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Emigrants, Entrepreneurs, and Evil Spirits, by Griffiths

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The actual position of woman in Philippine society is veiled by the power she wields in the home, the freedoms she has won, the empowerment of some. Since, however, the cages and stereotypes are still visible in media, they must still exist, at the very least in the minds of some of those responsible for media. They therefore still affect a majority of viewers. Enlightenment—through research and writing—is part of the liberation and empowerment of the Filipino, both man and woman.

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EMIGRANTS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND EVIL SPIRITS /
LIFE IN A PHILIPPINE VILLAGE. By Stephen Griffiths. Honolulu:
University of Hawaii Press, 1988. 95 pages.

The author, born of American Episcopalian missionary parents, grew up in the Philippines, in the village of Balbalasang in what is now the subprovince of the Cordillera Central. After graduating from college in Hawaii, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in a village in Malaysia. Returning to the Philippines in 1973 in order to do graduate research work in anthropology, he opted to work in a village in Ilocos Norte. He chose the village of Bawang (a fictitious name) for the following reasons: 1) Bawang has a history of emigrants to Guam, Hawaii and California since the days of the depression; 2) many emigrants have returned with their dollar earnings, have purchased farmlands, and have built substantial concrete and wooden houses in which to retire; and 3) since 1940, many village folks have engaged in the garlic trade, either by borrowing capital from returned emigrants or investing part of their dollar savings in the garlic trade. As one villager put it: "Here we have two important products, emigrants and garlic, and that is why we are rich" (p. 5). Indeed the barrio folk of Bawang do celebrate more lavish and expensive fiestas than those of the capital town of Simbaan (another pseudonym).

After the first chapter titled, "Prologue: Voices from the Past," the author discusses in the next three chapters the emigrants and entrepreneurs, as well as the changes in socioeconomic and cultural life which the village has been undergoing. In the last chapter, titled "Reservations for the Next World," Griffiths discusses at length the third element in the book's title, namely, the "evil spirits."

The Bawang folk believe that spirits can be either benevolent or malevolent; that they were created by God at the same time he created man, and that they reside in Mount Mawakwakar. The spirits intervene in human affairs by inducing men and women to become witches and thus become the tools of the spirits in causing people to become ill, or have accidents and eventually die. Witches are believed to be initiated by the spirits into witchery by making them partake of the flesh of human beings whom the spirits themselves kill. And witches must begin to exercise their witch power or else be killed by the

spirits. The author cites as examples such people as Virginia Solano, Amparo Estacio and Diosdado Tolentino (all fictitious names), who were accused of having caused some Bawang folk to fall ill and finally die. On the other hand, good spirits are credited with inducing other people, men and women, to become *arbolarios* or healers.

The author relates in detail the case of Alberto Ruiz, who, shortly after his marriage to Casandra Valdez, was visited by a young *kastila* woman, ravishingly beautiful, who wanted him to marry her. Alberto refused because he was already committed to Casandra. She threatened him with death if he refused. Afterwards she stopped visiting him, but her father, a dwarf with a long white beard, also insisted that Alberto marry her. Upon his refusal, the mother of the girl, who also had a beautiful face, but with no flesh on her body, and her brother, a young dwarf, also came to persuade him to marry. Since Alberto persisted in his refusal, a fifth visitor, a huge hideous creature, appeared and delivered the same message, but this time with a twist: if he continued to refuse, Alberto would die, and so would the beautiful woman. But if he married her, he would have the power to cure people of their illnesses. Reluctantly, Alberto agreed, and then he was told that he need not go through the marriage. It was enough for the spirits that he was willing to become a healer (p. 76). That night the lady returned and took Alberto for a walk through the forest. He was shown some twelve different plants and instructed how to use them for healing. Finally they came to a clearing and two giants appeared. One looked like the Virgin Mary, the other like Jesus Christ. Both wore crucifixes hung from their necks. The two giants then performed a mass. Alberto sensed that there were many spirits in attendance. The lady then touched Alberto on the shoulder and bade him: "Return to your house, *compadre*, and help people." Thus, he became a well-known healer in Bawang.

Social tensions and their resolution are credited in Bawang to evil and good spirits. However, not all tension is attributed to the intervention of evil spirits. Ordinary human ill-will and motivation are used to explain, for instance, the murder of Maximo Espiritu who had been publicly accused by the barangay captain, Diony Bautista, of having stolen his garlic. Maximo, incensed, hit Diony with a beer bottle on the head, and he was sent bleeding to the hospital in Simbaan. After less than two weeks, the grisly murder of Maximo occurred on the shore of the Simbaan river. Diony and three companions, all of Bawang, were apprehended, but only the former was detained in prison. Pascual Gomez, father of the young Gomez, a suspect along with Diony, with whom Maximo was supposed to have gone out fishing the night he was murdered, was apprehended by the military a second time. He later died either through suicide or a stroke.

The belief that spirits can be both good and evil is common in the Philippines. So is the belief that witches are inured in evil and do all they can to cause people harm. The existence of healers and shamans, the antithesis of witches, who work in order to serve human life and heal people, is also a common belief.

There is, however, one point in which the witch beliefs of this Ilocos Norte village differ from those of the southern Filipinos in Luzon, Bisayas and Mindanao. Only the witches are said to be cannibals among the peoples of the south. The good spirits who invite people to become healers or shamans are not believed to consume human flesh, nor do they invite the healers or shamans to feast on human flesh. I tend to believe that the belief among the Bawang (northern) folk that all spirits, good and bad, are cannibals, may be an influence from the Tinguian or Kankanay belief that spirits do eat human beings. This is clear for instance in the Tinguian "Story of Gaygayoma Who Lives Up Above" (M.C. Cole, *Philippine Folk Tales*, pp. 37-43). Both Gaygayoma, the daughter of Bagbagak and Sinag and the stars are said to eat human beings if their demands are not honored. And in the Kankanay "Tale of Timungan" (Lawrence Lee Wilson, *Baguio Midland Courier*, 5 Sept. 1948, p. 4), the underworld ruler, Maseken and his followers, were said to eat human beings.

Even without a healer's intervention, it is believed that a normal individual in Bawang can protect himself from the malign power of witches if he carries on his person an *anib*, an amulet to protect him from evil spirits and witches. Moreover, he is advised to avoid persons known to be witches, and not to accept food or drinks offered by a witch even in public feasts. Should a witch touch you, the folk advise, you should also touch him/her, making sure not noticed.

This reviewer is of the opinion that the Bawang belief in witches does not come from the native peoples of the Cordillera Central, nor from the Ilocanos. Isabelo de los Reyes, in his *La Religion Antigua de los Filipinos* (1909), attests to this. Belief in witches came with the Spaniards. Among the Ilocanos, for instance, there is no native term to denote the witch; instead the Spanish *brujo/a* is used.

Belief in witches, however, was common in the lowland regions of Bicolandia (Castaño records *Asuwang* in his *Breve Noticias*, 1895), among the Bikols, as well as in the Bisayas and in the regions in Mindanao peopled by Filipinos from the north which had been heavily influenced by Spain. Thus the reviewer believes that belief in witches in Bawang is a borrowing—not from the north but the south.

Although the discussion of folk beliefs in a northern Philippine town is enlightening, one is led to ask a final question: is there really a causal connection between emigration, entrepreneurship and the intervention of evil or good spirits in the lives of the Bawang community? This is not very clearly shown by the author.

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