Looking at Botong Francisco from the Horizon of Diego Rivera:
A Visual Dialogue between Two Modern Muralists

Feorillo Petronilo A. Demeterio III

This paper explored the visual aesthetics of Carlos Francisco in a dialogical manner using Diego Rivera's visual aesthetics as a point of reference. In particular, this paper comparatively analyzed Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History" and Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe." The comparative analysis covered the following aspects of these two murals: 1) the dimensions of their works and media used, 2) the styles that influenced them, 3) their figures and colors, 4) their themes and the way they plotted or narrativized them, 5) their underlying political ideology, 6) their underlying religious ideology, 7) their underlying gender ideology, 8) their nationalism, and 9) the hidden tensions between their colonialism and post-colonialism.

Keywords: *Carlos Francisco, Botong, Philippine Modernism in Painting, Diego Rivera, Mexican Muralism, Filipino Struggles through History, Man Controller of the Universe, Painting and Political Ideology, Painting and Religious Ideology, Painting and Gender Ideology, Painting and Nationalism, Painting and Post-Colonialism*

Introduction

The year 2012, the Philippines commemorates the centenary of the birth of one of its national and greatest visual artists, Carlos "Botong" Francisco. As a scholar of Philippine culture, I find it fitting to pay homage to this genius during his special year by offering an in-depth study of his aesthetics and by contributing one more text to the rather scarce literature about his legacy. It had been purely coincidental that the day I decided to study Francisco, December 8, 2011, to be exact, the web page of Google was displaying an icon honoring the 125th birthday of the great Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera. This reminded me of Francisco's deep fascination for this Mexican artist. It has been said that the famous Francisco turned down all fellowships and travel grants offered to him by various foreign institutions for fear that his aesthetic vision might be contaminated by other art forms (Cf. Ty 19, & Reyes, 73). But when the time came that he was invited to sojourn to Mexico to see the actual murals of Rivera, Francisco excitedly grabbed the opportunity. But unluckily, due to some recurrent sickness, such trip had to be rescheduled and eventually cancelled. The serendipitous dates prompted me to approach Francisco's art in a dialogical manner with Rivera's art as my point of reference.

Before proceeding, it would be beneficial to the readers if some clarifications and justifications on the use of comparative analysis are made at this point. Whereas there are some critics who would argue about the senselessness of making comparisons about two artists, or writers, or thinkers, or any other intellectuals for that matter, this study positioned itself over the hermeneutic tradition of the German philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). The dialogical hermeneutics of these two philosophers is teaching us that although two individuals, or texts, are indeed radically different from each other, using one of them as a perspective in understanding the other, and vice versa, would actually yield some deeper and richer grasp of their radical individualities. Hence, by reading Francisco side by side with Rivera, this paper will not just comprehend Francisco and Rivera, but comprehend them relationally and more fully. In the context of this paper, it has to be admitted that Rivera is used as a hermeneutic tool for the sake of his Filipino counterpart.

Since both painters were prolific art producers and specialized in richly detailed murals that are of gigantic proportions, this comparative study is compelled to adopt the strategy of case studies and merely focus on one of their major work. For Francisco, the work entitled "Filipino Struggles through History" of 1964 at the City Hall of Manila is selected. According to the art

critic Rafael Maria Guerrero, this piece is Francisco's biggest and last completed mural project (Cf. Guerrero, 38). This also holds the distinction of being one of the few works that are mentioned in the painter's posthumous citation as a National Artist for painting (Cf. Marcos, 237). For Rivera, the work entitled "El hombre controlador del universo" (Man, Controller of the Universe) of 1934 at the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City is selected. This work of Rivera is one of the few murals that he described in his autobiography with Gladys March and it approximates the rectangular-horizontal layout of Francisco's selected work (Cf. Rivera & March, 140-146). This work is very significant for Rivera that he remade this mural in Mexico, with some alterations, after its precursor, entitled "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future" was left unfinished and eventually destroyed at the Rockefeller Center, New York City, due to some disagreements with the Rockefellers over the figure of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) that Rivera included in the composition. Although Francisco's three-paneled mural is much more elongated than that of Rivera's, surprisingly, both Francisco's first and second panel turned out to have, give or take a few square meters, equivalent surface areas with Rivera's whole work.

This paper contains four substantive parts. The first part tackled the intellectual biographies of the two artists, providing historical contexts of their murals. The second part explored the literal details and the metaphorical messages of Francisco's selected work, while the third part did the same thing for Rivera's selected work. The fourth part constituted the core of this paper which is the comparative study of the two epic works. Such dialogical study was done by comparing and contrasting 1) the dimensions of their works and media used, 2) the styles that influenced them, 3) their figures and colors, 4) their themes and the way they plotted or narrativized them, 5) their underlying political ideology, 6) their underlying religious ideology, 7) their underlying gender ideology, 8) their nationalism, and 9) the hidden tensions between their colonialism and post-colonialism.

Intellectual Biographies

Rivera, who was born in 1886 in Guanajuato, Mexico, is 26 years older than Francisco, who was born in 1912 in Angono, Rizal. Rivera died at the age of 71 from cancer and cardiac arrest in 1957, while Francisco died at the age of 57 from tuberculosis and rupture of a blood vessel in his lung in 1969. The following timeline combines the highlights of their lives:

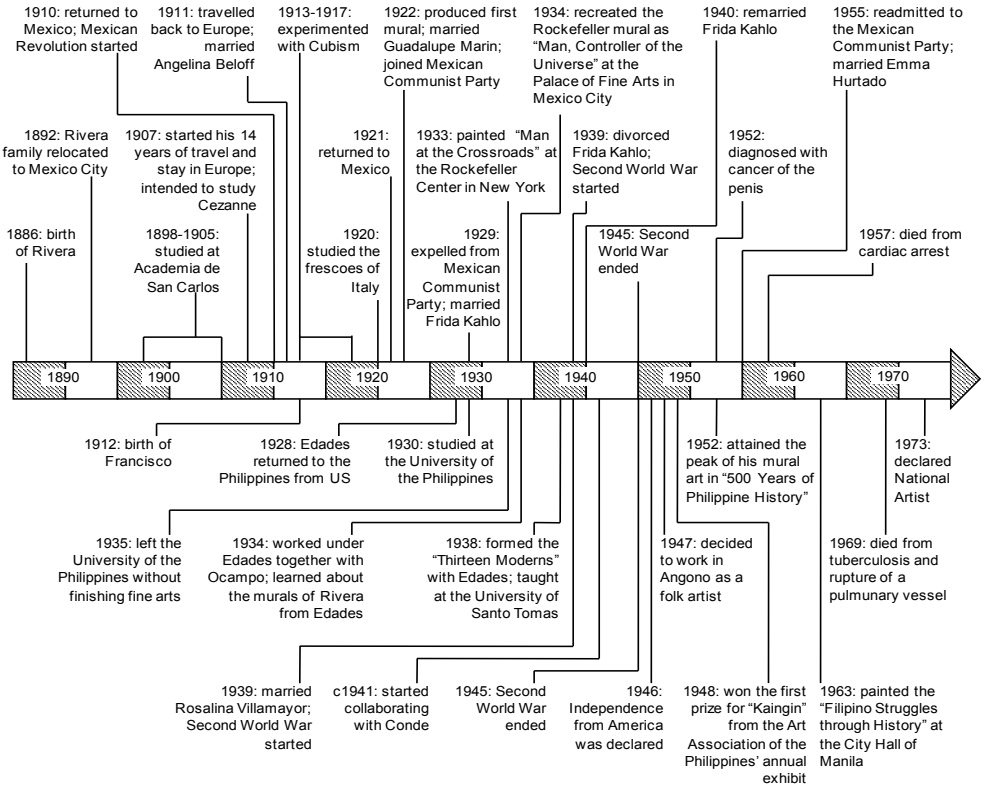

Figure 1: Timeline of the Lives of Rivera and Francisco

In many ways, Rivera's life was too different from that of Francisco. First, Rivera was born to a family that was headed by an atheistic and anti-clerical father and he grew up to become just like his father. In the same autobiography that he wrote with March, he took pride on how he, as a young boy, had hysterically denounced the fanaticism of his fellow Mexicans on the pulpit of their local church (Cf. Rivera & March, 6-9). Francisco, on the other hand, had a father who was a former Catholic seminarian and he matured to be a deeply religious painter. Francisco found his toils creating religious works spiritually enriching. His most famous religious works are probably the murals at Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City and at the Far Eastern University Chapel in Manila. Second, Rivera travelled widely and enriched his art through actually studying the works of the great masters. Rivera mentioned in the same book how he was motivated to go to Europe in order to study Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), how he became a friend of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and how he learned about mural painting through examining the Renaissance frescoes of Italy (Cf. Rivera & March, 20, 61 & 80-81). Francisco, on the other hand, practically spent his whole life in Manila and his hometown Angono and enriched his art through indirect knowledge about the western masters by listening to the lessons from his mentor

