

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Augusto V. de Viana

Stories Rarely Told: The Hidden Stories and Essays on Philippine History

Review Author: Concepcion R. Lagos

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 64 no. 2 (2016): 312–16

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

through false memories that were induced by our history of colonization and servitude. To read Claudio's work whether as autobiography or history necessitates, too, that we understand the US as an empire. Yet, the book is silent on the US quest for global dominance and formation of rogue states, that have supported or even have caused the downfall of the likes of Marcos, Suharto, Karimov, and Niyazov. People Power remains untamed and should be since this revolution is definitely part of our long history and unceasing struggle for freedom. To tame it by reducing it to simple perpetrators and victims is unfortunately to be politically naïve.

Gary Devilles

Department of Filipino, Ateneo de Manila University
<gdevilles@ateneo.edu>

AUGUSTO V. DE VIANA

Stories Rarely Told: The Hidden Stories and Essays on Philippine History

Quezon City: New Day, 2013. 255 pages.

Augusto V. de Viana joins a list of renowned historians, such as William Henry Scott, Luis Camara Dery, and James Francis Warren, who have earned the support of New Day Publishers and been instrumental in contributing to a “history from below.” “History from below” is a growing movement in Philippine historiography that utilizes a plurality of sources to dislodge hegemonic concepts on power, authority, and culture in favor of indigenous-based expressions anchored on localized experiences. *Stories Rarely Told: The Hidden Stories and Essays on Philippine History* is consistent in content and format with De Viana's earlier works—*Apples & Ampalaya: Bittersweet Glimpses of the American Period in the Philippines 1898–1946* (2001); *Kulaboretor! The Issue of Political Collaboration during World War II* (2003); *Halo-halo, Hardware and Others: The Story of the Japanese Commercial Community of Manila* (2008)—which provide pieces of a larger puzzle to enlighten our understanding of how people in the past made sense of the precarious situations they faced.

Stories Rarely Told provides De Viana an opportunity to tackle topics he has taken a keen interest in but which could not form part of his previous

books—because, unlike his earlier works, this book neither has a unified theme nor is focused on a single episode. This “polyphonic orchestra,” as Florentino H. Hornedo describes the collection of essays in the foreword, is choreographed through the gamut of stories that are seemingly unrelated to one another but which ought to find their own places in the larger context of a Philippine national narrative. How this objective can be fulfilled and why it must be are not of interest to De Viana. Instead, he makes this work open to the reader’s interpretation and contextualization. Neither a historiographical framework nor a theoretical model is launched in this uncomplicated, jargon-free exposition of events.

Due to the free-flowing and assorted display of information, there is no strict sequence to the chapters each of which stands on its own. Nonetheless, the chapters are roughly arranged based on the periods when particular people, places, and events made the most impact on Philippine history. De Viana delivers a chronology of what he characterizes as “rare” and “hidden” accounts of events that took place in the last decades of Spain’s waning empire until the first half of America’s colonial rule. In this sense the book can be a supplementary resource for history teachers who wish to discuss peripheral yet insightful details that textbooks tend to ignore.

De Viana has a twofold role in this work. On the one hand, as editor and compiler, he captures our interest through eleven short essays on rarely discussed topics, most of which were written by various authors, not De Viana himself. These short essays include, for example, Fidel Villaroel’s piece on the history of women and education, a 1901 report from the US Philippine Commission on night soil and vermin, and a 1907 *Manila Times* article about church properties. De Viana does not give any rationale for selecting these seemingly unimportant stories. On the other hand, De Viana as author discusses a number of historical events in chapters 5, 17, 18, 24, and 25. These chapters are exemplary of how the short essays in other parts of the book can be broadened had De Viana chosen to do so. In these lengthier parts, De Viana as author does a close reading of his sources, contributes his own opinions about the issues, and investigates thoroughly all points of view. In other chapters, however, De Viana’s own views are not clearly separated from the references he utilizes; researchers will need to validate De Viana’s sources should they find certain accounts relevant to their work.

Some of the short essays relate to wider discourses on nation building, migration, urbanization, and modernity; thus presenting past predicaments

that continue to haunt the present. For example, the sparse information given on the first (unfortunately, unnamed) female university students in the University of Santo Tomas in 1879 underscores how education privileged selected groups of women. While De Viana does not reflect much on this issue, this chapter helps us understand that education for women did not immediately contribute to a revolutionary movement for women's rights, and it prompts us to ponder how education remains far from being an inalienable right for all.

Some vignettes in the early period of American occupation provide snapshots of the Filipinos' predicaments within and outside the country. Some of these problems were a slew of socioenvironmental and infrastructural challenges such as the proper disposal of night soil, garbage, cadavers, and vermin—problems that have yet to find solutions to this day (123). The politics of street naming and national memory—as in the case of Claro M. Recto Avenue replacing Azcarraga—was contentious then, as it is now, and not only in Manila. Outside Philippine borders the sojourn of political refugees such as Jose Ma. Basa, Felipe Agoncillo, and Galicano Apacible to Hong Kong from 1874 to 1903 speaks of this port's strategic importance. Potential studies about the city's relevance to Philippine society, even those that focus on Filipino workers in present-day Hong Kong, would benefit from this historical vignette.

