

**Patricio N. Abinales. *Love, Sex, and the Filipino Communist*. Manila: Anvil Publishing Co., 2003. 159 pp.**

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In the same Akbayan forum where the unnamed “former Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) cadre” acclaimed fucking in the underground, my response to the suggestion that Akbayan develop its own rules on sexuality was: “Listen comrade, we already have a powerful enemy in the state, let’s not take on a second, even more powerful enemy, love and sex.” Instead of fighting it, embrace it.

This seems to be the general sentiment of the author and selected protagonists in this immensely important book. Although people seeing me reading this book react in the same way most Filipinos react when sex is discussed, with embarrassed giggles, I am happy Jojo Abinales has taken on this difficult subject. He says this is just an initial contribution to discourse on the subject. I hope Jojo’s preferred style, mixing analysis with getting people to talk (two chapters are interviews), in their own conversational Taglish, then using literary texts, influences future contributions.

This book is important not just as history, but as contribution to our future, our hopefully progressive future. There is danger that in reaction to the CPP’s attempt at repressing sexuality, people will say, *huwag kayong makialam*, this is personal. I want to start then with Guy Estrada’s insistence on the dialectic between the political and the personal. While asserting that it is the personal that we experience most directly, how we experience it is socially constructed. The “reconstruction” of discourse on sexuality is eminently political.

Guy Estrada takes it further: the insistence on the dialectic of the personal and the political would allow for “the sense of moral agency of the individual” to become “part and parcel of our revolutionary ethic...unless comrades see the injustices, the power relations of dominance and subordination that permeate all our interpersonal relations as men and women, then the sense of moral agency cannot be fully developed. In this sense, patriarchal practices and attitudes are the material basis for much of our moral weakness. Weaknesses that find their most disturbing manifestation in the increasing number of human rights violations that our comrades have perpetrated among the people and even on other comrades (62).”

Jojo goes to great lengths to establish the historical sources of CPP prudery in Marxist-Leninist tradition. Too bad he did not include Latin America and Africa. My impression, from personal conversations with communists from those two continents, is that communist parties there did not attempt to suppress sexuality. The CPP's misfortune might be that it imbibed Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy via Mao and the Chinese Communist Party.

Another source of CPP prudery, of course, is our Catholicism as Jojo points out in several places in the book. To be fair, CPP discourse provides a bit more room for women, encouraging them to take the initiative in courtship, and in ending relationships. Thankfully the CPP never encouraged "mortification of the flesh." But the Catholic confessional allows redemption—Sunday morning communion after a *Sabado* night of fun—while the CPP only provides DA (*may redemption ba sa disciplinary action?*) and collective discussion. *Puede ba?* Collectivize sex, you have an orgy. Discuss sex in CPP collectives, turn-off.

Another way to look at the similarities is in cadre formation. Both institutions peel its recruits like onions, producing "pure" cadres, maximizing their uses for god and revolution. Take a young university student's path to going "full-time" in the CPP. When you ask him to go full-time, you peel off his university education. You get his parents who have been scrimping to send his to university angry with him. You deprive him of a career and the means to raise a family. You even organize his sex life for him.

The audacious goal is to produce people who concentrate their energies on party tasks, without the disruptions of family, education, lovelife. When you combine this with centralized discipline, you generate organizations with prodigious organizational capacities. But as CPP history shows, the "subjective forces" are only part of the equation. When "objective conditions" shift, as in 1985-86, you need an organization capable of shifting tactics and strategies.

The problem for the CPP in the mid-1980s was that precisely at the time when it needed people capable of thinking independently, assessing new conditions with imagination and intellectual verve, you had a cadre corps trained only to await orders. The few cadre who somehow managed to retain the capacity to "get out of the box" were either harassed into going back in, or over time, forced out. "Reaffirm" put in strong new locks.

As long as the "revolution" was moving forward, dedication and commitment, the positive side of cadre formation, inhibited questions.

When the “revolution faltered” people began to count the costs. As a song once put it, “life happens on the way to revolution.” One way of looking at the splits is organizing to “cut the losses” from orthodoxy. PATH is counting the costs in lives lost and tortured in anti-infiltration campaigns. This book takes us much deeper into the personal, to all the quiet moments when we have wondered who stole the joy from our lives.

When party members conceded personal choice to the party, one important assumption was that everyone lived by the same rules. Leaders, like priests are supposed to lead exemplary personal lives. Though rumors abounded, this book provides documentation which confirms that the author of the first draft on the relations of sexes (ORS) violated his own strictures. Since he has remained party chairman forever and ever, I assume he never got disciplined. He cannot even avail of the redemptive value of Jesus Lava’s admission in his autobiography that the Partido Komunista Pilipinas (PKP) provided him a “party wife” other than his legal spouse.

What comes out clearly in this book is that many people simply ignored the rules. We could say, at least the impact of the rules was limited. But as many people know, hiding affairs has its costs, not least being unable to show the joy of loving to friends. There were “costs” to the party too for if you violate one set of rules it becomes that much easier to violate other rules. The hypocrisy permeating the implementation of ORS made it an easy tool for “power plays” that disrupted collectives. If everyone, or at least many are violating the rules and everyone knows it, if you want to bear down on someone, his or her violation of ORS rules is always available.

Thankfully, the shabby theoretical root of ORS is exposed here. I remember a story from San Francisco almost twenty years ago. A small group of us studied ORS for a whole day. Frustrated at being unable to answer what the roots of ORS are in Marxist analysis, our “instructor” said: “*Basta*, you should follow the rules because it will affect our political work.” I pounced on this and said that if it got around our political circles in San Francisco that I refused to sleep with my girlfriend because we were not married, people would think there was something wrong with me. When he dropped me off at my girlfriend’s house late that night, he said, “For the record, I am not doing this.”

Joey Flora, who now lives in San Francisco, would appreciate this story. His own stories about trying to implement, actually mostly

avoid, ORS in Kadena in the 1980s provide the experiential core of this book even as Guy Estrada teases out the theoretical shabbiness of ORS. Joey sums up the experience by saying “...ORS would simply not have worked in the youth movement. We still had to allow our members space to grow as other young people do. By ORS, you stunt their development, and you’ll be left with people who’ll either flout your laws—openly or discreetly—or likely become dysfunctional (40).” *Paano kaming matatanda, Joey?* ❀

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