Romulo, “The Mind of a New Commonwealth (December 9, 1935),” in *Mother America*, 233.

Through the language of states as persons, Romulo conjured an internationalism in which states related like individuals in a club—like the Rotary Club. With its ideals of businessmen relating to one another as equals, united in an ideal of service, we can see Romulo’s Rotarian internationalism as his picture of post-colonial Asian diplomacy and the impetus behind his enthusiasm for the U.S.-framed Tydings-McDuffie plan. By seeing the post-colonial Philippines as simply another businessman around the Rotary table with the United States, Romulo could imagine the United States as a benevolent equal, operating its policies on a moral rather than a political or diplomatic basis, with both the Philippines and the United States cooperating in a spirit of service rather than domination.

Romulo elaborated on this ideal in a February 1940 speech to a conference of Philippine Rotary clubs. Despite the ongoing Second World War, Romulo insisted that “Rotary has the opportunity and the power to help bring about a genuine era of peace and understanding among all the nations of the world.” He noted that the transnational links which Rotary facilitated continued around Asia despite the ongoing Sino-Japanese War, proving that “our organization has served to link countries together that are otherwise separated by enormous bodies of water or by the animosities of war.” But, drawing attention to Rotary’s relatively small footprint in Asia compared to Europe and North America, Romulo urged his Filipino Rotarian compatriots to “serve as the hub around which the Far Eastern wheel of Rotary must revolve” through complementing their ongoing personal, club, and community service with an international service by drawing other Rotarians’ attention to Asia. Rotarian attention to Asia, however, was only a lagging indicator of the fact for Romulo that “the Far East...will be the next important stage whereon one of the greatest dramas of our time will be enacted.” And the curtain had

already lifted on this stage: “The spotlight of contemporary history has been focused upon the Far East.”⁶⁴

If in 1940 Romulo thought Rotary clubbability could help to maintain peace when “staging Asia,” then when Japan and the United States joined the European and Asian theaters of the Second World War in 1941 and 1942, Rotary served Romulo as a network for wartime internationalism.⁶⁵ After General Douglas MacArthur and the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East evacuated Bataan and Corregidor, Romulo, who had joined as a press officer, went into exile with the Commonwealth government in the United States. Many U.S. Rotarians wrote to Romulo, desperately asking for updates about their sons imprisoned on Bataan, and Romulo spoke to countless Rotary Clubs around the country, drumming up support for the war effort against Japan.⁶⁶ One letter writer, whose son was interned by Japan in Manila, wrote to Romulo that “I still retain my membership – an honorary one – in Manila Rotary, and never miss an opportunity of telling Rotarians here that our club was indeed international.”⁶⁷

At the end of the War, Romulo returned to his 1940 theme of Rotary as a guiding star for re-establishing international order. At the first meeting of the reconstituted Manila Club, on February 28, 1945, Romulo brought “a consolidated message of consolation and good will from the 466 cities in every state of the Union which he visited,” as well as a message for the future: “Rotary must see that the peace that follows this war must be a just peace, a peace of which Rotary may be proud, a peace that will allow our boys who gave their all in Bataan to say ‘It has

⁶⁴ Carlos P. Romulo, Speech to Second District Conference of the Philippines, February 23, 1940, pp. 2, 3, 5, and 6, Box 59, Folder 548, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁶⁵ For an earlier notion of “staging Asia,” see Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ For instance, Chesley R. Perry, Rotary International’s secretary, wrote to Romulo on March 12, 1942, Box 12, Folder 148, CPR Papers, UPD. Romulo described his early talks at Rotary Clubs in Philadelphia and New York in a letter to MacArthur, August 18, 1941, p. 1, Box 1, Folder 1, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁶⁷ Fred C. Fisher to Romulo, December 10, 1943, p. 3, Box 1, Folder 2, CPR Papers, UPD.

not been all in vain.”⁶⁸ In late 1945, he tied the nomination of a Manila club member for Rotary’s international presidency to his longer-term project of shifting U.S. and Rotary attention to Asia, as well as Philippine independence: Romulo described the man he forwarded as “one of those Americans who believe that the Orient is the coming section of the world,” and “incidentally, he is a strong believer in the policy of ‘Philippines for the Filipinos.’”⁶⁹

By 1945, Romulo was no longer just a businessman among other businessmen in the Rotary fold: he was a policymaker, the Philippine representative in the United States and its delegate to the United Nations. However, his model of operating in a “clubbable” manner continued. In his official report on the San Francisco Conference which had drafted the UN Charter, Romulo wrote that “the world today is no more than a single community. What happens in one neighborhood ultimately affects all the other neighborhoods,” using a Rotary-friendly analogy to the world of states as a community, a neighborhood, a network of individuals who could gather to sort out their problems.⁷⁰

Romulo remained engaged with Rotary through the decades of his official diplomatic career, continuing to correspond with Rotarians and to make speeches to Rotary Clubs.⁷¹ Writing to a provincial club in 1951, Romulo reiterated his faith that “one of the true and constant principles that is immutable and changeless is the principle of service which is the basis of Rotary throughout the world. ‘He profits most who serves best’ will remain true and dynamic as long as man retains his humanity.”⁷² Another Philippine club lauded Romulo during one visit, celebrating him since “his internationalism has become world-wide and his services has been

