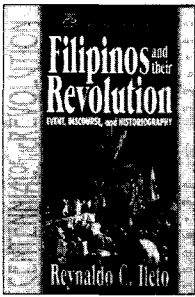


Review Essay

Illuminating the Underside of Philippine History

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Filipinos and their Revolution: event, discourse and historiography. BY REYNALDO ILETO. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998 300 pp. ISBN 971-550-294-6



Reynaldo Ileto's claim to fame came when his book *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* was published in 1979 and was declared the following year as the best book in the category of History by the Manila Critics Circle. A good 20 years have passed since that work and it is a pleasure to see his collection of essays entitled *Filipinos and their Revolution: events, discourse and historiography*.

The volume permits Ileto, who is a Reader in Asian History at the Australian National University, to touch base with fellow Filipinos. Arranged according to their publication from 1979 to 1998, the 10 essays that comprise the

volume, in the words of Ileto himself, '...reflect my changing political concerns, intellectual influences, institutional affiliations, and even styles of research and writing during the last twenty years...'

The essays were written for inclusion in anthologies published outside the Philippines. Thus, the volume assumes value since it gives Filipino readers access to Ileto's writings.

THE UNDERSIDE OF HISTORY

In the essay 'Bernardo Carpio: Awit and Revolution', Ileto posits that the metrical romance or *awit* entitled *Historia Famoso ni Bernardo Carpio* was appropriated by Filipino nationalists, first to enable them to imagine a lost past upon which was hinged their hopes for liberation, and second to serve as a device to frame events to better communicate their political ideas. Ileto notes that the Bernardo Carpio tradition remains alive in the central and southern Tagalog towns. It would be interesting to find out

whether outside the Tagalog region, there exists in myth or folklore a personage who would be the equivalent of Bernardo Carpio.

In the essay 'Rizal and the Underside of Philippine History', Ileta masterfully explains the continuity and the persistent thread that runs through the accounts of Bernardo Carpio, Jesus Christ, and Jose Rizal. The uncanny similarities of the three in terms of their display of unusual strength and intelligence and the capacity to cure the sick may explain why Rizal was mistaken as the resurrected Bernardo Carpio or the resurrected Christ. According to Ileta, the ability of Christ and Rizal to cure the sick is said to have stemmed from the 'condition of their *loob* which is equivalent to having true 'knowledge'. It was this 'knowledge' or *libim na karunungan* which gave the three figures access to power and authority.

If death is a 'passage to the depths of the earth, to the center of the world, where potency is supremely concentrated', Rizal in his death, according to Ileta, became the center, the 'ancestor' of many leaders of the peasant movements who were fighting against local and foreign oppression. This explains why peasant leaders invoke their being reincarnations of Rizal and claimed that their powers are derived directly from Rizal.

Ileta likewise explains in this essay how Rizal's life paralleled the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Rizal's *pasyon* was the *pasyon* of the *Inang Bayan* with the concomitant

concept of *lakaran* or journey leading toward the redemption of the country. Ileta states that with Rizal being depicted as a Filipino Christ, 'It was now time for the people as a whole, regardless of regional, linguistic and racial barriers to participate in a 'national' *pasyon* by joining the revolution.' Ileta quotes Francisco Lacsamana, a veteran *Katipunero*, as saying that when Rizal willingly faced his death, it became the people's turn to go willingly to their death.

Ileta decries how some writers have downplayed peasant leaders as being 'fanatical' and 'irrational'. He thinks that such a dismissal is facile. Ileta offers an alternative: view the revolution as the *pasyon* of the *Inang Bayan*, view Rizal as the Filipino Christ, and view peasant leaders as the living reincarnations of Rizal, Jesus Christ and Bernardo Carpio. Thus, peasant leaders are not reduced to being 'fanatics' and 'irrational' but are recognized as worthy sons of Bernardo Carpio, Jesus Christ and Jose Rizal.

SOCIAL HISTORY

'Rural Life in a Time of Revolution' and 'Hunger in Southern Tagalog' are clear illustrations of how social history inevitably becomes local history. Veering away from political and diplomatic history, these two essays show the other realities of the revolution such as the dynamics of what Ileta identifies as 'three realms' in a town called Tiaong. The first realm represents the church-*convento* complex; the second realm represents the

mayor's tribunal and the third realm, Mt. Banahaw. Iletto explains what became of these three realms during the Revolution. Using Tiaong as backdrop, Iletto describes how the first realm lost its dominant position while the second realm was divided and ambivalent. He asserts that it was in the third realm that revolutionaries, *cofradias*, *samahans* and *kapatirans* had a convergence of aims and therefore supported one another. Iletto asserts that a unity of the three realms was realized when the Spanish friar was imprisoned and was replaced by his Filipino assistant; when a revolutionary leader became the mayor; and when the third realm accepted as saints national symbols such as Fr. Jose Burgos, Jose Rizal and other revolutionary leaders. Iletto concludes the essay by saying that the interaction between these three realms—church, state and millenarian groups—persists up to present times and shall continue to shape the country in the coming century.