Victorio Edades (1895-1985), who was trained in the United States in the fields of architecture and painting, and most probably by poring over some photographs. The local masters that Francisco studied were mostly limited to his professors at the University of the Philippines, Fabian de la Rosa (1869-1937), the brothers Fernando (1892-1972) and Pablo Amorsolo (1898-1945), Guillermo Tolentino (1890-1976) and Irineo Miranda (1896-1964). In 1947, Francisco decided to leave the urban landscape of Manila and retreated to his hometown Angono.

Third, Rivera had a tempestuous political involvement. He claimed to be a leftist throughout his life, but there was a time when even the left expelled him from their ranks. He talked in his autobiography about a number of attempts to assassinate him as well as some public actions for or against his murals (Cf. Rivera & March 128, 138 & 142). Francisco, on the other hand, seemed to have steered away from the contentious concerns of politics. Although there were politicians of every stripe who flocked to his Angono residence, he considered them no different from his other patrons and clients. Fourth, Rivera was an avowed womanizer and married several times. His most famous wife was the painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) whom he married, divorced and married again. Francisco, on the other hand, although he had his share of womanizing during his bachelor years remained largely a good and faithful husband to Rosalina Villamayor.

Fifth, Rivera was an international sensation. When the Rockefellers planned to have a mural for their RCA building, they considered commissioning Rivera side by side with Picasso and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). The commotion that followed after Rivera was prohibited from finishing the "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future" and created an even bigger international publicity (Cf. Herrerias, 43). Francisco, on the other hand, even though he attained some level of international recognition, remained largely a national figure. His 1953 work entitled "Five Hundred Years of Philippine History," which is used in this paper as an inter-text for the "Filipino Struggles through History," was given a two-paged spread in the 9 February 1953 issue of *Newsweek*. Sixth, Rivera was at home with his urban and cosmopolitan outlook. Philosophy, ideology, progress and technology are tackled with great ease in his visual art. Francisco, on the other hand, opted to root his artistic expression in the rural, the folk practices and the local. In an almost paradoxical twist, Francisco expressed Philippine modern art using subjects that in all practical purposes are traditional objects and events.

Seventh, Rivera's life is riddled with contradictions: he believed in the cubist adage of art for art's sake but advocated for using murals to conscienticize the masses, he was a nationalist but accepted projects from North American patrons, he was a communist but accepted professional engagements with giant corporations, he was a revolutionary but opted to partner with the Mexican government, he was

pro-worker but had a deep fascination for machines and mechanical implements (Cf. "Biography of Diego Rivera"). Francisco, on the other hand, was at peace with the aspects of his much simpler life as a folk artist.

Beyond these differences, there are also striking similarities in the lives of these two great artists. First, the name "Carlos" is special to both Rivera and Francisco. It is obviously the given name of Francisco but it is also the given name of Rivera's twin brother who died in infancy. Second, both Rivera and Francisco were reared by foster mothers. Rivera grew up in another village with an Indian nurse named Antonia who happened to be a witch doctor, while Francisco after the early death of his father and the remarriage of his mother, lived with a married but childless aunt (Cf. Rivera & March, 4).

Third, both Rivera and Francisco found it fortunate that beyond the academic and canonical aesthetics where they were both trained as students, their expressions were enriched by some folk artists. Rivera recalled how his artistic life had been touched by the engraver and cartoonist Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913), while Francisco talked about two obscure village religious painters known merely as Tandang Juan, or Old Juan, and Pedrong Pintor, or Pedro the Painter (Cf. Rivera & March, 18; Ty, 19). D. M. Reyes, in his essay "Miracle of Rare Device," ascertained that their full names are Juan Senson and Pedro Pinon (Cf. Reyes, 73). These folk painters helped these two great artists to eventually find their own unique artistic expressions.

Fourth, both Rivera and Francisco rooted their paintings on their own native soils. Rivera was obsessed in capturing the so-called Mexicanidad, or "Mexicaness," in his works, just as Francisco was intent in portraying "Filipinoness" in his canvasses and murals. Fifth, and related to the third, both Rivera and Francisco were highly nationalistic in the sense that they took pride in the richness of their respective cultural heritage. Rivera has an extensive collection of Pre-Columbian idols, while Francisco is known for his studies on the ancient petroglyphs of Angono. Both of them are nationalistic also in the sense that they believed in the pedagogical function of art for nation building.

Sixth, both Rivera and Francisco are known as muralists. Rivera is one of the leaders of the so-called Renaissance of Mexican Muralism, while Francisco is honored as the greatest Filipino muralist and the citation for his award as National Artist for painting mentioned him as the one who "revived single-handed the forgotten art of the mural and remained its most distinguished practitioner for nearly three decades" (Cf. "Carlos V. Francisco (1912-1969): Greatest Muralist;" Marcos, 237). Seventh, and related to the sixth, both Rivera and Francisco had their own triumvirates of modernists and muralists who helped them mature in their respective modernist Muralism. Rivera had José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) and José David Alfaro

Siqueiros (1896-1974), while Francisco had his mentor Edades and classmate Galo Ocampo (1913-1985) at the University of the Philippines. Edades was the one who handpicked Francisco and Ocampo to initially help him in decorating some of the architectural projects of Juan Nakpil (1899-1986). Eighth, Both Rivera and Francisco had to struggle against some form of dominant modernism in order to give birth to their personal expressions. Rivera had to shake off his fascination for Cezanne and Picasso, while Francisco had to battle against the hegemony of Fernando Amorsolo's romanticizing style of painting.

Francisco's "Filipino Struggles Through History"

After serving as the Vice Mayor of Arsenio Lacson (1911-1962), Antonio Villegas (1928-1984) was elected Mayor of Manila in 1963. The following year, he commissioned Francisco to embellish the Bulwagang Katipunan of the then eighteen year old Manila City Hall. The said chamber is located on the second floor of the northern wing of the building. The subsequent "Filipino Struggles through History" is composed of four panels that fully surround the chamber. Upon entering the said chamber, one will see Francisco's homage to the political leaders of the city which strictly speaking, should not be considered part of the whole composition. Whenever the said work is reproduced in coffee table books, only the remaining three panels are featured. Similarly, this study limited its analysis on the three panels whose diachronic plot moves from the left to the right, just like a written or printed text. For the sake of this discussion we may call these panels, the left, the central and the right panels. Figure 2 illustrates the layout of the panels inside the Bulwagang Katipunan:

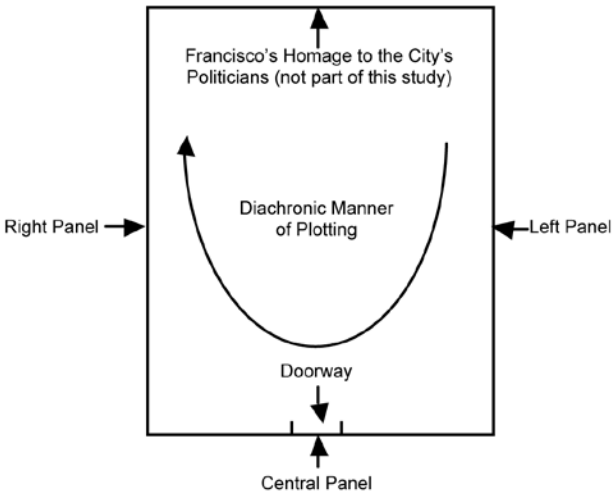

Figure 2: Floor Plan of the Bulwagang Katipunan and the Arrangement of the Panels of Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History"

The left panel is composed of sixteen major sections that cover the history of the country from Pre-Hispanic times to the middle part of the nineteenth century. These sections are mapped out in figure 3.

