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Sitting in Darkness: Americans in the Philippines

Review Author: Henry S. Totanes

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stood by his readers. Thus the thesis renders a service to Rahner's work for which Rahner himself expresses his sincere gratitude. "Fr. Wong has carried out his research in a most gratifying and fair way," Rahner says in the Foreword, "without having sacrificed its independence and conscientiousness."

There is little one can add to Rahner's praise, except a word of sincere congratulations for a study excellently accomplished. We can only voice the hope that Wong's theological concerns will, in years to come, also move in the direction of the concerns of the Church in his own country and in Asia. We trust that his theological work may become a part of the self-understanding and self-realization of the Church as it lives out the incarnate presence and the ongoing redemptive work of the Lord — in the life and history of peoples in our part of the world.

C.G. Arevalo, S.J.
Loyola School of Theology
Ateneo de Manila University

SITTING IN DARKNESS: AMERICANS IN THE PHILIPPINES. By David Haward Bain. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. 646 pages.

When one speaks of a historian, the image that often comes to mind is that of an indefatigable scholar stuck to his desk, poring over brittle documents amidst the dust and cobwebs of dank archives. But examining the contemporary written records of a past event is only one facet of a historian's task; equally important is an attempt to understand the past by "experiencing and reliving" it so that one's rendering of it in the present becomes vivid and relevant.

David Haward Bain's *Sitting in Darkness* is an effort in that direction. Spurred on by the writings of Mark Twain, a known anti-imperialist at the turn of the century and from whose essay Bain takes the title of his book, the author became interested in the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902, a topic which during his student days, had often been relegated to the footnotes of standard American history textbooks, overshadowed by America's short-lived but "splendid little war" with Spain in 1898. After over a year of research in American libraries, two figures emerged for him as the major historical characters of that era: Emilio Aguinaldo, president of the Malolos Republic and head of the revolutionary forces against the Americans, and Frederick Funston, the American officer who planned and executed the capture of Aguinaldo in Palanan, Isabela.

Bain believes that both men were "considered heroes of the highest sort in their respective countries . . . (and) emblematic of their people's aspirations at the time" (p. 4). Thus convinced of the inadequacy of pure documentary research, Bain journeyed to the Philippines in 1982 for a six-week

stay, to literally follow the footsteps of these two men and retrace the 110-mile route along Northern Luzon's rugged western coast, which Funston traversed to reach Aguinaldo's remote hideout in Palanan, Isabela. The cumulative result of the research and the journey is this book, a praiseworthy attempt to weave both past and present into one interesting narrative.

The book is essentially a narrative of the three episodes: the capture of Aguinaldo in 1901, Bain and his companions' trek to Palanan in 1982, and Bain's own impressions and experiences of the Philippines during his brief stay, when he conferred with scholars, historians, government officials, oppositionists, peasants and other Filipinos. The three episodes are actually intertwined in the book, but for the sake of clarity, they will be treated separately in this review.

The capture of Aguinaldo is already a much-written-about episode in Philippine history. Briefly, it involved the use of trickery on Funston's part and some naivete on Aguinaldo's side. By late 1899, Aguinaldo's revolutionary army was on retreat; the general crossed the entire Northern Luzon terrain from his last stronghold in Tarlac until he reached the remote hinterlands of Isabela. The hideout would have been perfect had Funston not been able to capture a messenger from Aguinaldo's camp. By grilling this prisoner, Funston was able to pinpoint this hideout and plan an expedition to capture Aguinaldo there—alive.

Funston used a contingent of Filipino scouts, the Macabebes from Pangasinana, and some officers from the revolutionary army who had either surrendered or defected. This expedition of around eighty men posed as Tagalog soldiers who were supposedly on their way to reinforce Aguinaldo's men and had captured five American prisoners, among them, Frederick Funston. After several days' march, the contingent was able to penetrate the revolutionaries' lines and reach Palanan, where Aguinaldo received them warmly, believing them to be the reinforcements he had sent for. The trap was set. The Macabebes fired upon Aguinaldo's honor guard while the American officers and their cohorts took Aguinaldo and his aides as prisoners. By 23 March 1901, the president of the Philippine Republic was in American hands. He was shipped to Manila and by April, he had taken the oath of allegiance and had urged the remaining guerilla forces to lay down their arms and work towards peace with the Americans.