Another reality often marginalized in the historiography of the revolution is food supply. By focusing on the subsistence crisis of two sugar producing towns in western Batangas, namely, Nasugbu and Balayan, Iletto presents to us the problem of hunger brought about by the disruption of agricultural life due to the abandonment by farmers of their fields, the absence of work animals and the lack of capital. Hunger was the element that pushed some Filipinos to surrender in exchange for food to eat. Iletto hints that

the execution of Bonifacio may have been tied to the fact that the Magdalo faction to which Aguinaldo belonged wanted to get hold of the remaining granaries in Cavite which were in the hands of the Magdiwang.

THE RETURNING HERO

Heriberto Zarcal, Artemio Ricarte and Ninoy Aquino are given a re-reading by Iletto. Zarcal's role as envoy of the revolutionary government of Aguinaldo to Australia is highlighted. Zarcal attempted to make the Australians aware of the Filipino cause to the point of naming his schooners after Aguinaldo, Llanera and Natividad. Zarcal's other boats sported the names of Filipino heroes such as Lacandola and Sikatuna and the battle cry of Filipinos such as *Kalayaan* or *Katarungan*.

Iletto expounds on how Ricarte captured the imagination of the ordinary people with his uncompromising stance of no less than independence for the Philippines. This caused his deportation to Hongkong and his eventual exile to Japan. Dismissed as millenarianism, the sprouting of 'Vibora' societies throughout Manila was considered threatening to the prevailing *compadre* colonial politics. Ricarte also appropriated the words 'Panabon Na' to denote that the time was ripe to unshackle the Philippines from its oppressors. The return of Artemio Ricarte from exile was on the minds of the ordinary fold during the early American period as rumors of his impending return signaled the libera-

tion of the Philippines from the American colonizers.

The story of Ninoy Aquino echoes the myth of the returning hero. Just like the comeback of Bernardo Carpio and Artemio Ricarte, Ninoy's return was to herald the liberation of the Filipinos from an oppressive regime (the oppressive Marcos administration in the case of Ninoy Aquino). The trilogy of 'return, risk and sacrifice' unfolds in both the lives of Rizal and Ninoy. Iletto asserts that this promise to return has therefore remained in the innermost recesses of the Filipino psyche, waiting for the appropriate time for it to be rekindled.

APPROPRIATING PHILIPPINE HISTORY

In the essays 'The Unfinished Revolution in Political Discourse' and 'History and Criticism: The Invention of Heroes,' Iletto is critical of American Filipinist Glen May. In the first essay, Iletto decries May's attempt to reduce events in the history of our nation to the argument of patron-client relationship. He is critical of May's estimate of *The Past Revisited* written by Filipino historian, Renato Constantino. According to Iletto, May criticizes the book for its nationalist bias, its failure to consult recent academic works, and its use of the past for present purposes. May declares that Constantino's work is nothing but propaganda and therefore not scientific history. Iletto quotes May as saying that '*The Past Revisited* violates every canon of historical scholarship and rather than teaching students to think critically, it merely

offers them a new dogma to replace the old'. What further irks Iletto is May's claim that his critique of Constantino is well intentioned. Hiding under the cloak of historical rigor, May, according to Iletto, intends to demolish nationalist historiography.

Iletto bristles when May declares that Bonifacio is but an invented hero. Iletto says:

... The book strikes without mercy not necessarily at Bonifacio but at the way Filipinos—particularly those of the 'nationalist', 'patriotic' and 'anti-colonialist' varieties—have remembered, reconstructed, and disseminated the past. It suggests that the centennial is a big sham because Filipinos have spent the last hundred years manipulating or inventing historical evidence in order to have a revolution worth celebrating.

Iletto is similarly unforgiving when May attacks foremost Filipino historian, Teodoro Agoncillo, whom May criticizes for not giving preeminence to archival sources. According to Iletto, May faults Agoncillo for using oral history and ignores the value of Agoncillo's interviews with people close to Bonifacio.

The collection of essays has an epilogue entitled 'Filipinos and their Centennial' wherein Iletto foresees a continuing re-reading and a re-interpretation of the Philippine Revolution in the coming century.

Ileto's genius as a historian lies in his intelligible and cogent interpretations of the past. True to the craft of a historian, Ileto is able to creatively use his sources to make a reading of the past. This is not uncontroversial however. Ileto has been dismissed as a creative fictionist instead of a historian by a fellow Filipino historian for his use of literary works. On the other hand, in his works Ileto has succeeded in articulating the Filipino psyche.

Finally, though this did not distract from the quality of the work, the book needs some editing. Filipino terms such as *damay*, *aral*, *pabasa*,

kapangyarihan and *loob* should be italicized. What made this fact noticeable was the fact that in some instances, there was an effort to italicize such terms. There is also a problem of hyphenations. Words like 'coopt', 'nonilustrado', 'postenlightenment', 'postindependence', and 'postcentennial' are in bad need of hyphens.

Notwithstanding these editing flaws, this collection of essays is a welcome addition to Philippine historiography. Until the next Ileto publication, *Filipinos and their Revolution* is to be read and reflected upon.