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widespread in Southeast Asian cultures, that can influence social and political organization at a very local level. And some districts (or “bailiwicks”) include areas too remote to experience the kind of direct intervention and election fraud by local bosses that Sidel enumerates. Knowing this, it becomes entirely conceivable that some bosses remain in power simply because they are legitimately re-elected. Clearly, despite Sidel’s concerns regarding the analytical misuse of culture, bosses do something to generate wider political support from voters. (The Osmeñas, for example, seem to have little use for violence but have managed to maintain power in provincial and national politics.) Even the single most powerful boss in Philippine history, Ferdinand Marcos, could not stay in power when citizens refused to condone the results of his rigged “snap election” and finally dared give him the boot.

Without acknowledging the local cultural context in which a state apparatus operates, the explanatory power of any political theory will be severely limited. In the case of the Philippines, it is clear that certain cultural factors configure social and political relations between bosses and their supporters, as well as within a given network of bosses. Essentialism need not be an issue if we can acknowledge that cultural models do shape material relations, but only within specific historical conditions of political and economic development. By removing politics from its cultural context, even an analysis as insightful as Sidel’s remains hollow, explaining only the “how” but never the “why.” If Capital, Coercion, and Crime strikes some readers as depressing, it is probably because, in the course of relocating the blame for bossism from ordinary people to the state apparatus, the Filipino people disappear from the discussion. However, Filipino voters, with their indigenous cultural constructs, remain the most important locus for change, as it is they who must evaluate and deconstruct this state apparatus in order to effectively contradict, destabilize, and subvert the institution of bossism.

Sidel is to be commended for this highly objective analysis of Philippine bossism, and an honest portrayal of the predation and violence that pervade the electoral system. Capital, Coercion, and Crime is a sober and detailed assessment of what may be the modern Philippine state’s most serious obstacle. And though he does not mention it explicitly, Sidel is obviously troubled by this phenomenon, as are most Filipinos at home and abroad. It is painfully obvious that bossism is highly damaging to Philippine society as a whole, at the very least because it corrupts electoral politics and hobbles the development of a truly representative democracy.

In my view, Sidel’s most important contribution here is showing very clearly that the image of a “weak” Philippine state is a lie. This study of bossism may be far from comprehensive, but Sidel is able to show conclusively that, no matter whose legacy it is, bossism cannot be tolerated as old-fashioned patronage that fulfills the people’s needs where the state is too weak to function effectively. This is because bossism both relies upon and reinforces the deplorable status quo in terms of widespread poverty, inequality, landlessness, lawlessness, and other socio-economic ills. This dependency, in turn, ensures that the Philippines will never rise above this post-colonial mire for as long as bossism remains entrenched. The field of Philippine studies, and Philippine democracy itself, will benefit greatly when others use Sidel’s framework as a point of reference to study modern Philippine politics.


By Proserpina Domingo Tapales

Most often, historical research deals with major events, big-name statesmen, or heroes of wars and revolutions. Some, however, dwells on smaller aspects of life. In the latter genre, the historian is able to look deeper into situations, people, and locales, and enables the reader to relate specific events to the larger societal picture. This book does just that: It looks into sections of Philippine society affected by the 1896 revolution, describing lives beyond Bonifacio and Aguinaldo, examining inward through the masa (mass), and offering portraits of small pockets of society, whose lives were drastically changed by the revolution, even though they did not assume leadership roles in it.
The book features selected papers presented during the Fourth Conference of the Spanish Association for Pacific Studies (AEEP), held in Valladolid, Spain, in 1997. It approximately covers the drastic transition from Spanish colonization to short-lived Philippine independence to American takeover of the islands; times, certainly, that affected each person living then in the Philippines. The essays look at the ways in which various sections of society – women, ethnic groups, the Spanish soldiers, the clergy, the Filipino military, the civilians, and the local elite - saw their lives change.

Barbara Watson Andaya, in her chapter on women, explains how gender associations during the revolution can be thought of in terms of partnership, which “reconceive the female role as one which complemented that of the males,” thus making the Philippine revolution “appear far more ‘modern’ than resistance movements of the same period in other Southeast Asian countries.” This idea is amplified in another chapter on gender, by Mina Roces, contending that “power was exercised unofficially and unobtrusively behind the scenes as [women] fulfilled their various roles from soldiers and couriers, to nurses and auxiliaries”.

Leonard Y. Andaya discusses the difficulty of forging one Filipino nation “because of the barriers of ethno-linguistic identity that had been advanced by the religious orders.” Yet, at the end of what he calls “the long revolution”, the revolutionary leaders, in the process of indigenization, “were able to create a national context in which the inhabitants... could then believe in themselves as Filipinos.”

By studying records of baptisms and burials in the province of Cavite, Glenn Anthony May was able to trace civilian flight from areas of extreme fighting to safer areas during the revolution. Interestingly, this allows him to conjecture that “the presence of refugees and the attendant food shortages also played a role in the conflict between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo” (p. 135). The civilian refugees also affected the war, as their presence “contributed to the fissures that already developed in the ranks of the revolutionary leadership.”

