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Church Lands, by Connolly

Review Author: Andrew J. Abalihin

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Book Reviews



Church Lands and Peasant Unrest in the Philippines: Agrarian Conflict in 20th-Century Luzon. By Michael J. Connolly, S.J. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992.

The American colonial government's 1903 purchase of lands owned by Spanish monastic orders for resale to Filipinos did not include officially archdiocesan properties ranging from parochial holdings to a number of large *haciendas*. Four such estates in the provinces around Manila provide Fr. Michael J. Connolly's case studies for agrarian conflict in Luzon in the early half of the twentieth century: San Pedro Tunasan in Laguna; Lian in Batangas; Dinalupihan in Bataan; and Buenavista in Bulacan. Although confined to the Tagalog region (with the partial exception of Dinalupihan, with its sizable Pampango minority), the four sites display considerable variation among and within themselves, especially in the contrast between areas of dense and ancient settlement and those of a more markedly frontier character.

With this study, Connolly sets out to verify an observation of Benedict Kerkvliet. On these church lands, gaining ownership rights rather than reforming the tenancy system was the central focus of agrarian discontent. He chronicles a complicated triangular relationship among the far-from-monolithic ecclesiastical proprietors, the shifting alliances of tenants, and the inconsistent central (colonial, then Commonwealth) government. In an earlier book on the Spanish period friar estates, Dennis Roth maintains that while landlord paternalism earned the loyalty of the peasants until absentee landlordism became common in the 1920s, the friar estates already suffered a "crisis in power and legitimacy" in the decades before the Revolution (as seen in Jose Rizal's anticlerical polemics). The *inquilinos* were noncultivating tenants, often wealthy agricultural entrepreneurs in their own right, who sub-leased to *aparceros*, the cultivators. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere, the *inquilinos* in these four estates were still subject (and increasingly so) to the dictates of ecclesiastical proprietors. The Church was an institutional capitalist who employed the *haciendas* with their thousands of long-established tenants as pawns in larger, and often spectacularly mismanaged, financial dealings. Moreover, a "multi-layered superstructure of exploitation" obscured the horizontal lines of class solidarity and increased opportunities for verti-

cal alliances that connected the poorer peasants, the richer peasants, and the nonpeasants such as lawyers, labor activists, and politicians.

Fr. Connolly's account demonstrates the low regard of Filipino leaders for land reform as an objective for its own sake, rather than as an instrument for political advantage. Indeed, even Manuel L. Quezon used it as a weapon against his personal enemy, the then Archbishop of Manila. Fr. Connolly also documents in painstaking, and at times bewildering, detail the inconsistent support that land reform received from the government. Thus, the long-term fate of the four estates did not greatly deviate from the pan-Philippine trend towards concentrating land ownership in the hands of the few and keeping it out of the hands of the toiling masses.

After reading this book, the reader is likely to ask questions of cross-regional comparison. Unfortunately, the author does not draw any explicit comparisons with agrarian development in other parts of the Philippines: for instance, how did peasant resistance articulate itself in newly opened plantation lands such as that on Negros Island, where agricultural laborers had no traditional ties to the soil they tilled?

Andrew J. Abalakin
History Department
Cornell University

Urban Usurpation: From Friar Estates to Industrial Estates in a Philippine Hinterland. By John McAndrew. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994.

In 1995, the Philippines was hit by a severe rice shortage, prompting the government to import rice from Thailand, Vietnam and India. While the shortfall on rice production was blamed by agriculture officials on a long drought, it now appears that rice, just like timber, would become a significant Philippine import commodity in the years to come in the light of state failure to lay down a coherent land-use policy that is sensitive to the requirements of food and environmental security. In this well-written book, John McAndrew offers us a structuralist lens in viewing the sociopolitical and historical processes that accompanied the rapid conversion of farm lands into non-agricultural uses in Cavite.

Employing a political-economy approach, McAndrew situates the changes in land use and land-tenure patterns within the vortex of social conflicts and global transformations. In this regard, he traces the emergence of the concept of land as private property in history and simultaneously, through the use of space and time dimensions. He argues that the spatial proximity of Cavite to Manila led to the rise of friar estates engaged in the production of