



REVIEWS

Abinales, Patricio N., and Donna J. Amoroso. 2017. *State and Society in the Philippines*, 2nd ed. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. xlix, 413 pp.

As I was doing research for an article on President Rodrigo Duterte's ties to the Marcoses, I came across a 2017 online article by Patricio Abinales, "Digong is Boss, Not the Bayan's Champion," published by *Rappler* (Abinales 2017). By then I had gathered numerous details about Duterte's political heritage from various other sources, many of which were freely available online even before Duterte was elected president. Thus, I was struck by the number of errors in this brief commentary by a well-known Mindanawon scholar. The article states that Duterte became Davao City's officer-in-charge, and served in that position from May 2, 1986 to November 27, 1987. Duterte was actually officer-in-charge *vice-mayor* from 1986 up to 1988 when he won his first term as mayor of Davao City. The error is stated twice; it also appears in a table embedded in the article titled "The Dutertes Rule Davao." The article also contains statements such as:

- "The Dutertes were migrants from Danao, Cebu, where Digong's father had his first taste of politics when President Manuel Roxas appointed him mayor of the city" (Vicente was appointed mayor of Danao by Sergio Osmeña, still immediate postwar president by virtue of succeeding Manuel Quezon);
- "[Ramon] Durano—a former WWII guerilla-like Marcos—had claimed the town as the clan's base of power, and Vicente had no choice but to look elsewhere to further his

political ambitions” (After winning the presidency in the 1947 election, Roxas, a member of the Liberal Party, replaced Vicente, a Nacionalista stalwart, with Pedro Sepulveda as Danao’s mayor);

- “[Alejandro] Almendras’s close patronage ties with [President Elpidio] Quirino led to the appointment of Vicente as provincial secretary, and then, in 1958, when Almendras was elected to the Senate, Vicente took over as governor” (Vicente did not replace Almendras because Almendras was elected senator; Almendras needed a replacement because he was appointed as President Carlos P. Garcia’s Secretary of General Services);
- “Vicente would hold that position until President Ferdinand Marcos appointed him Secretary of General Services in 1964 (again replacing Almendras who was elected to the Senate)” (Vicente did not replace Almendras as Secretary of General Services, since Almendras only held that position until 1959);
- “Vicente remained loyal to Marcos, but his wife, Soledad, turned oppositionist (and one of the first Davao Dilawan!) after Ninoy Aquino’s assassination in 1983” (this statement suggests that Vicente lived to see Marcos become a dictator when, as was quite well-known even in 2017, Vicente died in 1968).

I was certain that the Abinales who authored the pioneering dissertation-turned-book, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation State*, would not be as sloppy. Indeed, in the sections of that book focusing on “Landring” Almendras, Abinales, drawing from archival sources such as letters and articles from Mindanawon newspapers from the 1950s up to the 1970s, knew precise details about the political careers of Almendras and his political subordinate, Vicente Duterte (see Abinales 2000, 145–52, 171–76).

Seeing this odd discrepancy, I decided to examine the second edition of Abinales and Donna Amoroso’s *State and Society in the Philippines*—which updates the book from the conclusion of the Arroyo administration all the way to the first few months of the Duterte regime—to check if any of the abovementioned errors also found their way into that book. At least one did; on page 338, the *Rappler* table

stating that Duterte became Davao City's officer-in-charge after the EDSA Revolution also makes an appearance.

I do not mean to imply that the first edition of *State and Society*, published in 2005, was immaculate; even that edition was hardly error-free. A review of the book's first Philippine edition in this journal is at times laudatory in tone, but the bulk of it highlights a number of the book's typographical and factual errors (Ariate 2006). The reviewer concludes that "[e]ven if in no certain way will the length of this list [of errors] affect the conclusions drawn by Amoroso and Abinales, it will be helpful for the readers of the book's future edition—which undoubtedly there will be—if these seeming weaknesses in details sustained by the book will be addressed" (Ariate 2006, 218).