The other shorter essays De Viana includes are reader friendly and rich in content. The biographical sketches about the fierceness of Datu Akadir of Marawi; Josephine Bracken's miserly life based on her letters; Bonifacio Aranas's valor memorialized more in Cebu than in his birthplace, Camiguin; and Emilio Jacinto's peaceful retirement in Laguna can be used for emerging academic discourses on women's studies, local heroes, and lives after the revolutionary period.

The chapters that De Viana authored feature various eyewitness accounts and multiple perspectives. Just when we think there is nothing else that can be written about the Katipunan, De Viana breaks down the Katipunan narrative into separate chapters with multiple sources, from Spanish residents in Manila (particularly José María del Castillo y Jimenez's first-hand narrations and letters) to primary and secondary references, including the interviews De Viana conducted. On the one hand, the Katipunan here is discerned from the viewpoint of a "foe" who, De Viana admits, may be biased, but can be credible enough for the reader to learn

more about the Philippine Revolution. On the other hand, De Viana reveals details about Katipunan members—including their flaws—using local sources. He gives much attention to Gregorio del Pilar’s amorous passions and heinous crimes, discussed in back-to-back chapters. De Viana also addresses the controversies surrounding Teodoro Patiño’s betrayal, the treachery in Antonio Luna’s assassination, the deaths of Andres and Procopio Bonifacio and their alleged killers, and the Americans’ deceitful capture and execution of Macario Sakay and Lucio de Vega. Other extensively researched episodes concern the standoff in Baler from 1898 to 1899, the 1923 Ray Conley case, and the Cebuano guerillas’ contribution during the Second World War. These sections proficiently demonstrate the author’s research skills.

Fortunately the last chapter somehow tackles the book’s overall objective. Entitled “In Search of National Heroes,” it summarizes the academic discussions among committees tasked to select a national hero. For De Viana, these debates were onerous and irresolvable. Despite the number of holidays we dedicate to our “heroes,” it is ironic that no official proclamation of a single national hero has ever been made. Similar to the stance of the said committees, De Viana considers the famous, unfamiliar, and even unnamed people who, far from being flawless, nonetheless significantly changed the course of Philippine history.

In exposing their risky, sorrowful, and oftentimes questionable motives, De Viana renders all the people he mentions throughout the book with the same distinction and honor, across ethnicities, nationalities, or loyalties. His almost blow-by-blow account of the 337-day siege in Baler from the perspective of Spanish soldiers and friars is, on the one hand, a tribute to their own sacrifices for Spain. On the other hand, his memorialization of the Baler siege is a seemingly wishful endeavor to present the natives’ side. This aspiration is somewhat fulfilled in his resolute recording of the names and roles of eleven Cebuano guerillas whose valiant effort during the Second World War, regrettably, have been forgotten. Somehow De Viana shows that victors and losers can be appreciated equally as heroes. Such can be said for both Cdre. George Dewey of the US Navy and Adm. Patricio Montojo of the Spanish navy who, during the 1898 Battle of Manila Bay, witnessed the heavy loss of lives and property from their side and their enemies as well. Dewey’s commendation of Montojo’s gallantry is equally admirable as it saved the latter from being executed on the charge of Spain’s loss of the Philippine islands.

De Viana also believes that heroism does not happen solely in the battlefield. Jacinto's decision to embark on a cattle business in Laguna and live quietly with his family rather than participate in Emilio Aguinaldo's cabinet is laudable, as it demonstrated his loyalty to Andres Bonifacio and his concern for his wife, whom he had "sorely neglected" (85). De Viana emphasizes that retreating to quiet privacy is not necessarily less honorable than engaging in public life. Equally commendable are the American newspapermen who defied Gov.-Gen. Elwell Otis's orders to whitewash news reports about American soldiers' war crimes. They chose to report incidents—such as the wanton burning of villages, the killing of "every native who looks as if he had a bolo or a rifle" (117) to avenge the death of an American soldier and the stealing of personal belongings from Del Pilar's corpse—as truthfully as possible at the risk of being imprisoned for treason.

Toward the end of the book, chapters on Manuel Quezon and Emilio Aguinaldo based on their memoirs show these Philippine presidents' dispositions before they passed away. These accounts highlight the heavy predicaments with which they were emotionally burdened in their twilight years. De Viana recounts how Quezon felt embittered by friends who, due to differing political interests, "quickly abandoned him and deserted his bereaved family" (190). Aguinaldo's autobiographical letter to defend himself against allegations implicating him in the deaths of the Bonifacio brothers and Antonio Luna is documented in its original full text. A comparison of Quezon and Aguinaldo's accounts raises a number of questions: If people like them had adversaries and a vendetta to pursue, could they still be considered heroes? Does death determine heroism?

Stories Rarely Told succeeds in providing glimpses of the past, not to make people larger than life but to illustrate that, as heroes in their own right, they are in fact flawed—like us, too. Such realizations hopefully open the space for more heroes in their own little ways to be part of the Philippine national narrative.

Concepcion R. Lagos

Department of Asia-Pacific Studies, University of Asia and the Pacific
<concepcion.lagos@uap.asia>