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## <Book Review>

JPaul S. Manzanilla

**Susan F. Quimpo and Nathan Gilbert Quimpo. *Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years*. Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2012, 468p.**

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Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

Indonesia given that these policies are constantly referenced in the individual essays. What about urban reformers like Thomas Karsten or H. F. Tillema or urban-based technocrats involved in healthcare, urban planning, and housing policies? The editors have missed a great opportunity to contribute to scholarship by expounding on the contributions of these personalities who are relegated to minor roles, if at all mentioned, in traditional historical accounts that privilege the nation-state. Another major weakness is the uneven quality of the chapters in terms of sticking to the theme. Not all essays followed the set temporal scope. For instance, in some essays the postcolonial period seems more of an afterthought (such as in Wijono's) or even entirely neglected (such as in Khusyairi and Colombijn's).

Nevertheless, the book is still laudable for forcing us to question the artificiality of boundaries separating the colonial and postcolonial periods, especially when dealing with urban history or even social history in general. Southeast Asianists stand to benefit from the new perspectives that the authors offer regarding how technology and society interact in colonial cities.

Michael D. Pante

*Department of History, Ateneo de Manila University*

***Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years***

SUSAN F. QUIMPO and NATHAN GILBERT QUIMPO

Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2012, 468p.

In recent years, there have been a number of publications which reflect on the troubled history of the Philippines during the Marcos years, a period from 1965–86 characterized as a fascist dictatorial revolution presumed to emanate from the center. It was contested by rebellious movements from the Marxist-influenced Left and Moro secessionism and a traditional reformist elite displaced by a different patronage politics of supporting national leaders in exchange for exclusive business contracts, unrestrained local dominion, and nepotistic appointments to government positions (see de Dios *et al.* 1988). While writings published in the years immediately after the downfall of Marcos sprang from journalistic coverage and generally focused on the political, socio-economic, and religious state of the nation (Allarey-Mercado 1986; Project 28 Days 1986; Burton 1989; de Dios *et al.* 1988; Thompson 1996), books released in the last several years have dealt with the more personal dimensions of the anti-Marcos struggle. They share individual political involvement (Segovia 2008; Vizmanos 2003; Abreu 2009), gather thought-provoking perspectives on the experiences of activists during those tumultuous times (Llanes 2012; Maglipon 2012), and creatively reflect on those experiences (Cimatu and Tolentino 2010). Such works are much needed contributions to creating a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the period. *Subversive Lives* offers

different insights in considering the state and revolution of the time. Written by an unusual brood of activist children, it is a collective familial take on the profound changes which the “larger” realms of society and politics have wrought on a family. The book views governmental authoritarianism and the social revolution it kindled through the collective eyes of the Quimpos, a middle-class family based in Metro Manila who struggled against an iniquitous social order and, eventually, the alternatives to it.

The memoir begins by sharing the family life of the Quimpos. Although scions of relatively wealthy and *ilustrado* (enlightened, i.e. educated) background, Ishmael de los Reyes Quimpo and Esperanza Evangelista Ferrer moved down to the middle class and labored hard to give a comfortable life for their kids. Because of Ishmael’s transfer of job assignment and crucial medical attention to one polio-stricken son, the Quimpos had to move from Iloilo province in the central Philippines to the capital, Manila, and there raise all 10 of their kids (Lys, Norman, Emilie, Caren, Lillian, Nathan, Jan, Ryan, Jun, and Susan), vowing to provide them with the best education available. At first, the children became involved in organizations that actively addressed social ills, reform-inspired student councils, and Catholic organizations. Later on, they became involved with revolution-oriented social movements. One by one, 7 of the 10 became activists, leading them to become distant from their strict and conflict-averse family. They hid their involvement from their parents to no avail.