Figure 3: Major Sections of the Left Panel
of Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History"

Section A of the left panel portrays Filipino, Chinese and Arabic trading prior to the coming of the conquistadores. The goods that are being exchanged here are silk, swords, indigo and ceramics. Section B shows a turbaned Islamic missionary spreading the name of Allah in the archipelago. Section C presents portions of some Filipino vessels with a warrior on one of the bows blowing some signals through a huge conch.

Section D of the left panel illustrates the muscular Rajah Sulayman, the ruler of Manila, and his warriors in a defiant stance against the Spanish invaders. Section E depicts a friar with a wooden cross with some natives at his feet and a full sailed galleon at the backdrop. This symbolizes the spiritual conquest of the archipelago. Section F pictures a group of Spanish soldiers with drawn saber, sword, halberd, and muskets, with the map of Luzon as its backdrop. This symbolizes the military conquest of the island of Luzon. Section G represents El Adelantado, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi (1502-1572), founding the Spanish settlement in Manila with the defeated Rajah Sulayman seated beside him. Each of them is holding a golden goblet of wine, presumably used for the Filipino ritual of blood compact.

Section H of the same left panel renders a group of Spanish soldiers resisting the invasion of Manila by the Chinese buccaneer Limahong in 1574. Section I visualizes the stone fortification of Manila under Governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas (1539-1593) that started in 1590. A map of Intramuros is displayed on the foreground of the section. Section J frames in monochrome the Battles of La Naval de Manila, where the Spanish forces in cooperation with Filipino sailors and fighters resisted the Dutch invasion in 1646. The Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, the acclaimed protector of the Spanish fleet, is placed in the upper center of the said section.

Section K of the same left panel portrays a group of native Filipino warriors revolting against a friar who is murdered at the backdrop. One of the warriors is holding an impaled head of a Spaniard. Section L shows the British invasion of Manila in 1762 to 1764. The Remedios Church in Malate, which served as a fortress of the invading Englishmen, is placed at the backdrop.

Section M anachronistically commemorates the history of printing in the islands with a Chinese-looking ladino on the foreground, presumably Tomas Pinpin (c1580-c1650), and the title page of *Doctrina Christiana* beside him. Section N celebrates the proclamation of King Carlos IV's (1748-1819) royal decree in 1803 that ordered the smallpox vaccination of the native subjects of the Spanish crown. The bronze statue of the monarch, that currently stands at the Plaza Roma in front of the Manila Cathedral, is placed at the backdrop. Section O presents a docked galleon with promenading members of the principalia class at the pier and a disembarking crew that is followed by a procession of a white and blue draped image of the Blessed Virgin. This could be a representation of the arrival of the last vessel of the Manila-Acapulco trade that closed in 1815. Section P, the last major section of the left panel, illustrates a devastating earthquake that topples a belfry. This could refer to the great earthquake of 1863 that rocked Manila and Luzon.

The central panel, that has a slightly irregular shape to accommodate the chamber's doorway, is composed of four major sections that cover the late part of the nineteenth century. These sections are mapped out in figure 4.

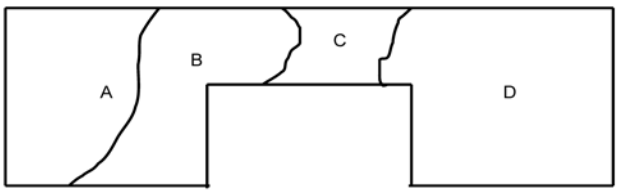

Figure 4: Major Sections of the Central Panel
of Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History"

Section A of the central panel depicts the poet Francisco Baltazar (1788-1862) who is poised as if in trance and thinking about scenes from his *Florante at Laura*. Section B pictures aspects of Spanish domination in the form of tax collection and forced labor. Section C represents the execution by garrote of the Filipino martyrs Fr. Mariano Gómez (1799-1872), Fr. José Burgos (1837-1872), and Fr. Jacinto Zamora (1835-1872), that sowed the seeds of the Philippine Revolution against Spain. Section D renders Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896) meditating on some scenes from his *Noli Me Tangere*.

The right panel is composed of eighteen major sections that cover the history of our country from the Propaganda Movement to the declaration of independence from the United States. These sections are mapped out in figure 5.

Figure 5: Major Sections of the Right Panel
of Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History"

Section A of the right panel visualizes the Propaganda Movement in the Iberian Peninsula and the execution of Rizal in 1896. A picture of Marcelo Del Pilar (1850-1896) superimposed on the front page of the paper *La Solidaridad* is placed on the foreground, while at the backdrop is a meeting of the patriots, presumably in Spain. Section B celebrates the establishment of the Katipunan with some members signing their names using their own blood and a secret initiation at the backdrop. Section C commemorates the Cry of Balintawak of 1896 where armed revolutionaries were symbolically shredding their cedullas. Section D pays tribute to the valiant Filipinas who nursed the wounded revolutionaries. One of these women could be Melchora Aquino (1812-1919). In the older painting "Five Hundred Years of Filipino History," Francisco had an analogous scene where the nursing woman is more recognizable as Aquino. Section E, the biggest section in the whole composition, honors Andres Bonifacio (1863-1897) and his band of freedom fighters in a full battle charge. It should not be surprising that sections B, C, D and E, which are all about the Katipunan, constitute more than one third of the right panel, because after all the whole work is in a chamber called Bulwagang Katipunan.

Section F of the right panel frames the Battle of Manila Bay of 1898 where the American Asiatic Squadron under Commodore George Dewey (1837-1917) defeated the Spanish Pacific Squadron under Admiral Patricio Montojo (1839-1917), ushering in the American occupation of the archipelago. Section G portrays the imposition of the provisions of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, on the unwilling Filipino freedom fighters. At the background of this section are the blue shirted American soldiers marching under the star spangled banner. Section H shows the shot from an American sentry on Sociego Street, Santa Mesa, Manila, in 1899, that triggered the Filipino-American War. Section I presents a group of Filipino guerillas fighting some unseen American enemies. Section J illustrates the troops of victorious Americans after the Battle of Manila of 1899.

Section K of the right panel depicts the civil, medical and hygienic projects undertaken by American soldiers as part of the pacification of the islands. In this section, we see a drainage system being put in place, some soldiers giving vaccinations to some rural folks, and some health workers fumigating an urban settlement. Section L commemorates the arrival of the Thomasites in 1901, and the start of the English public education in the country. The SS Thomas is placed at the backdrop and a classroom scene inside a nipa and bamboo structure can be found on the foreground.

Section M of the right panel celebrates the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth under President Manuel Quezon (1878-1944) in 1935. The section contains images of Quezon, the Supreme Court Chief Justice Jose Abad Santos (1886-1942), and Claro Recto (1890-1960), the man behind the Commonwealth Constitution. Section N honors the contributions of Lope Santos (1879-1963) in the textualization and development of the Filipino language.

Section O of the right panel pictures the Japanese Occupation of the country from 1942 to 1945. A group of greenish colored soldiers are raising their arms in front of their emblematic sun that is superimposed with the portrait of a Japanese General. Section P illustrates the carpet bombing of Manila by American forces that was intended to expel the remaining Japanese soldiers in the city. This is the bombing that left Manila with the ugly scar of being the second most damaged city after the Second World War. Warsaw, Poland holds the distinction of being the most damaged city.

Section Q of the right panel depicts in monochrome the return of General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964) in 1944. At the background are approaching American warships and fighter planes. Finally, section R pictures the declaration of Philippine independence from the United States in 1946, with President Manuel Roxas (1892-1948) and United States Ambassador Paul McNutt (1891-1955) raising the American and Philippine flags.

