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Making Mindanao, by Abinales

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Book Reviews

Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State. By Patricio N. Abinales. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000.

The author's goal in undertaking this ground-breaking study is "to broaden understanding of the singular nature of Mindanao's political landscape, the underlying causes of the two rebellions [Moro and Communist], and the larger issues of the resilience of weak states like the Philippines" (p. 16). Two streams of interest are conjoined in the book. The first is personal, the fact that Abinales grew up in rural Ozamiz; he has an investment in making sense of his home island. The second is academic, the fact that he was exposed to cutting-edge theoretical research in political science at Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program. The two interests are placed in a discourse framework in which Mindanao is shown as the empirical field for testing theoretical reinterpretations of the relations between state and society. The period under study is from 1900 to 1972, the eve of the Marcos dictatorship.

The whole study may thus be construed as a hermeneutics enterprise in political science, using the communities and political forces in Cotabato and Davao as illustrative cases. Reciprocally the cases "prove" and ground the author's alternative theory concerning state-society relations in postcolonial states like the Philippines, while the theory deepens understanding of the empirical facts in Mindanao's political economy. The study breaks new ground by going against the conventional interpretation of two antistate forces in Mindanao—the Moro secessionist movement, organized under the MNLF; and the Communist-inspired anti-government struggle. Moro secession threat has been conventionally attributed to the politics of identity, based on primordial ethnic ties and religious communalism. Likewise, communist insurgency has been commonly analyzed in terms of polarization and class-struggle stemming from rapid economic changes tied to a globalizing economic order. Rather than accepting identity politics and economic change as independent

variables, Abinales theorizes that such antistate forces are really dependent on a more fundamental process, i.e. "the manner in which the modern state was constructed and the nature of its relations with both indigenous and settler societies [i.e. the Magindanaos of Cotabato and the settler community in Davao.] (p. 1).

His ground-breaking argument is centered on the historical circumstance that the Philippine postcolonial state is inheritor of two previous state-building experiments in Mindanao, a major factor that shaped the parameters of the state's relationship with Mindanao society. Furthermore, one needs to observe how the embryonic postcolonial state projected its governance capacities at the local level in the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial stages of state formation. Thus his study is a conscious response to the need "to go beyond the current state (back to colonialism) and the capital (out to the provinces) to build a base for broader comparison" (p. 8).

Chapter 1 lays out a series of critical terms, concepts, and propositions involved in the study. Recurring throughout the book is the pivotal concept of "state" contextualized in various qualified forms—state formation, colonial state, postcolonial state, state theory, state capacities, etc. The author warns against the danger of reifying the state, as if it is a unitary organization, a distinct entity over against society it rules and governs. Rather, state is to be conceived organically, as an evolving capacity to interact with elements of society within its territory, setting the governance parameters in a given social field. As an organic entity, therefore, state can be strong or weak, aggressive or accommodating.

The other pivotal concept, paired with state, is "society." The role of society in recent state theory studies has been marginalized because of the academic tendency to focus on centralizing institutions in the capital. And yet society is integral to state theory in so far as state capacities are reciprocally exercised with the various publics within society. To avoid reification of either state or society, Abinales interprets society not as an impersonal field but as a constellation of societal forces—networks, communities, strong individuals, interest groups, organizations, etc.—that limits, constrains, amplifies, and maintains state capacities in given arenas of domination and resistance.

State-society relations encompass spaces and interstices where accommodations, innovations, conflict, or breakdowns can occur. This interactional space is described variously as "state-in-society" or "strong society-weak state" or "strong state-weak society." Such formulations explicitly recognize a negotiated balance between domination and resistance. The author, while subscribing to these dichotomous formulations, is nevertheless against what he calls "formalist" differentiation between state and society. He wants to go beyond the dichotomy, by arguing that in reality one and the same actor, a janus-faced double agent, may operate as representing the state and society simultaneously.

In this formal division of state and society, the strong society-weak state perspective overlooks one fundamental feature of many postcolonial weak states: a considerable blurring of what is official and what is not and how the lack of a clear divide weakens state capacities. In reality it is difficult to distinguish between citizen and bureaucrat, party official and local warlord, police officer and local smuggling kingpin. (p. 11).