Bain's addition to this oft-repeated story is a biography of the two men—their separate careers before the incident at Palanan brought them face-to-face with each other. He traces Aguinaldo's career, from his being the son of a moderately wealthy landowner in Cavite, to his emergence as the leader of the revolutionary forces in 1897 after having led successful encounters against the Spaniards and wrestled the initiative from the Katipunan *supremo*, Andres Bonifacio. The first phase of the revolution would end in a truce and Aguinaldo would go on voluntary exile to Hongkong. While in exile, Aguinal-

do's political naivete would surface when he dealt with the Americans, whose aid he sought in finally driving out the Spaniards from the Philippines in 1898. Within months after having organized a fledgeling Philippine Republic, Aguinaldo would be faced with a prolonged war with the Americans who by then had made public their desire to colonize the Philippines.

Funston's career is equally interesting. Bain portrays him as a "rascally and heroic adventurer" (p. 4) who had a reputation for toughness and courage in tight situations. After having travelled extensively in Alaska as a government botanist, Funston joined the Cuban rebels as a mercenary and led many daring attacks against Spanish garrisons. He returned from that adventure as a lieutenant-colonel, and would have been part of the official American interventionist force in Cuba had he not been diverted to the Philippines. With the outbreak of the war in February 1899, Funston's bravery in battle was once again put to good use. This ferocity also caused excesses; at one time, his own men testified against him for ordering the execution of some Filipino prisoners. Indeed, only a man of Funston's daring would hatch and execute such a dangerous plan to penetrate enemy lines and capture an insurgent general.

Though Bain's account of these two men's travails is interesting and captivating, his interpretation of the significance of their lives is not quite convincing. His attempt to hold up Aguinaldo and Funston as representative of their people's aspirations at that time seems to be an oversimplification of a complex era. For one, Aguinaldo's capture did not really strongly determine whether revolutionary activity against the Americans would come to a halt. In fact, despite his capture, many Filipinos continued to resist, this time led by less prestigious and relatively unknown leaders whom the Americans conveniently labeled *ladrones* (thieves). Recent historical studies on the revolution done by Milagros Guerrero, Reynaldo Ileto, and John Schumacher, have attempted to show that the participants in the revolution at the turn of the century had aspirations which were different from those which their leaders, like Aguinaldo, articulated. This explains why, even when Aguinaldo had capitulated, many other sectors of Philippine society continued to resist the Americans, probably because the goals which they had been fighting for had not yet been achieved. It seems to me that it was the Americans themselves who gave undue significance to and over-highlighted Aguinaldo's capture, because for them, it was a signal victory. For the Filipinos, it did not actually mean defeat nor the end of a revolution. Perhaps Bain could have included these recent findings in his book, but the works of the historians cited above are conspicuously missing from his bibliography.

Secondly, not all the Americans approved of Funston's manner of capturing Aguinaldo and conducting the war against the Filipinos. Although many hailed him as a hero, the anti-imperialists, among them Mark Twain, showed great disdain for Funston's racist and interventionist behavior. Since a significant number of Americans have denounced the act of intervention in the

Philippines under the guise of "benevolent assimilation," how then could Bain hold Funston up as emblematic of the American people's aspirations at that time?

The second portion of the narrative comprises Bain's and his five companions' trek to Palanan, interspersed with the retelling of Funston's capture of Aguinaldo. For this expedition, Bain hired four Agta tribesmen, headed by a seventy-year-old named Bersosa. What strikes a Filipino reader most in Bain's account was the "collision of cultures" between the Americans and their Agta guides. They definitely had different goals; the Americans bent on reaching Palanan according to their schedule; the guides simply interested in getting paid for the gruelling trek and getting the job done at their own pace. Thus, the two often came into conflict over small matters like the pacing of the hike or the schedule for meals, mainly because the Americans refused to adjust to the Agta's way of doing things. Unfortunately for them, the Agtas were equally stubborn. At one point, the guides hiked way ahead of the Americans, almost leaving them stranded in that wilderness. Many times, too, Bain and his companions brushed aside typical offers of generosity and hospitality to visitors by Filipinos along the way, because these would cause them much delay. Quite obviously, Bain had not acclimatized to the Filipino way of doing things.