Rivera's "Man, Controller of The Universe"

In 1933, when Rivera sensed that the Rockefellers were totally upset about the presence of Lenin's face in the mural "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future" he asked one of his assistants, Lucienne Bloch, to take as many pictures of the condemned work as she can with her smuggled camera (Cf. Rivera & March, 141-142). As already mentioned, this mural was eventually destroyed in 1934. On that same year, however, Rivera was commissioned by the Mexican government to recreate the controversial work on a

wall at the west end of the third floor of the Palace of Fine Arts. Thus, the Rockefeller mural was modified into "Man, Controller of the Universe." Among the additions that Rivera made were the portraits of John Rockefeller (1839-1937), Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), the North American communist leader Jay Lovestone (1897-1990), and Rivera's biographer and communist writer Bertram Wolfe (1896–1977) (Cf. Apel, 58). Unlike Francisco's work that is located way above the eye level on walls of the Bulwagang Katipunan, Rivera's work fills up the whole height of the wall in its location at the Palace of Fine Arts.

The single panel of "Man, Controller of the Universe" is composed of twelve major sections that are mapped out in figure 6. To account for Rivera's peculiar ideology as well as for his synchronic, or even anachronic, manner of plotting his message, and for the sake of our discussion these sections are labeled in a radiating manner starting from the central figure of the said panel.

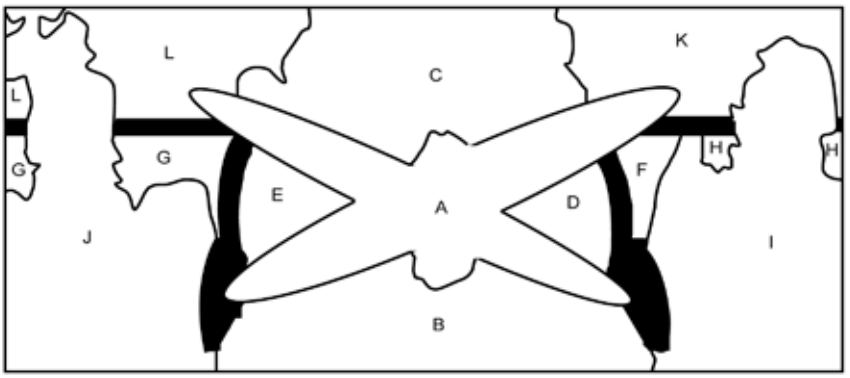

Figure 6: Major Sections of Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe"

Section A, the central section of the panel, portrays two intersecting ellipses. Nestling at their center is the figure of the man who is supposed to have attained the power to control the universe. The two ellipses signify the intellectual fields of vision of the modern man who has already fathomed the mysteries of both the microcosm and the macrocosm. The ellipse that leans towards the left displays aspects of the microscopic world, while the one that leans towards the right displays telescopic images of the universe. The figure of the controlling modern man is presented as someone from the working class who with his heavily gloved hands is manipulating a joystick and a control panel. Below this figure of the modern man is a huge hand clasping a crystal sphere that contains some measuring devices, seemingly emphasizing the mathematical precision of modern knowledge. Section B, located below section A, illustrates some of the natural resources that the earth can offer, such

as agricultural products, fossil fuel, water and mineral reserves. Section C, located above section A, depicts some the technological innovations of man that help him conquer the micro and the macro universe.

Section D, located at the right side of section A, is where the more explicit ideological discourse of Rivera begins. This is the same section that caused the destruction of the Rockefeller mural. Here, Lenin, Rivera's acknowledged leader of true socialism, is clasping the hands of some wretched of the earth, while some angry soldiers are keeping watch over them. Section E, which is the counterpart image of section D at the left side, pictures the decadent lifestyle of the bourgeoisie and the capitalists. This is a nightclub scene where the rich are gambling, drinking, smoking and dancing. This is the section where Rivera did his artist's revenge by inserting the portrait of Rockefeller among the bored faces of the partying bourgeoisie and capitalists. Section F enhances the contrast created by sections D and E by featuring a group of female athletes symbolizing the kind of wholesome recreation that will be enjoyed by the people once true socialism is established in this world. Sections G and H represent the stark reality that before the socialist utopia can be realized in this world, industrial workers, as rendered in section G, and agricultural workers, as rendered in section H, would have to endure the violent reactions of the bourgeois and capitalist controlled police, which in these two sections are dispersing their public actions.

Section I, located at the lower right portion of the panel, renders the group of Trotsky, Lovestone, Engels, Marx and Wolfe at the foot of the bullet riddled and decapitated statue of the allegory of Nazism/fascism. The socialist leaders are holding a red banner that says "Workers of the World United in the IV International." Rivera is openly campaigning here for the socialist ideology, and since this mural was done years before the start of the Second World War, he is practically prophesying that the dictatorships of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) will eventually be toppled by socialism. Section J, which is the counterpart image of section I at the left side, visualizes an equally complex scenario in which the handless statue of the allegory of Christianity and Scholasticism is abandoned by some young people in favor of emergent philosophies that are concurrent with the evolution of society. The allegory of Christianity and Scholasticism is portrayed by the image of a handless Aristotle (384-322 BC) with a rosary on his neck and with his head smoking with so much groundless thoughts. The missing hands of Aristotle seemingly allude to the impracticability and uselessness of the grand synthesis of Christianity and Scholasticism. The emergent philosophies that Rivera expects to emerge as society evolves are expressed with a lecture scene at the back of which is the figure of Charles Darwin (1809-1882).

Section K, located at the upper right portion of the panel, illustrates columns of marching men, women and children, signifying the utopian victory of socialism. Section L, the counterpart image of section K at the left side, depicts Rivera's gloomy prediction about the future of capitalism where greed would eventually goad the people to engage in a terrifying war as expressed by columns of marching soldiers in gas masks with fighter planes above them.

Comparative Analysis

As already mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, the comparative analysis of the two murals looked into the following aspects: 1) their dimensions and media used, 2) the styles that influenced them, 3) their figures and colors, 4) their themes and the way they plotted or narrativized them, 5) their underlying political ideology, 6) their underlying religious ideology, 7) their underlying gender ideology, 8) their nationalism and 9) the hidden tensions between their colonialism and post-colonialism. The following sub-sections, therefore, thoroughly delved into each of these nine aspects.

Dimensions and Media

Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History" is a massive work. This research, however, was unable to locate from the existing literature its correct measurement. In Alice Guillermo's essay in the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, it is mentioned that the mural measures 2.70 meters by 4.87 meters (Cf. Guillermo, "Filipino Struggles through History," 241). A visual inspection at the Bulwagang Katipunan would easily tell anyone that a length of 4.87 meters would just be a small fraction of the works' full length. The length of its central panel alone would even be longer than 4.87 meters. In the book *Life and Art of Botong Francisco*, edited by Patrick Flores, it is mentioned that the mural measures 2.71 meters by 20.00 meters (Cf. Flores, 233). This figure could be the correct measurement of the left panel, which should be equivalent to that of the right panel. My approximation is that each of the left and the right panel indeed measures 2.71 meters by 20.00 meters, and that the central panel measures 2.71 meters by 8.70 meters. These will make the total dimension of the work 2.71 meters by 48.70 meters. If my approximations are correct, the surface area of this mural would be 132.00 square meters.

Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe" on the other hand is well documented to have a dimension of 4.85 meters by 11.45 meters. Compared to Francisco's work, this is taller by 2.14 meters, but shorter by 37.25 meters. The surface

area of Rivera's work would be 55.53 square meters, which is almost equivalent to the surface area of either the left or the right panels of Francisco's work, which approximately would measure 54.20 square meters each. Francisco's mural, with its approximate surface area of 132.00 square meters, is more than double compared to that of Rivera.

With the restrictions at the Bulwagang Katipunan and with the position of the mural which is way above the eye levels it is not easy to determine the medium used by Francisco. But we know from the art critics Purita Kalaw-Ledesma and Amadis Ma. Guerrero that Francisco's technique that he inherited from Edades was to paint on canvas off site using oil colors and to attach the finished project on its designated wall (Cf. Guillermo, "The Triumvirate," 90). The Ateneo De Manila professor D. M. Reyes thought, after visiting the preserved studio of Francisco in Angono, that the artist's preferred colors are the oil paints from the American company Grumbacher (Cf. Reyes, 40).

