

3-8-2018

Talitha Espiritu's Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime

Review Author: Curaming

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies>

Recommended Citation

Curaming, Review Author: (2018) "Talitha Espiritu's Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*: Vol. 66: No. 1, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.4279>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies/vol66/iss1/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Ateneo Journals at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* by an authorized editor of Archium Ateneo.

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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

Talitha Espiritu's

Passionate Revolutions:

The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime

Review Author: Rommel A. Curaming

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 66 no. 1 (2018): 115–19

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>

Nonetheless, East has been consistent throughout the work regarding one insight: that despite the ever-increasing presence of state security forces in Basilan and Sulu, the ASG's expansion has been exponential. This observation and other recent events such as the 2017 Marawi crisis, which saw ASG involvement along with other groups, prove that the Philippine state remains weak in this part of the country. The struggle for peace and security in Mindanao has a long way to go.

Juhn Chris P. Espia

Division of Social Sciences, University of the Philippines-Visayas
<jjespia@up.edu.ph>

TALITHA ESPIRITU

Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017. 276 pages.

The emergence of leaders like Rodrigo Duterte and Donald Trump has strengthened the notion that the age of populism or “irrational politics” is upon us. Astonishment, anxiety, or disgust over the supposed predominance of emotion over “reasoned” politics has characterized discourses in mainstream and social media. Notwithstanding its focus on the Marcos era (1965–1986), Talitha Espiritu's book, *Passionate Revolutions: The Media and the Rise and Fall of the Marcos Regime*, has much to contribute to the ongoing debates on the nature of democracy, populism, and authoritarianism in the contemporary Philippines. As a Philippine-born Filipino American scholar whose family was closely tied to but eventually had a falling out with the Marcoses, and having lived through the tumult of the 1970s and 1980s with friends from opposing sides of the political divide, the author seems well placed to offer a penetrating and even-handed approach to some contentious issues about the regime.

Passionate Revolutions offers a multilayered description of and explanation for the roles of political emotions in the rise and demise of Pres. Ferdinand Marcos's regime. Following the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences, the book eschews the common tendency in political science to “scientificize” political analysis, simplifying complex variables and dismissing or downplaying factors that cannot be reduced to measurable,

observable, or easily operationalized units, such as sentiments or emotions. Focusing on the “political culture of true feeling,” it demonstrates “how political emotions operate in official and popular forms of nationalism” as they intersect and manifest in “national allegory, melodramatic politics and sentimental publicity” (3).

The book is divided into two major parts. The first three chapters focus on the roles of cinema and cultural policy in Marcos’s “revolution from the center” or “democratic revolution.” These slogans refer to the state-driven program of socioeconomic and political transformation supposedly to counter the deeply entrenched reactionary interests of the “oligarchs” as well as the radical aspirations fomented by the Communist Party of the Philippines. The second part consists of the next three chapters that highlight the opposition to Marcos both by the moderate and radical groups, leading to the 1986 People Power uprising. From an empirical standpoint, there is hardly anything new about the Marcos regime, anti-Marcos groups (both radical left and moderates), and the popular media in the Philippines to be found in these chapters. The book makes use of information from published materials that are standard fare in the study of Philippine politics and media during the Marcos and post-Marcos decades. Nonetheless, it offers an alternative interpretation of the politics of the period by, for instance, transcending to an extent the ideological biases (liberal vs. conservative; pro- vs. anti-Marcos; pro- vs. anticommunist) still common in Philippine political analysis.

The introductory chapter, which may prove daunting to the uninitiated, is crucial in appreciating the value of this book. Replete with concepts drawn from interdisciplinary areas such as feminism, media studies, and postcolonial theory, this chapter needs to be read carefully and digested thoroughly. Aside from offering a key to understanding the illustrative examples the six chapters spell out, it also provides insights that are applicable to many other analytic areas beyond media studies and politics. In addition to the notion of “national allegory,” which has been an object of debate in literary and postcolonial theory, Lauren Berlant’s views on the political culture of “true feeling,” the “national symbolic,” “cruel optimism,” and “sentimental publicity,” in which melodrama on a personal level and grand scale is central, are illuminating.

The idea of national allegory allows the experience of an individual or a small group to stand in for that of the nation, and vice versa. The shared “national symbolic,” which refers to “discursive resources”—metaphors, rituals, stories, feelings—generated on a daily basis within a community

including the political sphere, enables this sliding between individuals and national collectivity. The melodramatic modes of communication (such as in the packaging of Imelda Marcos as the “mother” of the “national family” or of Ninoy Aquino as a martyr sacrificing his life to save the nation) make for “sentimental publicity”—that can elicit emotional connections and communal understanding—which decides which claims (or who among politicians) are “affectively truthful” and are thus just and deserving of support. These concepts allow collective but differentiated or even clashing subjectivities to work out analytically. They also foreground emotion or affect in analysis, elevating in the process affective rationality as a potential alternative or an equal to logical rationality. Nonetheless, *Espiritu* is careful not to privilege or celebrate the former over the latter, as either can be empowering or emasculating depending on context.