Later printings of *State and Society's* first edition did correct one egregious error pointed out by Ariate (2006, 214), likely not the authors'—"Philippines" was previously spelled "Phillippines" on the book's spine—but all other errors were apparently noted, perhaps with thanks, but little else. Raul Roco is still "Paul Roco," and readers are still told to pronounce Luzon as "loo-ZONE." In the second edition, other errors not highlighted by Ariate also still stand, e.g.,

- On page 244, Fidel Ramos is described as winning "by only a slim majority," when it was actually by a small (and highly contested) plurality. This error stands out particularly when one reaches page 304, when Abinales (in one of the new chapters, written after his wife and co-author passed away) shows that he of course knows the difference between a majority and a plurality;
- On page 260, readers are instructed to say "pare" aloud as "PA-ray"; it seems that fidelity to local pronunciation (by any ethnolinguistic group) was not a particular concern of the authors (or were they trying to normalize a particular, perhaps, translocal way of pronouncing Filipino words?);
- On page 265, the authors mix up Jose Singson and Luis "Chavit" Singson; the latter was the Ilocos Sur governor and "longtime Estrada crony" who turned against his presidential friend in 2000, not, as stated in the book, the former, who may either be Chavit's father or his brother, Jose Jr.;

- Saying that Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, while campaigning in 2004, spoke “the local language in her native Visayas” (page 273) is a bit of a stretch, since, although she does speak Visayan/Cebuano, and she reportedly spent some of her formative years in the house of her maternal grandmother in Iligan—which is in Mindanao, not the Visayas—both her mother and father were born in Luzon.

Besides errors, the book has, across editions, notable instances of excluded information that would have helped in better understanding the relationship of political factions and the electorate in the Philippines. For instance, there is absolutely no mention of the 1987 Mendiola Massacre and its ramifications, especially as regards Corazon “Cory” Aquino’s relationship with the Philippine Left and the possible solidification of groupings that made known their opposition to Aquino by voting against the ratification of the 1987 Constitution. Joseph Estrada is profiled as being an action star prior to his election to the Senate in 1987, leaving out the fact that that was not his political entrypoint, as he had previously served as mayor of what was then the Municipality of San Juan a few years shy of twenty. On page 262 of *State and Society*’s second edition, a table of celebrity candidates during the 1998 and 2000 elections, derived from articles by journalists Luz Rimban and David Celdran, lists Estrada as a candidate for president whose previous occupation was “action star”—as if he had not risen through the political ranks since 1969. In the same table, Alfredo Lim is reduced to “TV host,” when, by 1998, he was best known for being the “Dirty Harry” two-term mayor of Manila and, before that, the nonsensical chief of the National Bureau of Investigation under Cory Aquino. These reductions become particularly eye-catching when one reaches page 268, where Arroyo is described as having attained “veteran politician” status before her ascent to the presidency, even though her career as an elected official started much later than Estrada’s and in the same year as Lim’s. (Also, if a point was being made about the confluence of politics and showbusiness, then why is there no mention of the well-documented use of Arroyo’s passing resemblance to immensely popular actress Nora Aunor in her campaigns?)

All these aside, I have repeatedly consulted the first edition of *State and Society* whenever I had to write about the Philippines; the book was prescribed to me and my fellow students in a college sociology course at the University of the Philippines Diliman twelve or so years ago. It

serves as an excellent introduction to the politico-socioeconomic history of the Philippines up to about 2004, or of the interplay between what the state orders and what social forces demand (and, at times, the reverse) in our archipelagic country. Most readily accessible reviews of the first edition, including that of Ariate, agree. Morada (2005, 535) noted that the book presented “outstanding scholarship and admirable depth and breadth of discussion and analyses about state formation and the dynamics of state-society relations in the Philippines.” Ševiač (2007, 512–13) noted that the book “is a very good read for both novice researchers in the area and those who need a well-written reference-type book that provides information in an authoritative manner,” and decreed that the book is “suitable for classroom use.” Reyes, though somewhat disparagingly stating that the “readily apparent” target audience of the book is solely “the undergraduate American readership” (2007, 198), hailed the book as a “refreshingly useful volume” for the aforementioned target audience and the “generalist/comparativist” (2007, 199).