Rivera used a more complicated process for his mural. First, "Man, Controller of the Universe," just like most of his other murals, is a fresco. His assistants would prepare portions of the wall at dawn, so that he would have more or less twelve hours to paint, using his own ground pigments and distilled water, before the plaster would dry (Cf. Rivera & March, 93). The secret behind the capacity of the fresco to last for centuries is the bonding of pigments with the wet plaster. Secondly, maybe as a precaution against the fact that the future of a fresco is tied to the future of the structure in which it is painted, Rivera made his work movable by not painting it directly on the specified wall at the Palace of Fine Arts. Instead, he made his fresco on a steel frame with wires and pieces of metals to hold the mixture of cement, lime, sand and marble dust (Cf. Herrerias, 43). In case a strong earthquake happens, the mural would not crack. In case the Palace of Fine Arts will be utilized for other purposes or torn down, the mural can be safely transferred to other appropriate locations.

Hence, both Francisco and Rivera's murals hold the advantage of being movable public artworks. However, Rivera's fresco has the extra advantage of durability compared to the giant canvas of Francisco that is susceptible to termites and flaking. It must be remembered that Francisco's "Progress of Medicine" which was painted in 1953 and is located at the lobby of the Philippine General Hospital had already been subjected to a thorough and very expensive restoration. Francisco's work is further susceptible to fire damage specially that the Bulwagang Katipunan, has an intricate wooden ceiling and is fully clad with dark wood paneling from the base of the wall up to more than two meters where the mural can be found. During my visual inspection at the Bulwagang Katipunan I was horrified to see an electrical

molding running along the corner where the central and the right panel meet. In simpler words, Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History" is more difficult to conserve than Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe," and the City Hall of Manila should be aware of this reality.

Foundational Styles

As already mentioned, Francisco's initiation into academic art had been through the masters De la Rosa, who is known for his genre paintings, Fernando Amorsolo, National Artist for painting and who is known for his genre and landscape paintings, Pablo Amorsolo, who is known for his portrait paintings, Tolentino, National Artist for sculpture, and Miranda, who is known for his watercolors and illustrations. The modernist spirit that can be found in the works of these Filipino masters are unfortunately hitched on Impressionism that flourished in Europe from the last quarter of the 19th century to the first quarter of the 20th century. By the time Francisco arrived in the University of the Philippines as a student, all of Europe's major impressionists were already dead.

If Filipino modernist painting had to blossom further, it had to break away from the aesthetic hegemony of these masters. It is said that one of the reasons why Francisco left the University of the Philippines without finishing his degree was to free himself from the shackles of these academic masters (Cf. Reyes, 48). As already mentioned also, Francisco's modernism was re-charted by his association with Edades who introduced him to the Post-Impressionism of Cezanne and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) as well as to the Muralism of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros (Cf. Guillermo, "The Triumvirate," 90).

In the "Filipino Struggles through History," however, Francisco had already toned down his fascination for French Post-Impressionism and Mexican Muralism and had already expressed his graceful and stylized rendition that is infused with the aesthetics of art deco. Art deco originated in France in the second decade of the twentieth century and spread internationally in the third decade. With the Philippines being a colony of the United States at that time, art deco flourished immediately in Manila in between the third and the fifth decade of the said century. Francisco most probably imbibed this kind of modernism from his collaborations with Edades, who was both a painter and architect, from his projects with Nakpil, National Artist for architecture and one of the earliest proponents of art deco in the country, and from Edades' pointer that murals should blend well with the architectural features of the place where these works are done (Cf. Guillermo, "The Triumvirate," 90). It must be remembered that the first project of the Edades/Francisco/Ocampo triumvirate was

the murals at the Capitol Theatre, along Escolta Street in Manila, which happens to be one of the early specimens of art deco architecture created by Nakpil.

Rivera, on the other hand, had to struggle against his early fascination with the Post-Impressionism of Cezanne, and the Cubism of Picasso and Georges Braque (1882-1963). In his autobiography written with March, he recalls how he intentionally tried to cleanse himself from the effects of these "modernist residues" (Cf. Rivera & March, 81). When Rivera shifted to Muralism, many of his human figures were strongly tinged with the Primitivism of Gauguin. But the style of "Man, Controller of the Universe" deviated from his more signature Gauguin-like figures. From his same autobiography, there is a hint on where he probably derived his other styles, when he mentioned his admiration for the Northern Renaissance artists such as the Dutch Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), the German Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), the Flemish Joachim Patinir (1480-1524), and the other Flemish Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) (Cf. Rivera & March, 26). The human figures in "Man, Controller of the Universe," are more like the human figures of Bosch and Bruegel than the figures of Gauguin.

Figures and Colors

Due to the discernible traces of art deco, Francisco's figures are more angular, elongated, and consequently more graceful and noble when compared to Rivera's Bosch and Bruegel-inspired rustic figures. From a distance, there are sections of Rivera's panel that would look like colored illustrations from a comic book. The image of the controlling man at the center of his panel, for example, resembles a fighter plane pilot from some comic strip about the Second World War. Thus, Virginia Ty-Navarro and Paul Zafaralla commented: "While Rivera's figures virtually curse and convulse in defiance, those of Botong are mild mannered and dignified. Violence and revolution pervade Rivera's works; composure and resolution are Botong's hallmark" (Ty-Navarro & Zafaralla, 19).

Francisco individually frames his subjects and provides them with enough visual cues, such as clothing, props, and backdrop, for them to be immediately identifiable. To enhance the visual identity of some of his subjects and to elaborate further on their noble contributions to our country, he sometimes adds secondary frames. Rivera, on the other hand, lives up to his reputation of being a "sponge man" and fills up all the nooks and crannies of his panel with human figures. Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe" has more human figures per square meter than Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History." He relies on iconic images to give identity to his historical subjects, such as those of Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, Marx and Darwin.

Francisco's way of dividing his panel into sections makes use of spiraling and flowing flames, smoke, water and clouds, as well as demarcating buildings and other huge objects. This technique makes his sections seem to seamlessly flow from one scene to another. Rivera, on the other hand, is more rigid with his divisions. He makes use of objects that are integral part of his composition, such as the ellipses, giant lenses, huge piston, and beams, to plot his sections. Rivera also relies on overlapping his scenes much more frequently than Francisco does. Their difference results to a dreamlike experience when viewing Francisco's work and to a more tedious section by section interpretation when appreciating Rivera's work.

Francisco's panels are predominated by his signature blue and purple hues, as well as by his pastel colors. The softness of his tones is enhanced by the fact that he left his mural unvarnished. He deftly exploits the evocative power of colors. He learned it well from the Post-Impressionists that colors do not only describe subjects but also elicit certain emotional response from the viewers. The defiance of Rajah Sulayman, for instance, is made more dramatic by the flames beside him; Baltazar and Rizal's literary worlds are made seemingly captivating by the twilight setting; and the Japanese soldiers are shown in a more menacing and terrifying manner by their greenish glow. Rivera, on the other hand, relied on earth tones to dominate his panel. His cheerful hues are concentrated on the ellipses and the section depicting the female athletes. Even his section portraying the rich resources that nature can offer are rendered in his characteristic subdued hues. Because of their color schemes, Rivera's panel would appear more serious and heavier when compared to Francisco's panels.

Themes and Manner of Plotting

Francisco's intention in the mural "Filipino Struggles through History" is to present the historical heritage of the city of Manila. Hence, in one epic work, he narrativized the Pre-Hispanic life and commerce of the city, its resistance to the Spanish colonization, its conversion to Catholicism, its alliance with the Spanish crown, its eventual uprising, its resistance to American colonization, its alliance with the Americans, its stark phase of Japanese occupation, its liberation from the Japanese forces, and its attainment of independence from the United States. It recalls in a more refined and colorful manner some of the scenes from his "Five Hundred Years of Philippine History." Since the history of the country and of its capital city, Manila, are intertwined, the "Filipino Struggles through History" is like a meditation of Philippine history as seen and experienced by this old city.

Rivera's intention in the mural "Man, Controller of the Universe," on the other hand, is to lay down a more complex argument that even if man has already

conquered both the microcosm and the macrocosm, he has not thoroughly attained control yet of his own self and of his own society, as expressed by the scenes of suffering of the wretched of earth and by the looming threat of a terrifying chemical warfare. Rivera is suggesting in his work that humanity can only eliminate such sufferings and dangers, and in the process gain full control of the universe, once true socialism is attained. With this intention, we can understand how uncomfortable the Rockefellers must have been with the whole "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future" and not just merely with Lenin's face.