⁶⁸ Theo. L. Hall, minutes of Manila Rotary Club meeting of February 28, 1945, Box 59, Folder 548, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁶⁹ Romulo to Gil Puyat, December 7, 1945, Box 59, Folder 548, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷⁰ Romulo to Sergio Osmeña, July 15, 1945, Box 1, Folder 15, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷¹ For instance, en route for an official visit to Indonesia, a Singaporean Rotarian invited Romulo to visit the Singapore club: M.R. Anciano to Romulo, May 6, 1950, Box 4, Folder 60, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷² Romulo to Tim L. Robles (Bacolod), May 7, 1951, Box 59, Folder 548, CPR Papers, UPD.

outstandingly recognized, especially in the areas of world peace and freedom, for the small nations of the earth.”⁷³ An American admirer wrote Romulo in 1953 after he published an article in Rotary’s *Rotarian* magazine, to share his “opinion that you have already done more to bring about a friendlier relationship and a better understanding of Asia than any twelve men, living or dead, that I have ever heard of.”⁷⁴

Amid the rise of the global Cold War, Romulo’s version of Rotarian internationalism could remain palatable for American anticommunists, especially since Romulo had impeccable anticommunist credentials dating back to the 1930s.⁷⁵ In 1949, the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers wrote to Romulo to support his diplomatic efforts at the UN, affirming a Rotarian faith “that the give and take of open genuinely free discussion can deal successfully with the problems of nations as well as being the basis of promoting industrial peace among the industrial segments of each nation.”⁷⁶ As Romulo explained to a Philippine Congressman, his strategy was of quiet persistence, in a Rotarian style: “there is no cure-all for such problems, but with vision, realism, wise counsel, and forbearance on both sides of the water, they can be solved, each in its appointed time.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

One way to explain Romulo’s political *mélange* would be to chalk it up to delusion, a utopian dreaming that the Philippines and the United States could ever sit as equals in an

⁷³ Gab Tabuñar, “The Rotary Club of Iloilo welcomes Secretary Romulo,” October 17, 1951, p. 2, Box 59, Folder 548, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷⁴ Foster Kienholz (St. Paul, Minnesota) to Romulo, March 19, 1953, Box 59, Folder 549, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷⁵ For instance, Romulo wrote about the perils of Communism spreading in Cuba after its 1933 revolution, and articulated a liberal anticommunism which recognized the defects of communism while abhorring the destruction of individual and religious liberties under Communism: “The Red Menace,” *Philippines Herald*, September 9, 1933; “Recognizing Soviet Russia,” *Philippines Herald*, September 22, 1933; “A Stabilizing Move,” *Philippines Herald*, October 22, 1933.

⁷⁶ Telegram from National Association of Manufacturers to Romulo, October 26, 1949, Box 67, Folder 602, CPR Papers, UPD.

⁷⁷ Romulo to Francisco M. Pajao, April 14, 1952, Box 6, Folder 79, CPR Papers, UPD.

international club. Another approach would be to claim he acted in bad faith, seeking to mystify an embrace of U.S. imperialism through the language of anticolonialism. Thus, the Indian diplomatic corps dismissed Romulo and his compatriots at the Bandung Conference for attending “as among the founder members of this Western club,” “determined to act as the spearhead of the Western or U.S. point of view in this Asian-African gathering.”⁷⁸ However, if the aim all along was to join a club – or *the* club – then was this a failure, or a success, of anticolonialism? As Sinha notes, the social club survived the British transfer of power in India, thanks to “the selective appropriation by Indians of the ever-present tension in colonial clubbability: the potential clubbability of the Indians themselves.”⁷⁹ Why should the same not apply to the international club, or the “Congress of nations,” as Romulo called it in 1935?

Rather than presume that anticolonialists who did not embrace economic and political radicalism were deluded or acting in bad faith, if we try to see the world from Romulo’s perspective, we can begin to understand how anticolonialism could be seen as compatible with capitalism, Americanism, and Wilsonian liberal internationalism – which, when coupled with Cold War anticommunism, could help anticolonial and postcolonial elites explain to themselves and their audiences why they should align with the U.S.-led political and economic order. That is, if we can understand Romulo’s notion of the international order as a club, and his belief that one could use that club to dismantle colonialism, we will understand why so many former colonies sought to join the American club after 1945 – not just pragmatically, but idealistically.

⁷⁸ B.F.B.H. Tyabji to Subimal Dutt, “Some Impressions of the Asian-African Conference,” April 28, 1955, pp. 2-3, F.1(37)-AAC/55(S), NAI.

⁷⁹ Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere,” 520.

Romulo exemplifies other conservatives and center-right liberals who also practiced internationalism aimed at weakening colonial rule around the world.⁸⁰ Without considering this crucial global political formation of the mid-twentieth century, international historians will fail to understand how the United States and European empires in transition were able to find so many countries' leaders open to cooperating with them in the global Cold War, even to great domestic political risk. We need to understand leaders like Romulo to grasp how the "anti-Communist Third World" came to be an enduring international framework in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.⁸¹

⁸⁰ A main example is Charles Malik of Lebanon, who is prominently featured in Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and Glenn Mitoma, *Human Rights and the Negotiation of American Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁸¹ See Lisandro E. Claudio, "The Anti-Communist Third World: Carlos Romulo and the Other Bandung," *Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (April 2015): 125-156. Claudio's article focuses on Romulo's activities at Bandung and his books after 1945, while this chapter takes an earlier timeframe and relies on Romulo's personal papers. Augusto Espiritu also reads Romulo's writings about Bandung, detecting a potential anticolonialism and antiracism *despite* Romulo's anticommunism, not because of it: Augusto Espiritu, "'To Carry Water on Both Shoulders': Carlos P. Romulo, American Empire, and the Meanings of Bandung," *Radical History Review* no. 95 (Spring 2006): 173-190.