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Lisandro E. Claudio's

Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-Century Philippines

Review Author: Dominic Sy

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Despite this minor quibble, the book delivers on its promise stated in the Introduction. Campos asserts that the task of the contemporary film critic is to "clear spaces and reveal nodes of independence within national formations and orient these spaces and nodes across or 'beneath' nations to forge supranational solidarities" (17). This book has certainly cleared a space for new interpretations while also laying down the foundation of what is to come.

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LISANDRO E. CLAUDIO

Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in 20th-Century Philippines

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 227 pages.

In his first book, *Taming People's Power: The EDSA Revolutions and their Contradictions* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), Lisandro Claudio examines different interpretations of the People Power Revolution to understand how their competing narratives influence contemporary Philippine politics. He concludes by criticizing both mainstream ideologies, which occlude the role of the left, and the communist movement, which often "instrumentalizes" the people. Disillusioned by both, Claudio seeks solutions to Philippine problems elsewhere. In *Liberalism and the Postcolony*, he proposes one such solution by exploring the political praxis of liberalism in twentieth-century Philippine history. As such, this book has two primary goals. The first is to complexify the understanding of Philippine elite discourse vis-à-vis the liberal practices of four bureaucrats: Camilo Osias, Salvador Araneta, Carlos P. Romulo, and Salvador P. Lopez. (In a highly personal afterword, he includes a fifth liberal, Rita Estrada, the author's grandmother.) Claudio devotes one chapter to each individual to show the existence of an oft-ignored Philippine liberal tradition. Meanwhile, his second goal is to argue for the contemporary value of this tradition—and how it can be a source for future political practice in postcolonial nations.

The book's publication is undoubtedly timely. In recent years, the prestige of liberalism has declined in states that have been its traditional strongholds. Much of the criticism against it, however, is decades old. Liberalism has been called reactionary and duplicitous, privileging minor changes and compromise that ultimately preserve the status quo. Simultaneously, Marxists have shown the centrality of property rights—thus, capitalist accumulation—in the history of liberal policy. Meanwhile, postcolonial critics have argued that liberalism's universalizing concept of liberty has been central to justifying colonialism as benevolent.

Consequently, the Philippine left has often sidelined liberal philosophy, routinely castigating it as the ideology of neocolonial elites. However, Claudio argues that there is much to gain from understanding liberalism as a complex phenomenon. Using John Gray's classification from *Two Faces of Liberalism* (The New Press, 2000), Claudio distinguishes between liberalism as the execution of universal models, a teleological approach that has often been repressive, and liberalism as modus vivendi, or the pragmatic, day-by-day project to maintain peaceful coexistence among different ways of living. This second tradition of liberalism is what Claudio seeks in the works of the four bureaucrats and in formulating his "liberalism for the postcolony."

The strength of Claudio's book lies in its first goal. Claudio reveals two main features of Philippine liberalism: the adaptation of American liberal ideas and the commitment to freedom via mediation. These features manifest in the works of all four bureaucrats, although adaptation is more prominent in the first two—in Osias's Deweynian civic nationalism and Araneta's Keynesian economics—and mediation in the next—in Romulo's anticommunist Third Worldism and Lopez's negotiation between student radicals and the Marcos regime. Against homogenizing depictions of the elite, Claudio shows the complex convictions of some of its prominent members. He also contributes to the broadening of Philippine intellectual discourse through his analysis of nontraditional actors such as bureaucrats. In doing so, his project aligns with immanentist epistemologies—including, ironically, the Marxist philosophy of praxis—that seek to deconstruct rigid distinctions between political theory and action.

It is in fulfilling the second goal—proving the contemporary relevance of liberalism—that the book shows its weakness. The problem lies in Claudio's vague definition of liberalism, leading to noticeable absences and contradictions. Despite conceding the prevalence of liberalism among

the elite and middle classes, he makes no attempt to analyze how liberal ideas participate in the formation of these classes or their institutions. He focuses on the idea of modus vivendi, eschewing positive definitions of freedom—e.g., a definitive model for attaining freedom—in favor of the negative—i.e., freedom from intolerance and extremism. Unlike John Gray, however, Claudio does not systematically analyze the implications of this definition. For Gray (2000, 34–40), mediation is important because of the incommensurability between rival definitions of "a good life." Because incommensurable values contradict, every society must find a modus vivendi to resolve conflicts. Consistent with this value pluralism, however, Gray (108–10) argues that modus vivendi is possible in different kinds of political regimes, even traditionally authoritarian ones, while liberal democracies can sometimes be insufficiently tolerant.