This thematic difference between Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History" and Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe" resulted into a fundamental difference in the way these murals are plotted or narrativized. Francisco's historical theme follows the diachronic arrangement of his sections from the Pre-Hispanic life and commerce of Manila to the Declaration of Independence from the United States. Hence, his mural is ought to be viewed from its extreme left section of the left panel, through the central panel, and to the extreme right section of the right panel (Cf. Figure 2). This would just be like reading a single line of written or printed text. Francisco, however, disrupts the otherwise perfect chronology of his sections with the anachronistic insertion into the left panel of the section portraying the title page of *Doctrina Christiana* and a ladino who is presumably the printer and writer Pinpin, which dates back more than a century earlier than the events featured in its surrounding sections. This anachronistic disruption of the otherwise seamless diachronic composition can only be explained by the painter's decision to depict the history of country's textual and literary awakening, which he deems to be a necessary prelude to the Revolution against Spain, at the center of his epic work.

Rivera's argumentative and highly symbolic concerns, on the other hand, have a synchronic plot. Hence, one can actually start viewing "Man, Controller of the Universe" from any section and end up likewise in any section. But one cannot appreciate the totality of the painting by doing a section by section viewing, because for these sections to be meaningful, they have to be interpreted in relation with the other sections. One functional technique on how to view Rivera's mural is to start from the central sections, that is sections A, B and C in figure 6, and then proceed by contrasting the counterpart sections of the left and right sides of the mural, such as sections E and D, sections J and I, sections G and H, and sections L and K. Section F, we have to remember, is a supplement to section D.

The bench that is permanently positioned in front of Rivera's mural is an appropriate device for the more contemplative mood that the mural requires from any serious viewer. But a similar bench would not be appropriate for Francisco's mural because the way it is narrativized would compel the viewer to move from left

to right. Paradoxically, however, Francisco's mural would more easily lend itself to photographic or digital disectioning and a consequent independent presentation of such detached parts as posters, postcards, t-shirt design, calendars and book covers. In the internet, for example, one can easily find fragments of the "Filipino Struggles through History" but not the whole work. Such dissectioning and independent presentation of detached parts would not make much sense for Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe."

Because of the differences in their themes and in the way they are plotted or narrativized, Francisco's work ends up being simpler and more straightforward, and therefore friendlier to the masses who are supposed to be the intended viewers of pedagogically oriented Mexican Muralism. Rivera revealed in his same autobiography the underlying philosophy of the Muralism that he co-founded with Orozco and Siqueiros: "A new kind of art would therefore be needed, one which appealed not to the viewers' sense of form and color directly, but through exciting subject matter. The new art, also, would not be a museum or gallery art but an art the people would have access to in places they frequented in their daily life—post offices, schools, theaters, railroad stations, public buildings" (Rivera & March, 78). But Rivera's work, on the other hand, ends up being too sophisticated and too capable of eliciting multiple interpretations to be suitable for his proletarian viewers. This distance from the masses could have been the effect of the fact that in the first place the precursor of "Man, Controller of the Universe" was originally intended for the more discerning bourgeoisie of New York.

Political Ideology

In the section dealing with the intellectual biographies of the two painters, this paper has already highlighted that Rivera had had a rather tempestuous political involvement while Francisco seemed to have managed to safely steer away from the contentious concerns of politics. Hence, a drastic difference on how they express their respective political ideologies should only be expected in this section.

It is one thing to avoid direct political involvement, especially in the context of a very personalistic and emotionally charged world of Philippine politics; but it is quite another thing to be totally apolitical in one's artistic expressions, especially if what we are talking about is an art work of epic proportions that dwell on local subjects and events. Francisco may have accomplished the first one, but not the second one. It is simply not possible for him to restrain his own political consciousness and unconsciousness and prevent them from shaping his murals. In the preceding section, we have already uncovered his populist leaning based on his choice of theme and manner of plotting his narratives that are more accessible to the less aesthetically

literate Filipino masses. By hindsight, this populist quality of the "Filipino Struggles through History" is compatible with his decision in 1947 to retreat to Angono and lead the life of a folk artist.

Aside from this formal and grammatical clue, in terms of the material content of Francisco's mural, there is also another more subtle clue of his preferential option for the Filipino masses. But this clue is only noticeable once we compare this mural with its precursor, the "Five Hundred Years of Philippine History," that includes a full figure of General Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964) with the Malolos Congress of 1898 as his backdrop. The material clue in the "Filipino Struggles through History" is not even "material" in the strict sense, but something "immaterial," for it is the silence of this mural about the victories of the Aguinaldo faction of the Katipunan that reveals Francisco's leaning for the mass-based movement of Bonifacio. Francisco sees Aguinaldo as an icon of the local petite bourgeoisie who subverted the revolution of the people. In the "Five Hundred Years of Philippine History" Francisco drapes Aguinaldo with a royal sash and beside him are a handful members of the principalia class in dark European suits and top hats. This silence, or absence, in the "Filipino Struggles through History" cannot be brushed aside with the explanation that such happened for the reason that the victories of the Aguinaldo faction occurred outside the city of Manila. The fact is Francisco includes a number of sections that portrayed events that also occurred outside the city of Manila, such as the conquest of Luzon in section F of the left panel, the Cry of Balintawak in section C of the right panel, and the return of MacArthur in section Q of the right panel (Cf. Figures 3 & 5).

Whereas one has to dig first into the grammar of Francisco's mural and ponder on its silences and absences in order to unearth its populist ideology, Rivera's mural is much more explicit about his rather well articulated political ideology. In fact, its theme already expresses such ideology. We have already mentioned that "Man, Controller of the Universe" extols socialism and critiques capitalism and the rising fascisms of Hitler and Mussolini. What we have not mentioned yet is what specific kind of socialism is being propounded by Rivera in this mural.

As shown by the timeline in figure 1, Rivera joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1922, was expelled from this party in 1929, and was readmitted to this same party in 1955. In 1933, when he created the ill-fated "Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future," and in 1934, when he recreated this mural as "Man, Controller of the Universe," he was not a member of the said party but claimed to be a true communist by persuasion. His choice of featuring Lenin in the older mural, who in 1933 was already nine years dead, is actually a statement against the specific socialism of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953),

who at that time was the reigning leader of socialism in general. Such statement was amplified in "Man, Controller of the Universe," when Rivera adds the portrait of Trotsky proclaiming the banner of the Fourth International and seemingly backed up by Marx and Engels themselves (Cf. Section I of Figure 6). Both Trotsky and the Fourth International are against the socialism of Stalin. In fact, because of his anti-Stalin stance, Trotsky had to seek political asylum in Mexico, but was eventually assassinated six years after this painting was finished. Rivera is saying in his "Man, Controller of the Universe" that the utopia that he expects to dawn on earth, and on the universe, is the true socialism propounded by Lenin, Trotsky and the Fourth International.

Religious Ideology

In the mural "Filipino Struggles through History," Francisco did not problematize the Catholic religion and merely portrays it as an integral part of being Filipino. In fact, his choice to become a folk artist of Angono in 1947, already included the choice to partly become a religious artist, like his revered masters Tandang Juan and Pedrong Pintor. In the context of Angono, or in any similar Filipino rural town, religion, Catholicism and the folkways are hopelessly entangled with one another such that any folk artist would sooner or later be asked to render a religious image or design, an arch or some other paraphernalia for some religious festivities and rituals.

In 1964, when Francisco started working on the "Filipino Struggles through History," his most famous religious works, the ones in Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City and in the Far Eastern University Chapel in Manila, were already a decade old. He seems to have retained his utmost respect for Catholic religion in his Bulwagang Katipunan mural. Section E of the left panel, for example, depicts with noble sincerity the otherwise contentious event of the imposition of the Spanish faith on the native Filipinos, and the implicit destruction of their Pre-Hispanic beliefs (Cf. Figure 3). Section J of the left panel celebrates the miraculous protection given by the Lady of La Naval to the Spanish fleet against the Dutch invaders, and section O of the same panel presents an earnest Marian procession (Cf. Figure 3). Conversely, he downplays the anti-friar sentiments that fueled the revolution against Spain. The murdered friar in section K of the left panel, for instance, is placed in the far background giving the impression that it is just an isolated event in the vast history of the country (Cf. Figure 3). Francisco, moreover, renders the otherwise iconic figure of Rizal's Padre Damaso, in section K of the left panel, in a manner that makes him not immediately recognizable (Cf. Figure 4). The "Filipino Struggles through History" is a thoroughly Catholic mural. It is even silent about the Protestantism that came with the Americans and of the religion that Isabelo De Los Reyes (1864-1938) founded in Quiapo, the heart of Manila, in 1902.