Quality-wise, does the second edition of *State and Society* skew more toward the praiseworthy first and the excellent *Making Mindanao*, or his sloppily produced *Rappler* article? Lisandro Claudio, in his superlative-laced foreword to the second edition, states that “*State and Society in the Philippines* (now revised [how?] and updated) should be the history textbook of the current generation of Filipino students” (xviii; Claudio’s italics). It should be noted, however, that the new chapters of the book (“The Rise and Fall of the ‘Strong Republic,’” “Cacique Democracy Personalized,” and “Neo-Authoritarianism?”) written solely by Abinales, seem to be at least as error-and-exclusion-riddled as the preexisting ones.

- On page 291, Republic Act 7941, or the Party-List System Act, is described as exclusively allotting seats in Congress to “parties representing the poor and the marginalized,” when a plain reading of the law shows that it does not; this fact was reinforced by *Atong Paglaum, Inc. v. the Commission on Elections*, decided by the Supreme Court on April 2, 2013.
- On page 292, Abinales implies that the Family Code is a product of debates in Congress, when, as the numerical designation of the law—Executive Order 209—suggests, it

was the result of the dictatorial power wielded by Cory Aquino before the convening of elected members of Congress following the ratification of the 1987 Constitution (also, the reference he cites, an article he wrote [Abinales 2009], does not say anything about the Family Code on the stated page, nor in the preceding or subsequent pages, nor anywhere else in that article).

- Indeed, Abinales seems reluctant to discuss the extent of Cory Aquino’s immediate post-revolution powers. On pages 311–12, he notes that the first President Aquino was able to establish the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) “to recover billions plundered by the Marcos family,” but the second President Aquino’s similar Truth Commission was struck down as unconstitutional. Abinales chose not to elaborate; Cory Aquino, as a one-person legislature of a revolutionary government, could create a prosecutorial body such as the PCGG, while her son, whose powers were limited by the 1987 Constitution, could not.
- To say that the “[Communist Party of the Philippines] legal organizations . . . did badly in the [2010] elections” just because their senatorial candidates lost, as Abinales does on page 294, is to downplay the fact that the so-called Makabayan Bloc in the House of Representatives still won seven seats through five parties, and as a whole received over three million votes. It would have been fairer to say that they did as well, perhaps even slightly better, than in previous elections.
- On page 301, Abinales seemingly accepts the pro-Duterte propaganda of Davao City being “one of the safest cities in the country.”
- Page 314 contains the following curious dyad: “Despite Aquino’s reformist campaigns, the darker features of the political process prevailed. The Senate remained under the control of the opposition after Ferdinand Marcos Jr.; the dictator’s former defense secretary, Juan Ponce Enrile; and coup plotter Gregorio Honasan were reelected in the

2009 midterm elections.” Working backward: 2009 was not an election year, 2007 and 2010 were; Honasan won his third non-consecutive term as senator in 2007, while Enrile was reelected in 2010, which was also the year that Marcos was elected to his first, and thus far only senate term; and by 2013, after the midterm election, the Senate was dominated by Aquino’s allies (though by 2016, many of them eventually did oppose Aquino and his anointed candidate, Mar Roxas).

- Any discussion of Benigno Aquino III’s rise to power that does not reference the August 2009 death of Corazon Aquino and the nationwide lamentation that followed (even the Marcoses went to her wake) will either tend to oversell Aquino’s (at the time, virtually non-existent) political clout independent of his parentage or make it seem that he won his big plurality in 2010 largely because he had a (back then, virtually non-existent) reformist reputation; Abinales leans more toward the latter.
- A statement on page 342, “Criticism of Duterte’s harsh methods is now universal, with even international pop singers becoming visibly upset by the rise in the numbers of dead people,” did not age well, nor was it accurate when the book came out; the inconclusive conclusion, “Ominous Future,” ends with the results of a December 2016 Social Weather Stations survey, showing but without commenting on the seeming contradiction that the overwhelming majority of Filipinos (or at least those surveyed) claim that they are satisfied with the Duterte administration’s anti-drug campaign and believe that it is effective, but worry that “they, or anyone they know, will be a victim of extra-judicial killing” (344).