The revolution, as expected, affected in no small measure the lives of soldiers, Filipino or Spanish. As letters written by a Spanish soldier, collected and interpreted by Fernando Palanco Aguado, attest, ambitions were put on hold, if not killed, by war. But the fate of the Spanish clergy has not been so dramatically documented as in a chapter by F. Cayetano Sánchez Fuertes on the Franciscans in the revolution, describing the physical suffering and humiliation inflicted to the clergy by the Filipino victors of the revolution.

Essays on the military and on local government corruption provide continuing mirror reflections on present-day Philippine society. Alfred McCoy traces today’s military traditions and practices to colonial times, Spanish and American, noting that the ideals taught in the military “were so clearly foreign, they lacked roots or resonance within the country’s political culture.” The same pertains to political culture. Xavier Huetz de Lemps shows that, as early as 1772, “the Council of the Indies [had] denounced the culture of corruption among the citizens and inhabitants of the Philippines.” The methods of local corruption still continue, in more elaborate guises, probably because, as their colonial precursors, they are hardly reported or resolved. In a chapter on legal proceedings against corrupt governors, Luis Ángel Sánchez Gómez makes clear that the pattern of low-level practitioners being severely punished while the bigger fish go free has historical antecedents. During the Spanish times, decisions were affected by some factors as “the prestige of the (Spanish) race and authority.” Today, it could be kinship or fellowship among the elite.

The chapter by Yoshiko Nagano documents the strong trade links between the Philippines and Hongkong and Singapore, or “intra-Asian trade,” where the trading partners were used for reexport or reimport of goods between the Philippines and the United States and Britain. In another chapter, Karl-Heinz Wionzek relates events behind diplomatic façades, which disguised “frictions among the German and American forces in Manila Bay” in 1898.

Ending the volume, Bernardita Reyes Churchill’s essay presents major themes on the Philippine revolution as drawn by historians, aptly concluding that, while some critics write that the Philippine revolution is a much-studied topic, there remain areas to be analyzed. Quoting from another historian, it challenges scholars “[...] to write plural, disparate, and heterogeneous histories of the revolution in which heroes matter, yet do not, in which class divisions are evident, yet fluid,
divergent, yet internally articulated, in which every social group makes an important contribution, though not everywhere and all the time” (pp. 292-293).

This collection of essays certainly contributes to that quest for a better understanding of the 1896 revolution. A colorful patchwork picture, it offers, seen as a whole, a more complete saga of the times of the revolution, stressing that revolutions are not just fought in the battlefield but, rather, by every person whose life is affected by them.


By Oona Thommes PAREDES

As studies of lowland, “Christianized” Philippine culture go, this is easily one of the most insightful works to be published since Ileto’s *Pasyon and Revolution*. Both works deal to some extent with how people manage power inequalities. Like Ileto’s *Pasyon*, Cannell’s study shows how lowland Filipinos – this time in the Bicol region – have interpreted Christian symbols according to local concepts of power. However, Christian symbolism is only one aspect of Cannell’s work, and because of this, her book is meaningful on a much wider level. It is also an honest ethnography that will remain relevant for future generations of Philippinists and anthropologists.

The book is composed of four distinct and seemingly unrelated sections: marriage, spirit healing, saints and the dead, and beauty contests. Each section is strong enough to hold its own, and a hasty reading may yield the impression that the book is merely a compilation of disparate elements from the author’s fieldwork. The working theme is relational power – in this case, how power is negotiated in a relationship between unequal partners. The book deals with the most intimate types of relationships – between husband and wife, between a spirit and a healer, between the dead and their survivors, between a believer and her God, and between a person and his/her ideals of personhood. The theme recurs throughout the chapters, but does not truly coalesce to its full analytical impact until the concluding chapter.

In “Marriage,” Cannell explores how women manage their multiple roles as daughters and wives, and yet somehow retain some power in situations where they feel obligated to follow their parents’ decisions – in this case, in marriage decisions, even when these go against their own will. With parent-arranged marriages and the ideal of the obedient daughter, one could assume that Bicolano women have no real control over their own lives. But Cannell shows that women have multiple avenues for exercising control (e.g., rejecting their husbands in bed), and that both men and women see marriage as a process through which such difficulties should be eventually worked out. In fact, we learn that the marker of a successful marriage is that the wife and husband ultimately learn to cooperate, stay together, and eventually come to love each other. In the woman’s case, her assertion of power in this relationship is deciding when it is finally time to “pity” the man she was forced to marry, and actually start to care about his welfare and happiness. In addition, the woman’s demonstrated obedience to her parents compels them to defend her interests through parental interference. By gaining the confidence and obvious affection of these women, Cannell was able to explore with great insight how power is negotiated and a semblance of equality achieved through the institutionalization of female reluctance within this intimate dyad of husband and wife.

The section on “Healing and the Spirits” provides a glimpse of the fascinating interaction between people and the spirit world, a fact of life almost everywhere in the Philippines. The theme of relational power is explored here through the problematic relationship that (female) healer-mediums have with their spirit-companions (saro). The root of the problem is that, while the saro may grant some women the precious power to heal others, it is a gift that a healer is basically compelled to accept, and with this “gift” comes the near-total control by the saro and the spirit world over the healer’s life. The saro also has the potential to overpower the healer and literally drag her out of this world. Like the partnership between husband and wife, the partnership between the healer and her saro often involves reluctance,