Gray's caveats help to show the shaky foundations of Claudio's arguments. Bereft of both materialist critique and rigorous philosophical analysis, Claudio's "liberalism" is often merely the willingness to negotiate between extremes, exemplified by the chapter on Lopez. However, negotiation and compromise are not exclusive to liberalism; they are integral to all politics. Peace negotiations, coalitions, and even the organization of a single movement necessitate day-to-day mediation among various interests and objectives. The Sakdalistas, for example, in the months before their 1935 revolt, had internal conflicts regarding the direction of the party and whether revolt was necessary.

One expects then some way to differentiate negotiation among liberals against that of other groups. What patterns emerge in the mediatory practices of liberals that depend more on civic institutions than mass mobilization? How do different demographic configurations affect access to either method? How do different negotiating tactics affect alliances? Without such analyses, it is hard to distinguish between Lopez working with Marcos until he realized "his politics had become fundamentally incompatible with the dictatorship" (135) and the Communist Party of the Philippines negotiating with the government until its compromises became too threatening to the revolution.

Claudio often approaches this predicament, but never directly addresses it. Instead, to distinguish liberalism from other philosophies, he returns to two themes: gradualism versus revolution, and flexible pragmatism versus teleology. The first pair is more promising for future studies, although it is

not fully explored in the book. Claudio decries, for example, the catastrophes of revolutionary violence, but these are not compared with the often invisible, though still catastrophic, violence maintained in the status quo amid gradualist change. As for the second theme, it is unfortunately never clear exactly where teleological liberalism ends and pragmatic liberalism begins. After all, even teleologically oriented liberals brand their philosophy as only pragmatic, not ideological, yet this belief did not stop the imposition of American-style liberal democracy alongside colonial economic control. At the same time, liberalism is not the only philosophy to have both essentialist and nonessentialist roots. Even post-Marxists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*; Verso, 2014; 51–55) recognize that Leninism has oscillated historically between rigid class analysis and hegemonic political struggle, an ambiguity in Marxism that is rooted in dialectical thinking itself (ibid., 81).

Claudio does not recognize this dual tendency in other ideologies, which reveals the core contradiction in his work. Although he defends the complexity of liberalism, he denies it in other movements. In order to justify the significance of liberalism, Claudio constantly invokes caricatures and misreadings of Marxism and anticolonial liberationists. In the chapter on Osias, for example, Claudio reduces Renato Constantino's "The Miseducation of the Filipino" to a nativist text wherein "nationalist education, as such, simply became a means of returning to a more authentic subjectivity" (24). In contrast, Claudio presents Osias's beliefs in nationalist education complemented by internationalism. However, a more thorough reading of "Miseducation" shows how Constantino (*Kasaysayan at Kamalayan: Mga Piling Akda ukol sa Diskursong Pangkasaysayan*, ed. N. M. S. Santillan and M. B. P. Conde; Limbagang Pangkasaysayan, 1998) argues not so much for "authentic subjectivity" as for focusing on the concrete needs of the neocolonial state. Constantino's (1998, 249) call for a "genuine Filipino education" is not in search of some essential indigenous culture, but rather of "minds and attitudes that are attuned to the needs of the country." Even his lament that "the Filipino past . . . did not enjoy a revival under American colonialism" (ibid., 236) is a criticism of how colonial education orients the average student more toward American culture and colonial interests than local cultures and concerns. In fact, like Osias, Constantino believes that internationalism is important and that nationalism is a necessary step toward

it (ibid., 240). The difference is in their method: Osias wants national and international cultures studied simultaneously; Constantino wants to address socioeconomic inequity first.

Liberalism and the Postcolony has its accomplishments. Fashioning a history of ideas via bureaucrats is a promising and mostly unexplored project for historians (as opposed to paid biographers), and it complexifies the normal characterization of the elite. In this regard, Claudio fulfills his goal of showing that some bureaucrats self-identified as liberals and that their philosophy played a role in shaping the Philippine state. Unfortunately, his postcolonial liberalism is built on vague definitions and inconsistent comparisons. These contradictions raise doubts about the distinguishing traits of liberal "mediation," as well as the ultimate value of liberalism itself.

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RINA ANGELA P. CORPUS

Dance and Other Slippages: Critical Narratives on Women, Dance, and Art

University of the Philippines Press, 2013. 143 pages.

The literature on Philippine dance by Filipino writers is so scanty that every published contribution is considered valuable. Rina Angela P. Corpus's *Dance and Other Slippages*, however, begs to move outside that category of "just-another-valuable-contribution" toward being a piece of substantial scholarship that could pave the way for a shift in perspectives in Philippine dance studies.

Corpus was a volunteer and meditation teacher at the Brahma Kumaris Center for Spiritual Learning in Tagaytay City. In that tranquil city south of Manila she finalized her two books on dance, *Defiant Daughters of Dancing* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2017) and *Dance and Other Slippages*—the former, based on her master's thesis; the latter, a compilation of essays spanning over ten years of introspection (1999–2013). She was assistant professor in the Department of Art Studies of the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, where she earned her undergraduate degree in Art Studies and her