Perhaps some of these errors and omissions can be chalked up to the difficulty of writing contemporary history, or of writing about groups and individuals who at times have a wanton disregard for objective (as opposed to “alternative”) facts. But the uneven and error-filled additions to the second edition highlight the fact that in writing the book, it was not only depth of discussion of certain issues that the authors “[traded off] in [their] decision to attempt a sustained analysis

of state formation over the course of a millennium” (xxiii). In trying to craft an accessible history book that nevertheless revels in Philippine complexity, the authors at times seem to blur the (admittedly tenuous) line between political punditry/polemics and well-researched scholarship.

Thus, on page 221, we find the following: “It was Marcos himself who radically changed the political landscape on August 21, 1983. On that day, ex-senator Benigno Aquino Jr., who had been in the United States since 1980, returned to the Philippines. As he deplaned, he was surrounded by a military escort and shot dead.” The obvious insinuation here is that it was “Marcos himself” who ordered the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr., lack of irrefutable evidence notwithstanding. Moving to the new chapters, Abinales states that Duterte’s family “was one of three that ruled Davao for most of the second half of the twentieth century, adjusting seamlessly to the change in politics during the Marcos dictatorship and when constitutional democracy was restored in 1986, shifting political fidelities with very little effort and ingratiating itself to the new regime” (338). Besides the inaccuracy—*constitutional* democracy was not restored in 1986, again because Cory Aquino had sole lawmaking and appointive powers for more than a year after the EDSA Revolution—this sentence suggests that the Dutertes only turned their backs on the Marcoses after the dictator was deposed, when, as Abinales notes in his 2017 *Rappler* article, Soledad Duterte ended up a leader of the anti-Marcos forces in Davao City years before the EDSA Revolution.

Going back to that *Rappler* piece: despite the deeply flawed historical pathway that he took in that article, there remains therein some factual statements and conclusions regarding Duterte that make sense, given other data; the same can be said for even the most contentious sections of *State and Society*. I am reminded of a defense for Michel Foucault’s “archeologies/genealogies,” i.e., that they “do not aim at a full and balanced reconstruction of past phenomena in their own [terms, instead] focus selectively on just those aspects of the past that are important for understanding our present intolerable circumstances” (Gutting 2005, 15). Such a defense, however, can be vulgarized then weaponized as a justification for historical denialism in favor precisely of those who are the cause of the majority’s “present intolerable circumstances.” Moreover, if some pro-Duterte/Marcos pseudo-intellectuals highlight Abinales and Amoroso’s errors and slippages, or note that while the book certainly does not portray either

President Aquino as a saint, it does downplay a lot of the facts that have been deployed by their opponents to politically delegitimize them, then it becomes easy to (dishonestly) reduce the latest edition of *State and Society* as biased toward the pro-Aquino “yellows.” Worse, a more objective reviewer might say, “how can we trust the theses about Philippine state-society relations in this book when the authors seem to misunderstand or misinterpret a lot about the leaders of the state?”

To sum up this review, I will continue to recommend and consult from time to time the first edition of *State and Society*; I pray that someday we will consider the second edition as a somewhat misguided interlude between the first and the third. Not addressing the combined issues of the first and second editions is a disservice to the book’s wide and still-increasing influence (well over 460 citations, according to Google Scholar, as of this writing). If the devil is in the details, then there is a little bit of the infernal in this book, which otherwise adequately sums up the Philippines’ purgatorial “weak state.”—**MIGUEL PAOLO P. REYES**, UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, THIRD WORLD STUDIE CENTER, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN.

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