The attempt to reinterpret the political history of Mindanao is carried out in nine chapters chock-full of qualitative and quantitative data that are insightfully marshaled in support of the central argument—i.e. that the antistate rebellions of the Moros and that of the Communists are traceable to state-society dynamics rather than to the primordial sentiments of ethnicity and religion or to the forceful reaction to capitalism in organized class struggle.

Chapter 2 describes how the Philippine postcolonial state presence in Mindanao traces its origin to two previous state-building experiments in the island under American administration. The first was the Moro Province administered by the U.S. Army until 1914. During this period Cotabato and Davao were considered “districts” run by American military officers. The Moro Province was a regime within a regime because it was administered virtually independent of the American colonial government centered in Manila. American intentions in Mindanao then tended to see the island not as an integral part of the Philippines but a separate territory similar to Hawaii, a frontier open to American settlers and entrepreneurs. The Americans viewed the Moros as distinct from Filipinos. In 1914 the Moro Province was replaced by a second colonial state experiment, the Department of Mindanao and Sulu. Cotabato and Davao were transformed from districts into provinces. This new administration was no longer run by the U.S. Army, which had pulled out of Mindanao, but by an American civilian governor with Filipino assistants. This transition was the beginning of a Filipinization process that gradually brought Mindanao formally into the orbit of Philippine jurisdiction and administration.

Chapter 3 describes how the mindset and role of the traditional Moro leadership underwent some radical change during these two state-building experiments. During the period of the Moro Province, the traditional *datus* were cut off from their traditional ties with other systems of *datu*ship prevalent in other parts of Southeast Asia. They saw themselves as simply inhabitants of the Moro Province that was not integrated with the Philippines. They would have remained simply as Moros under American jurisdiction if this arrangement had not been changed. But with the Filipinization program under the Department of Mindanao and Sulu, the Moro leadership began to be introduced to Filipino electoral and patronage politics. This was the period when some Moro leaders wanted to discard the name Moro in favor of the term “Mus-

lim Filipino" to underscore a shift in their perspective towards the Philippines, a claim to political and social equality with the rest of the inhabitants of the Philippines. Ethnic and religious distinctiveness remained, but its meaning and function had shifted from being an argument for separation to a claim for political and social equality and brotherhood notwithstanding the differences.

Chapter 4 is devoted to a description of Davao as another case of a virtually autonomous society that had variable relations to the colonial and postcolonial state. Unlike the Moros of Cotabato, which had strong political organizations under the Magindanao sultanate, the tribal peoples of Davao were less advanced in social organization. This explains why Davao society evolved as largely a settler society—formed by networks of Americans, Japanese, and Filipino pioneers, settlers, entrepreneurs. Under the Moro Province, American settlers wanted to make Davao an American frontier society, a model for civilizing the backward tribes and the Moros of Mindanao. Under the Department of Mindanao and Sulu, Japanese abaca farmers replaced the departing American pioneers; they successfully teamed up with Filipino landowners to develop Davao's plantation economy while collaborating with the emerging postcolonial state authorities in Manila.

Chapters 5 and 6 continue describing the state-society relations in Mindanao in the postwar period. The Department of Mindanao and Sulu was finally shut down during the commonwealth era, and its functions turned over to the independent Philippines. The postcolonial state that inherited Mindanao from the two previous state-building experiments started as a weak state vis-à-vis strong societal forces in Mindanao, particularly the Moros of Cotabato and the settler communities in Davao. Nevertheless the state succeeded in increasing its governance capacities through a series of compromises and accommodations through the mechanism of state-initiated party politics, elections, and patronage favoring outstanding "strong men." These strongmen, in turn, welcomed collaboration with the state because it bolstered their own local power and authority and at the same time it provided them access to additional sources of state power and prestige through association with national party leaders who managed the bartering of patronage for electoral votes. As power brokers these strong men served to anchor state capacities in Mindanao while increasing the participation of Mindanao polities in Philippine national life.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the political careers of two strong men, Pendatun of Cotabato and Almendras of Davao, to illustrate the weak state-strong society argument. These two strong men maintained power bases in their provinces and in Manila. Both achieved high political position in the capital as senators in Philippine Congress. But eventually they lost their power positions because of events that upset the existing balance of power between them and state leaders in Manila.