As an artist of the Mexican people, Rivera also had to deal with an equally Spanish Mexican Catholicism with its Pre-Columbian undertones. It is said that he and his wife Kahlo were both avid collectors of ex-votos, Judases and ancient idols (Cf. Barta, 684). Ex-votos are votive offerings in the form of handcrafted and handwritten thank you cards that are left behind by some faithful at church altars, while Judases are papier-mâché effigies of Judas that are filled up with firecrackers and blown up during the New Year's Day celebrations. But these fascinations with the religious aspects of Mexican culture remain at the level of artistic appreciation, for Rivera, just like his father, was an atheist and an avowed anti-cleric.

Atheism as a theme may not be immediately discernible in "Man, Controller of the Universe." But when one reflects on the title of the work and the way Rivera enshrines the symbolic figure of man at the center of his composition, we can surmise that the painter is actually bumping God away from the center of a theistic worldview. Rivera's anti-clericalism in the same work is more obvious than his atheism. Scholasticism, the special philosophical worldview of Catholic clerics, is symbolized in this mural with a handless statue of Aristotle with a rosary hanging on his neck (Cf. Section J of Figure 6). By itself, the handless image implies the impracticability and uselessness of Scholasticism in the fast changing modern world. But when viewed side by side with its counterpart image at the right side of the panel, the allegorical image of a decapitated Nazism/fascism, Rivera's critique of clericalism deepens (Cf. Section I of Figure 6). The two mutilated marble statues seem to convey the message that clericalism, just like Nazism and fascism, is an unpleasant system that needs to be transcended as society moves towards the utopian world of socialism.

Gender Ideology

Francisco's "Filipino Struggles through History" offers a vision of a patriarchal Philippines, where the males are the primary characters and the females are just secondary figures. A cursory look at this mural will easily yield at least twenty-five identifiable male portraits: Sulayman, Legazpi, Limahong, Dasmarinas, Drake, Pinpin, Carlos IV, Baltazar, Florante, Elias, Crisostomo Ibarra, Pilosopong Tacio, Padre Damaso, Rizal, Del Pilar, Bonifacio, Abad Santos, Recto, Quezon, Lope Santos, Laurel, MacArthur, McNutt, and Roxas. A similar look at the same mural, however, will only yield three identifiable female portraits: Melchora Aquino, Maria Clara and Sisa. In other words, in Francisco's mural male historical figures outnumber the female historical figures more than eight times.

To make this gender statistics even worse, we should realize that the picture of Aquino in section D of the right panel is not given enough visual cues to ascertain her identity (Cf. Figure 5). As such, the image could actually be of any heroic Filipina

who attended to some battle wounded Katipuneros. Furthermore, Maria Clara and Sisa in section D of the central panel are not actually historical figures but are merely characters from Rizal's fiction (Cf. Figure 4). Hence, if we discount the ambiguous image of Aquino and the fictive images of Maria Clara and Sisa, Francisco's mural will have no identifiable female historical figure left.

The gender statistics of identifiable figures in Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe," are no better compared to that of Francisco's composition. Rivera's panel contains only nine identifiable portraits, namely Aristotle, Darwin, Rockefeller, Lenin, Trotsky, Lovestone, Engels, Marx, and Wolfe. All of them happened to be male historical figures.

Francisco and Rivera's patriarchal visions could have been shaped by the actual patriarchal societies which they inhabited. Rivera, however, proffers a utopian alternative of a world in which the females will have more active roles. In section K of figure 6, he presents at least thirteen women, in red scarves, who are part of the victorious column of marching socialists. In section F of figure 6, he also depicts female athletes to symbolize the wholesome recreation in his utopian society. In section I of the same figure, he creates a female aviator triumphantly sitting on the severed head of the allegory of Nazism/fascism. Hence, whereas both Francisco and Rivera are basically patriarchal in their outlook, Rivera is more gender-sensitive in as far as his utopian vision is concerned.

Nationalism

Francisco's commitment to the triumvirate's vision, during the early part of the 1930s, of experimenting with and eventually establishing some kind of a post-Amorsolo and post-Tolentino style of Filipino modernism using the western Post-Impressionist idioms that Edades brought back with him from his sojourn to the United States is already a general commitment to nationalism. Such commitment was concretized and deepened, more than a decade later, when Francisco retreated to Angono and opted to ground his artistic expression on the folkways of his hometown. The resultant modernist form and style expressed in the "Filipino Struggles through History" is a manifestation of Francisco's success in carrying out the triumvirate's vision of achieving a more updated and vibrant Filipino modernism.

In terms of content, although Francisco's mural captures both the highs and lows of the story of the Philippine race, the whole work remains a document of his nationalist sentiments. If we are going to reckon the length of canvas that he devotes to the glorious Pre-Hispanic life and commerce of the Filipinos as well as to the brave resistances that these Filipinos put up against the invaders we are going to have approximately 30 meters of these highly nationalistic narratives. If we

are going to add to this length the meter of canvas about the establishment of the Commonwealth, and another meter for the declaration of independence from the United States, we will have a total of approximately 32 meters which is equivalent to 65.70% of the 48.7 meters length of the whole work. In this sense, his citation as National Artist for painting is accurate in saying that he indeed "turned fragments of the historic past into vivid records of the legendary courage of the ancestors of the race" (Marcos, 237).

As an additional evidence of Francisco's nationalism he made it a point to honor the establishment of our national language with an image of Lope Santos in section N of the right panel who is surrounded with his writings that helped in the textualization and development of Tagalog.

The mural will make its Filipino viewers proud of their being Filipinos. It is a pity that its location at the Bulwagang Katipunan is not as accessible to the general public as if the work were located in the National Museum. Its potential contribution to nation building is not fully utilized in its present location. Perhaps the local government of Manila and the national government should start thinking about transferring the whole work to the National Museum and leave behind a replica at the Bulwagang Katipunan just like what was done to Francisco's newly restored "Progress of Medicine" at the lobby of the Philippine General Hospital.

In his autobiography that he wrote with March, Rivera made an enlightening discussion on the relationship between nationalism and aesthetics. He starts with his admiration for the Pre-Columbian art of Mexico. "Like all first-rate art, their work had been intensely local: related to the soil, the landscape, the forms, animals, deities, and colors of their own world. Above all, it had been emotion-centered. It was moulded by their hopes, fears, joys, superstitions, and sufferings" (Rivera & March, 22). But with the influx of Spanish and European aesthetics, the Mexicans turned away from their art, became ashamed of their heritage and started to imitate the westerners' standards of beauty. Rivera realizes that one can only become a great painter if he plants his own feet on his native soil. "Great art is like a tree which grows in a particular place and has a trunk, leaves, blossoms, boughs, fruit, and roots of its own. The more native art is, the more it belongs to the entire world, because taste is rooted in nature. When art is true, it is one with nature. This is the secret of primitive art and also of the art of the masters—Michelangelo, Cezanne, Seurat, and Renoir. The secret of my best work is that it is Mexican" (Rivera & March, 33).

It is unfortunate that such a remarkable discourse on nationalism and aesthetics was not able to find its manifestation in "Man, Controller of the Universe." This could be due to the philosophical and cosmopolitan themes that Rivera tackled in his work that was aggravated by the fact that the precursor of this painting, the

"Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future," was originally intended for his international audience in New York. The only chance for Rivera to infuse his remade work with a tinge of Mexico was when he added the section B of his panel that shows some agricultural bounty in the form of sugar cane, rubber tree, cotton, pineapple, wheat, barley, potatoes, corn, grapes, sugar beets, and other similar produce (Cf. Figure 6).