Reaching Palanan with Bain, the reader is saddened even more. For one, the village which Bain describes is in a state of neglect. Aside from the historical marker which the government erected in 1962 to commemorate Aguinaldo's stay, the village has not received much attention as far as roads, hospitals, schools, and other essential services are concerned. Palanan still remains as isolated as it was during the American takeover; in fact, New People's Army (NPA) guerillas thrive in the area because of its inaccessibility. Secondly, one may be somewhat angered by the fact that these Americans spent a lot of money (fortunes to the ordinary Filipino) to get to Palanan and for what purpose? To "re-live" a historic event. For ordinary Filipinos like those living in Palanan, whose efforts are totally consumed by the pressing needs of surviving day-to-day in the present, such a journey would seem foolhardy and self-serving.

An incident of reaching out is recorded, however. The doctor in Bain's expedition, Dario Gonzales, offered free medical services and consultation during their brief stay. He had brought an abundant supply of medicines and first-aid equipment for all sorts of injuries which might befall the group on the way and not wanting to take the heavy load back, he left the medical supplies with the Palanan paramedic for use if and when a doctor ever visited the place. Reaching Palanan greatly helped Bain in writing his book, but the people of Palanan, who played hosts to these fleeting visitors, may never read the book. Perhaps that act of generosity will be gratefully remembered.

The third part of the narrative is a hodgepodge of Bain's own impressions

and interviews with Filipinos about the present state of the country in the eighties, again interspersed with the ongoing journeys to Palanan in 1901 and 1982. Bain sketches the contemporary Philippine scene: a country under a long-standing dictatorship, a recipient of American aid and support; a society besieged by a communist insurgency, arbitrary detentions, and human rights abuses; a people suffering from widespread poverty while a privileged few wallow in luxury; an economy saddled with insurmountable foreign debts; and a militant Church which tries to respond both to its people's spiritual and temporal needs. In the epilogue, Bain meditates upon the consequences of the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr. for the future of the Philippines.

For those unacquainted with developments in the Philippines, as most Americans and many Filipinos in the United States are, the sketch provided by Bain is more than adequately revealing, since he relies not only on local and foreign media reports, but also on material prepared by opposition circles and not sanctioned nor controlled by the government. At the book's end, Bain thanks organizations involved in Philippine affairs, like Amnesty International and Friends of the Filipino People for their help. He refers the reader to *Philippine News*, a San Francisco weekly, and *Ibon*, a fortnightly Manila publication, both of which provide data on Philippine matters, for further information and "suggestions as to how to become involved." (p. 419).

Still, for a Filipino involved in the crises and sufferings of the country; the victims of the abuses of this regime; those arbitrarily detained or mercilessly tortured, who have joined rallies and been "violently dispersed," whose pleas for justice have not been heeded, the sketch may appear somewhat cold and detached. It is the account of a casual observer who, although a wide reader on Philippine affairs, lacks the sympathetic understanding of the Philippine problem which a six-week stay cannot provide.

For, as Bain himself believes, an author needs to "experience and relive" the story of the past which he is about to tell. His own experience of an odyssey to Palanan added life and vividness to his re-telling of the Aguinaldo/Funston story. But the present Philippine problem which he attempts to handle, is an entirely different story, and demands from the author the same pain, suffering, and commitment that he gave the Northern Luzon wilderness. If Bain had wanted to render that story meaningfully, he would have needed to "live" lengthily and intensely more of the Philippine experience than just Palanan.

Henry S. Totanes
Department of History
Ateneo de Manila University