Passionate Revolutions builds upon the earlier works on history and democracy “from below” in the Philippines. This book pushes the analytic boundary further by demonstrating the dialectical and synergistic, as well as shifting, relationship between intellect and affect, public and private, and between elite leadership and the common people. By examining the political relationship between leaders and people as facilitated by melodrama, which can be politically enabling or limiting depending on the context, *Espiritu* dissolves the sharp dichotomy between the two sides that often characterize political analysis. Consequently, a dynamic and comprehensive analysis of political phenomena such as democracy, populism, and authoritarianism may be pursued more productively and impartially.

This book also foregrounds an alternative, meta-analytic approach to authoritarian and populist regimes like Marcos’s and by extension Duterte’s. Unacknowledged liberal-democratic, “Marxist,” and intellectual biases weigh down common approaches to critical analyses of such types of regimes. Presupposed in these approaches is the inferiority or inability of the “people”—emotional, silent, patient, and apathetic—to act as autonomous political agents. This supposition justifies the need for leaders or a vanguard movement to represent, speak for, and think for them. By starting off with the notion of lack or of defects among “the people” that need to be corrected, liberal and Marxist intellectuals tend to deny legitimacy to people’s (politically incompatible) feelings or sentiments, dismissing these emotions as signs of false consciousness or of being brainwashed. In doing so, they critique the state, fellow oppositionists, and “the people” who do not agree with them

based on the assumed supremacy of their intellectualist, ideological, or moral standpoint. As a result, they merely replace one political-rational viewpoint with another, affirming the ideological-intellectual correctness of their position, but leaving untouched the fundamental roots of the issues. In contrast, *Espiritu* demonstrates that both the state (as personified by Marcos) and its moderate and radical critics operate on the same logic by capitalizing on the power of the national allegory, performing melodramatic politics and employing sentimental publicity to advance their political interests and claim legitimacy for their political stance. This analytic move of the author is not meant to exculpate a political actor (like Marcos) from his or her historic sins and responsibility, but to highlight the fact that analysis ought not to be blinded by predetermined moral certainties. Doing otherwise precludes a full and fair understanding of clashing political standpoints. The political vacuum this analysis creates leaves the reader to decide which kind of politics one opts to follow.

I would not go to the extent of saying that “it was the force of national allegory that toppled that dictator” (19), as *Espiritu* concludes. Given the complex and unstable field of power relations in the 1980s, it seems hyperbolic to give national allegory that much credit. The roles, in the realpolitik sense, of the US and of factions within the Philippine military, for example, can hardly be subsumed as mere parts of the national allegory. Besides, national allegories themselves are multiple and clashing; that which emerged ultimately victorious in 1986 merely reflects a particular configuration of power at that specific moment. Such a configuration of power could, and did, change not long after the fall of Marcos. In my view, the book’s significant contribution lies in the use of an analytic scheme that allows ordinary people and their “true feelings” to assume their rightful roles in the historical and analytic process, without resorting to exaggeration. After all, there are structural limits to what humans can do as historical agents.

The book is well written, with several chapters employing engaging narratives and graceful prose. However, the conceptual scheme that drives its overall analysis demands that the entire work be read carefully; how particular narratives or analytic lines connect to the book’s key arguments is not always apparent. Historians or scholars of politics who are unaccustomed to this line of analysis may find the book as “postmodernist nonsense.” However, *Passionate Revolutions* is far from being so. A patient and careful

reading promises to yield fascinating insights with analytic implications that go beyond Philippine media and political studies.

Rommel A. Curaming

History and International Studies, University of Brunei Darussalam
<rommel.curaming@ubd.edu.bn>

ERWIN S. FERNANDEZ

The Diplomat-Scholar: A Biography of Leon Ma. Guerrero

Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2017. 359 pages.

Erwin S. Fernandez is a biographer, poet, and local historian with graduate and baccalaureate degrees from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. He used to be a lecturer both at the Department of History and the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature of the said university. At present, he is the director of Abung na Panagbasay Pangasinan (House of Pangasinan Studies), an independent research center promoting Pangasinan studies. He has published extensively on topics that include Philippine diplomacy, social movements, and the local history of his home province of Pangasinan. *The Diplomat-Scholar: A Biography of Leon Ma. Guerrero* is a historical and biographical account of one of the prominent Filipino diplomats in the Cold War.

Because Guerrero is a controversial figure in Philippine diplomacy and is widely known for his “Asia for Asians” advocacy and realist foreign policy approach during the Cold War, Fernandez situates his life in the evolution and development of Philippine diplomacy. Fernandez claims that this book is his interpretation of Guerrero’s story, “holding on to the precepts of traditional and modern life-writing and relying on the sources and the recognition of their limitation” (5). By doing so, he applies “transnational and comparative contextual analyses” (5) in his inquiry into Guerrero’s life, positing that a descriptive historical approach may suffice but will not be adequate to understand the diplomat-scholar amid the broader intellectual developments at that time. He asserts that, for the purpose of the book’s authenticity, Guerrero’s voice is reechoed from his speeches and interviews, although he admits that gaps might exist in his narrative which cannot be supplied by historical sources.