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Ranilo Balaguer Hermida

Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment

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The book needs proofreading, although overall the number of misspellings is insignificant. A number of photo reproductions need to be fixed for clarity, but the maps and documents—considering that some of them are photostats and archival materials—are to be lauded for their clear reproductions. These flaws do not detract from the book's use as an excellent source material for a history of Manila and its environs.

Gaerlan mentions the publication of a second volume to this work. It is surely awaited by history scholars and enthusiasts alike.

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RANILO BALAGUER HERMIDA

Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. 338 pages.

Exemplifying the current trend in the Philippine philosophical community, *Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment* fuses political theory with a sustained practical assessment of Philippine democracy, which is one of Asia's oldest. In examining the Philippine democratic experience, Ranilo Hermida divides the book into two parts. The first part lays the overall framework culled from the Habermasian concept of discursive/communicative democracy. The author utilizes this concept to assess the Philippine experience of what Hermida calls as "imagined modern democracy," the main substance of the second part. By drawing from the requisites of facticity and validity that Habermas expounded in *Between Facts and Norms* (1992), the author clearly extracts the epistemological grounding and theoretical formations of the conduct of the state in modern societies with diverse goals, cultures, and interests. For Habermas, as Hermida explicates well, the laws that govern modern societies must constitute more than a form of a compelling instrument but also "serve as medium of social integration" (35). Such social integration can be realized if the proceduralist paradigm embedded in the democratic process "would allow the free play of autonomy whereby all citizens by themselves can come to a consensus about the nature of their problem and the solution of their choice" (100).

With this framework, Hermida assesses the present political structures, systems, and processes enunciated in the fundamental law, the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines. In particular he highlights how the citizens' political autonomy allows them to participate actively in democratic processes, such as lawmaking and other national and local political exercises, and not simply exercise their right to suffrage. Through critical analysis of the Habermasian theory of deliberative democracy, coupled with a substantial historical mapping of how the 1987 charter was drafted and the circumstances surrounding it, the book concludes that "the desire to deepen democracy is embodied in provisions that pave the way for greater popular engagements in various political avenues" (120). Of these political avenues, Hermida specifies four modes that he claims should have encouraged greater political participation among the citizenry; i.e., the system of initiative and referendum, the party-list system, civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local government autonomy and decentralization.

Despite these constitutional innovations for political participation, the book concludes that Philippine democracy is far from the flourishing democracy that Habermas envisions of a modern state. Such an unfortunate consequence, according to the author, owes partly to "problems with . . . implementation" (229), the lack of commitment of public political leaders "to a truly democratic politics" that translates into "the everyday policies and programs of the Philippine government," and the "resistance to change by the political elites who mostly benefit from the status quo" (227).

Indeed, the book is a great contribution to the current literature on the conduct of democracy in the Philippines. It offers a new and refreshing perspective that focuses on the conduct of constitutionally guaranteed avenues of participation instead of formulating a discourse on personality politics. It interrogates the Philippine democratic experience through a careful textual analysis, coupled with historical contextualization that strengthens his claims. The study is also timely. Nearly three decades after the promulgation of the current constitution and more than a century after the emergence of Philippine democracy, first instituted through the establishment of the Malolos Republic in 1899, an assessment of the constitution's applicability in Philippine society and effectiveness to increase political participation among its citizens is desirable, if not totally necessary. The book contributes particularly in gauging how the political structure, which is supposedly the center, accommodates those in the periphery.

Although the book is successful in analyzing the constitutional avenues for greater public participation such as the party-list system and the involvement of NGOs in the political arena, Hermida's arguments can be strengthened further through an examination of the existence in the Philippines of a strong public sphere, a claim that Habermas presupposes in his theory of communicative democracy. Without a strong public sphere, which is supposed to be the space to generate public opinion, any attempt to involve the "public" will be futile. It is through the public sphere where civil society groups and marginalized sectors can realize their potential and where the communicative power of citizens must be habitually exercised. In turn, the citizens' communicative power, as it influences politics, translates into political power. Although the direct participation of the aforementioned groups in the legislative process, such as through the party-list groups, is one step forward, the totality of the democratic system's success is still dependent on greater public participation in the discourse of political-will formation.