Chapter 8 brings the whole argument in sharp focus, as suggested by the chapter title—"Centralizing State, Weakening Strong Men, and a Frontier in Crisis." The crucial event from the state side of the equation was the rise of Marcos who broke the rule of mediated governance. The state under Marcos moved strongly to centralize the projection of state capacities in Mindanao, bypassing the traditional strong men. One of the most insightful section of the book is the analysis of how Marcos was able likewise to go outside the traditional sources of patronage traditionally provided by the Philippine elites, by tapping into a widespread developmentalist ideology—the people's growing aspirations for modernization through the instrumentality of the state. Abinales quotes a perceptive observation about Marcos as:

the first elite Filipino politician who saw the possibilities of reversing the traditional flow of power. All his predecessors had lived out the genealogy of mestizo supremacy—from private wealth to state power, from provincial bossism to national hegemony. But almost from the beginning of his presidency in 1965, Marcos had moved out of the nineteenth century, and understood that in our time wealth serves power, and that the key card is the state (p. 157).

On the society side of the equation there were new forces and aspirations that challenged the strong-men leadership in Cotabato and Davao. Among these new forces was a new generation of educated Moros who imbibed Islamic political ideas from the Middle East and anti-American nationalist and socialist teachings in Philippine colleges and universities. Out of this generation came the recruits to the MNLF who challenged Pendatun and the older generation of Moro leadership. Furthermore the intensification of postwar migration into Cotabato and Davao so diluted the traditional support system of the strong men that they were forced to create new provinces out of the large imperial provinces of Cotabato and Davao. It was a rear-guard action to maintain their power bases in elections where new migrants and settlers supported new rival candidates.

Almendras's traditional power base in Davao, somewhat neglected because of his concentration on national politics in Manila and close association with Marcos, suffered reverses too. Young radicals, disillusioned with the politics of patronage and questionable dealings in land by powerful politicians, made common cause with poor and marginalized elements of the community. Davao's peasants and proletariat became the seedbeds of Communist recruiters and organizers.

Abinales's analysis shows that a definite break occurred in the evolution of the Philippine state as a result of Marcos' martial law. He argues that Marcos's decisive centralization, upsetting Mindanao's traditional state-society balance, was the underlying structural shift causing strong antistate opposition represented by the MNLF and the Communists in Mindanao. To quote Abinales in closing: "The revolution in Mindanao was, in a way, the

'offspring' of the state, born of the Marcos dictatorship when the state reached its most centralized form" (5).

Making Mindanao is definitely a ground-breaking scholarly venture. It offers novel insights and challenging interpretations of previously known and recently discovered data about Mindanao society and the Philippine state. As a fellow-Mindanaoan, this reviewer congratulates Abinales for indeed laying the basis for renewed dialogue and debate among those interested in the future of Mindanao, the Philippines, and state theory research.

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We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese. By Elizabeth M. Norman. New York: Random House, 1999. 268 pages.

Many stories are told of World War II in the Philippines: of Death March survivors, guerilla fighters, comfort women and Japanese collaborators. But since war is usually seen as a soldier's domain, most of the recent contributions to the historical writing on World War II in the Philippines deal with the military, the guerilla movement, and the battles to liberate the country. Elizabeth M. Norman's gripping book is doubly interesting since it tells the story of a sector that is doubly marginal in war: women medical personnel. Norman is an authority on the subject since she is a nurse herself. She is an associate professor of nursing and heads the Doctoral Program at New York University's Division of Nursing. Her particular specialty is nursing history and she has previously written on the experiences of nurses in Vietnam. Her training in the historical method is evident in her skillful use of archival sources interspersed with diary entries and interviews with the surviving nurses and/or their family members. Her skill as a writer is likewise evident in the personal tone and readability of the book. The result is an exhaustive and compelling tale of the first large group of American military women in combat and later, captured and imprisoned by the enemy.

From such diverse backgrounds as the streets of New York City and rural South Dakota, these young women joined the nursing corps of the US Armed Forces. Most of them found their way into the country by purposely seeking an assignment to the then tropical paradise that was the Philippines. For many of them, a tour of duty to the Philippines promised adventure and luxury away from their restricted lives in their hometowns. They were not disappointed. In the Philippines, the nurses were provided with laundrywomen, cooks, and chauffeurs. Their daily lives revolved around light hospital duty and the round of socials such as dances, concerts, picnics, and trips into the countryside and occasionally, romances with dashing young officers. It was this blissful and idyllic life which was shattered by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.