

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Even as they offer new arguments, the contributors to this issue revisit a number of classic themes and works in Philippine studies. These themes include kinship, values, heroes, and the structuring of Philippine society. The works revisited include Yasuchi Kikuchi's *Uncrystallized Society* (1991), the starting point of Charles Macdonald's article; Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979), the source of Thomas Gibson's interest in the legend about Bernardo Carpio; and Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism* (1988), to which a symposium is devoted in celebration of its twenty-fifth year of publication.

Boldly Macdonald accounts for the puzzles of Philippine society such as its "loose texture," "institutional fuzziness," and the "informal quality of social life" that exist alongside the importance given to smooth interpersonal interactions. He argues that lowland Catholic populations "share certain value orientations" with indigenous communities that are asocial, "open-aggregated, anarchic, strictly egalitarian, and mostly peaceable" small communities. Although at the time of the Spanish conquest petty states existed on these islands, Macdonald posits that most islanders lived in small communities of the open-aggregated type. Spanish colonialism imposed a stratified type of society, but somehow, through a process yet to be spelled out, the preconquest value orientations survived. The idea of cultural remnants has also been put forward by Ileto in proposing a nonlinear view of Philippine history. For his part, Macdonald sees these residual value orientations as resilient and operative in the sphere of interpersonal behavior, but are "at odds" with the social.

Kinship of the bilateral kind that prevails in the Philippines constitutes a key aspect of relationships. Rather than the essential building block of society, kinship provides the setting where one selects allies and partners. What makes a kin group cohere, Macdonald argues, is the cumulation of person-to-person ties, which result in strong aggregations as well as splits and fractures. But kinship does not provide unity at a "higher level." Humans, however, are inherently gregarious: they enter (and leave) bonds of companionship based on "weak ties" that must be reactivated constantly to form communities that

live together for any length of time. These communities produce a type of sociality that scholars in the 1960s, particularly the late Frank Lynch SJ and Mary Racelis Hollnsteiner, sought but failed to understand, says Macdonald, because of their inability to analyze values as contradictory and as “a deeply anarchic dimension in the culture of the Filipino people.”

Gibson views kinship differently. The concrete relationships in the domestic realm, “within which the basic kinship units of a society are reproduced,” yield the metaphors that people utilize to conceptualize “higher level” abstract relationships in the realms of the political, the religious, and the cosmological. Because the Indo-European and Semitic kinship systems of the Middle East differ from the Austronesian kinship systems of Southeast Asia, the concepts generated by the domestic realm vary. In the former the concept of the male seed, legitimacy, and the father–son relationship are stressed; in the latter the concept of shared space is preeminent, hence the privileging of siblingship and opposite-sex twins. As Gibson demonstrates, the hero legends are thus structured differently in these two parts of the world. Moreover, Gibson argues that the interpretation of the lives of Jesus and Muhammad among the Tagalog and the Makassar helped people to internalize abstract moral ideas about justice and salvation and to participate in history.

Reflecting on the conditions under which *Contracting Colonialism* was written, Rafael looks back to the “long 1970s.” In the Philippines, it was a time of cultural and intellectual florescence that responded to but also went beyond Marcos’s authoritarianism, a conjuncture Rafael characterizes as countercultural, modernizing, nationalist, and cosmopolitan. He also credits the milieu of transdisciplinarity at Cornell University, where he completed his dissertation in 1984. Vernon Totanes tracks the publishing history of Rafael’s thesis, while Ramon Guillermo analyzes its citation rates. Internationally *Contracting Colonialism* is the most widely cited historical work by a Filipino; but the factors that explain its success are not conducive to the advancement of an “autonomous social science” in Southeast Asia.

Finally, together with Maria Eliza Agabin, Guillermo brings to our attention the little-known memoirs of the German pharmacist Dr. Heinrich Rothdauscher, who lived in the Philippines from 1873 to 1883. Translated to English, a portion of the memoirs provides a perceptive and invaluable ethnography of the Cordilleras in the late nineteenth century.

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