Habermas developed his theory of communicative democracy within the context of a theoretical "highly advanced democracy," an assumption that Hermida emphasizes (11). Along with this theoretical context, Habermas conceptualized the notion of a public sphere that is a product not of the conscious effort of individuals but of a way of life of citizens in a truly advanced democracy. This public sphere is where "private" subjectivities are carried forward into the "public" scene through communication. A healthy public sphere in the Habermasian sense cannot be achieved overnight. In fact, in an earlier study, Habermas underlined the long period of development of the European public sphere, pinpointing its peak in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

It is a tautology to say that, presently, the Filipino public in general has not attained such a level of political maturity, which would make them consistently vigilant about legislative actions. However, one cannot deny the manifestations of wide public participation in recent Philippine history such as, but not limited to, the EDSA People Power 1, 2, and 3 (1986–2001), and the recent controversy over pork barrel in the form of the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) (2013), moments during which Filipino citizens spoke out. Still, such modes of popular political participation are reactive rather than proactive, only appearing during instances of grave abuse and injustice that come from those in the political center. This lack, to my mind, should have been addressed by Hermida if a truly Habermasian model is to be applied to the Philippine experience of democratic governance.

If, for the sake of argument, there is a sustained public sphere in the Philippines, the question remains as to how this public sphere may "influence" the political center so as to translate "communicative power" to "political power." The answer lies more in the citizenry's ability to persuade political parties than in the direct participation of interest groups and marginalized sectors in legislative and administrative processes. The former can have a more lasting effect than the latter. Two points can be highlighted in this respect. The first is the absence of genuine political parties in the Philippines; the second is the prevalence of patronage politics that political groups use to gain political power. It is not an overstatement that the present political arena lacks genuine political parties that are framed by specific convictions and ideologies. Political parties in the Philippines exist only for convenience, machinery, and electoral logistics. At the same time, the election turnout for the past several years seems to reinforce the popular notion that Filipinos vote based on personality rather than platforms. Thus, political parties only produce alliances of personal interests. Political turncoats and opportunists exemplify this type of system.

Finally, one fundamental aspect of the Habermasian model of discursive democracy is the presupposition of communicative theory in linguistic interaction. The vital requisite for this theory is the "understanding" that happens in the conduct of speech acts, which Hermida failed to include in his study. In the present conduct of legislation and political administration in the Philippines, it is apparent that a language barrier exists between the center and the periphery, i.e., the political administrators and the common *tao*. With legislation and governance often using legalese expressed in Philippine English, considered as the language of the elite and the middle class, the common tao finds it difficult to keep abreast with political debates, let alone participate thereto. This condition ends up therefore in the enactment of laws that can never be a medium of social integration. Again, the different contexts elucidated above can be considered in a future "assessment of the Philippine democratic experiment"—for without a clear and sustained involvement of ordinary citizens in the public sphere, Philippine modern democracy remains imaginary.

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RAUL CASANTUSAN NAVARRO

Musika at Bagong Lipunan: Pagbuo ng Lipunang Filipino, 1972–1986

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 203 pages.

Music in the Philippines is a rare topic for scholarly research. Even more exceptional is a critical examination of music's link to the historical and political issues of the country whence it comes. Raul Casantusan Navarro's latest opus, *Musika at Bagong Lipunan: Pagbuo ng Lipunang Filipino, 1972–1986*, once again addresses the dearth of academic studies on an art form that is strongly associated with Filipinos. Navarro, a University of the Philippines College of Music alumnus and associate professor, reprises his work that granted him the National Book Award (History Category) in 2008, entitled *Kolonyal na Patakaran at ang Nagbabagong Kamalayang Filipino: Musika sa Publikong Paaralan sa Pilipinas, 1898–1935* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007). *Musika at Bagong Lipunan*, also written in Filipino, similarly examines how music intersects with power, ideology, and social transformation.

But while the author's previous study explored music's role as a prime tool of imposing an American colonial worldview, the novelty of Navarro's recent book is not only its focus on a frequently overlooked aspect of Philippine culture, but also its choice of an undeveloped area of inquiry on the Marcos dictatorship. Instead of providing another evaluation of martial law's ramifications, Ferdinand or Imelda's character, or their government policies and programs, Navarro's research locates music's crucial role in the political agenda of the First Couple and in the anti-Marcos struggle.

Many of the author's most salient insights revolve around the theme of music's instrumentality in consolidating power to control other people.