Francisco and Rivera might be both nationalistic visual artists in the sense that they are convinced that their art will only flourish on their respective native grounds, and in the sense that they believed that their Muralisms are pedagogically useful in propagating the spirit of nationalism among their fellow countrymen. But in as far as the contents of their works "Filipino Struggles through History" and "Man, Controller of the Universe" are concerned, Francisco's nationalism is much more visible compared to that of Rivera.

Between Colonialism and Post-Colonialism

In the preceding section, we have already discussed the tension between colonialism and post-colonialism in the Edades/Francisco/Ocampo triumvirate's struggle of finding a more updated and vibrant Filipino modernism with the western, and therefore colonial, aesthetic idioms and systems that Edades brought home from the United States. However, with the triumvirate's strategy of grounding these western idioms and systems on their native soil, they were not able to resolve the tension between colonialism and post-colonialism. This is just understandable because in the first place it was not their concern to purify Filipino painting from all traces of colonialism, as they were just interested in establishing a version of Filipino modernism beyond the hegemony of Amorsolo and Tolentino. Consequently, Francisco never bothered about the colonial nature of Gauguin's Primitivism, or of the Mexican triumvirate's Muralism, or of the art deco that he gleaned from Nakpil's architecture. Instead, he freely appropriated these and grounded them on his Angono soil and consequently produced his own unique style that is nevertheless unquestionably Filipino. It is only the rather academic retrospective of an art critic that happens to be familiar with the debates of post-colonialism that became current only in the Philippines in about the last decade or two of the twentieth century that would question Francisco and the triumvirate for their failure to resolve such tension in their art.

If in form, Francisco and his "Filipino Struggles through History" are mired in colonial aesthetics, the same would also be unfortunately true in terms of content. Like most Filipinos who remain ambivalent about their colonial past, this mural to a large extent is also ambivalent about our country's Spanish and American

colonizations. Whereas, Francisco shows resentment and bitterness in the scenes where Luzon is vanquished by the conquistadores, in section F of the left panel; where Sulayman surrenders Manila to Legazpi, in section G of the left panel; where the Treaty of Paris is imposed on the Filipino freedom fighters, in section G of the right panel; where the shot that triggered the Filipino American War is fired, in section H of the right panel; and where the American troops victoriously march after the Battle of Manila, in section J of the right panel (Cf. Figures 3 & 5). He also shows pride and gratitude in the scenes where a friar brought the Catholic faith to the archipelago, in section E of the left panel; where Intramuros is fortified with stone, in section I of the left panel; where the Filipino and Spanish forces are victorious in the Battles of La Naval, in section J of the left panel; where a ladino learned the art of printing from the Spaniards, in section M of the left panel; where Rizal wrote his novel in the Spanish language, in section D of the central panel; where the Americans put into place a more modern civil works and health service, in section K of the left panel; and where the Thomasites came to start a public education in the English language (Cf. Figures 3, 4 & 5).

Beyond this ambivalence towards our Spanish and American heritage, however, there is an effort exerted by Francisco to invite his Filipino viewers to celebrate and take pride in our Pre-Hispanic culture. If we take a closer look at his mural, we will notice that sections A, B and C of the left panel that deal with the commerce and life of the early Filipinos before the advent of the conquistadores are the most detailed part of his whole composition (Cf. Figure 3). Furthermore, in section G of the right panel, he undermines the myth of benevolent assimilation propagated by the United States by showing the disgruntled Filipino freedom fighters who were forced to bear the consequence of a treaty of which they are not signatories. This subversion of the said myth is further enhanced by the mural's choice of representing American colonization as a continuation of Spanish colonization. By being silent about the Cavite declaration of independence from Spain or of the Malolos Congress, the Spanish and American dominations were in effect juxtaposed as a single continuum of oppression.

In theory, Rivera, on the other hand, was able to resolve the aesthetic and formal tension between colonialism and post-colonialism by his decision of not only grounding his art on his Mexican soil but also by enriching it with the art forms of the Pre-Columbian Mexicans that are fortunately well preserved as ceramic artifacts, sculptures and bas reliefs. Unlike Francisco and the Filipino triumvirate, Rivera was able to infuse pre-colonial elements into his own style and form. But in the mural "Man, Controller of the Universe," he seems to have set aside this remarkable resolution and to have slid back to his youthful dependence on colonial forms, specifically on styles of the Northern Renaissance artists Bosch and Bruegel.

In terms of content, Rivera did not problematize the theme of colonialism and post-colonialism in the concerned mural, as he is pre-occupied dealing with his philosophical and cosmopolitan theme that is anchored on the socialisms of the Russians Lenin and Trotsky, as well as of the Fourth International. It would be unjust, however, to question Rivera's failure to resolve the tension between colonialism and post-colonialism in the contents of his mural, for it appears that Rivera is actually thinking that such a thorny tension would be transcended once the true socialism is established. It also appears that at the time Rivera painted both the "Man, Controller of the Universe" and its ill-fated precursor, he was already certain about his identity as a Mexican artist of international standing, that he did not bother anymore with the questions on the purity of his "Mexicanidad" that bothered him during his youthful period of searching for his own artistic language.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have taken a cursory look at the intellectual biographies of Francisco and Rivera, explored the images of their epic works "Filipino Struggles through History" and "Man, Controller of the Universe," and meticulously compared these two murals.

In the process of comparing these two masterpieces, we uncovered the following information. First, the dimension of Francisco's three-paneled mural is more than double compared to Rivera's single paneled work; but Rivera's fresco is easier to conserve than Francisco's giant canvas. Second, the two artists seem to have converged in terms of their style in Gauguin's Primitivism, but in their two works they have parted ways as Francisco appropriated the angular and elongated figures of art deco and Rivera pursued the rustic figures of Bosch and Bruegel. Third, as a consequence of their stylistic divergence, Francisco's figures are more graceful and dignified compared to those of Rivera; in terms of the arrangement of their sections, Francisco used his dynamic devices of interlinking streams, fires, clouds and water, while Rivera used his static objects that are integral to his composition; and in terms of color Francisco opted to fill his canvas with his signature blues, purples and pastels, while Rivera used his stark earthy tones. Fourth, Francisco diachronically plotted his historical narrative on his elongated canvas, while Rivera synchronically plotted his ideological discourse on his panel; and while Francisco's diachronic history will compel the viewer to move along the length of the composition, Rivera's synchronic presentation will elicit a more contemplative mood on its viewer.

Fifth, Francisco's preference for the Filipino masses is only an implicit and unarticulated political ideology that is consistent with his option of becoming a folk artist of Angono; Rivera's Leninist and Trotskyan socialism, on the other hand, is

a highly articulated political ideology with its own international organization, the Fourth International. Sixth, Francisco's mural is piously Christian and Catholic in its outlook; while Rivera's mural, on the other hand, is subtly atheistic and explicitly anti-clerical in its outlook. Seventh, whereas both Francisco and Rivera are patriarchal in their worldview, Rivera proved to be more gender sensitive in his utopian vision. Eighth, although both Francisco and Rivera are known for their intense nationalism, in the two masterpieces studied by this paper, only Francisco was able to effectively convey this sentiment both in form and in content. Lastly, it seems that both Francisco and Rivera were not able to address the issue of colonialism in as far as their two murals are concerned.

Beyond their differences and similarities, this paper stands on its strategic goal and believes that by understanding Francisco and his "Filipino Struggles through History" using as its hermeneutic lens Rivera and his "Man, Controller of the Universe," it was able to grasp and understand more deeply the radical individuality of Francisco's visual aesthetics. This paper is my homage to Francisco on the centenary of birth.■

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Dr. Feorillo Petronilo A. Demeterio III is an associate professor of Filipino and Philippine studies at the De La Salle University, Manila. He is the current holder of the Don Eduardo Cojuangco Sr. Administrative Chair in Liberal Arts, and the vice dean of the College of Liberal Arts of the same university. He finished his doctor's degree in Philippine studies at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and his master's degree in philosophy, as well as his bachelor's degrees in philosophy and theology, at the University of Santo Tomas. Dr. Demeterio is the author of several scholarly articles in general philosophy, Filipino philosophy and cultural studies, most of which are accessible through the internet. He can be contacted at feorillodemeterio@gmail.com.