As a first-hand account of their engagements in social transformation, the anthology is remarkable in sharing the intense personal crises each of the siblings experienced as they wrestled with personal ambitions and guilt over their parents’ sacrifices in order to give them a much better life. They were not only turning against the status quo in Philippine society, but also the deeply-entrenched traditionalist values of their families. One may also ask whether the children’s progressive and revolutionary stances which impelled them to commit to radical work were also not a creation of their parents’ hard work—honesty, fairness, and diligence inculcated inside the home and service to others learned in school. The memoir also highlights the postwar phenomenon of the “boom generation” of youngsters who had better lives than what their parents enjoyed, who benefited from an expanding educational system, and were exposed to decolonization and subaltern struggles (See Gitlin 2003). Furthermore, the “novelty” of radical student movements beckoned the youth to wage transformative struggles that unavoidably put them on a collision course with their parents.

Readers unfamiliar with Philippine radical history will benefit from seeing how individual personal narratives track the contours of the national democratic revolutionary movement that, by the 1980s, had grown into the single most formidable enemy of the dictatorship. We observe how the movement benefited from, even as it developed, the personal capacities of its members in “the parliament of the streets,” among farmers in the countryside, students and workers in urban areas, and the cultural field of literary and artistic productions. Nathan played a role in the party’s con-

roversial project of procuring arms from China, led political-military campaigns in the country's second largest island, and entered the arena of complicated international liaison work. Ryan helped in organizing farmers in the Bicol region and went into overseas revolutionary work in France. Norman participated in work among the religious. There are many details that appear trivial but are nonetheless deeply moving. Emilie and Susan's efforts to reclaim the body of their brother Jun who was killed by a comrade resisting disciplinary actions tell of bureaucratic red tape and military cover-up of a heinous crime. Nathan's prison experience shows the dignified campaign of captive revolutionaries even in isolation. The romance between Jun and his wife Tina is recollected through love letters in the rebel zones, revealing with sympathy the convolutions of the deeply personal and the ruggedly political dimensions of revolutionary commitment, such as the predicaments of choosing whether to work in the city or countryside and the pains of being separated from families and partners. Songs, poems, and photographs render palpable the intimacy of real people waging real struggles to change their realities. They also reveal new forms of human associations, transcending kith and kin, which revolutionaries imagine and create. Newspaper clippings highlight the extent to which the movement had inserted itself into the national body politic, with its amazing military, political, and social operations. All of these primary sources tell profound transformations in both person and society more than what sources can ever inform.

We also see how the authors have redefined their commitment as their different communist organizations encountered new challenges and suffered grievous setbacks in many campaigns. Ryan shares his disagreement with the party leadership over relations with other strains of the global Left and the general conduct of international work. Nathan discloses the intense argument over the movement's participation or boycott of the 1986 snap presidential elections when the crisis of the Marcos dictatorship was at its most acute point. He also battles with comrades over the contentious political-military campaigns characterized by massive *welgang bayan* (people's strike) combined with audacious assassinations and large-scale rebel offensives. Susan was very vocal in questioning the party's "lead role." At the point where everything becomes too partisan for the reader's comfort (if comfort is at all possible given the book's subject) the student of history reading the lives of these activists arrives at a bind: who/what is "correct" and who/what is "wrong" in their debates on revolutionary ideologies and practices? And since there are authorial claims on proper ends of struggles, who was on the "right" side of history? The presumed reader is the general public, those who are interested in knowing the lives of those who fought the dictatorship but have yet to be recognized for their heroism. For activist readers, their judgment largely depends on present political involvement, on which side one is pursuing the struggle, sides and struggles whose validity and correctness are yet to be settled in the plural and continuing revolutions that are waged by contending protagonists. Lualhati Milan Abreu's own memoir (2009) provides a critical counterpoint to the intense ideological and personal debates within the underground movement. The Quimpos' and Abreu's recollections of their experiences only show that

such revolutionary past cannot be objectively recovered. Revolutionaries who waged war to change the objective conditions of society are precisely subjective beings whose memories of the revolution are far from being complete and definitive.

The collective autobiography raises a lot of serious questions on the relations of the individual, family, class, and even intellect to the state and revolution. A salient starting point for all of these questions is that they are ineluctably seen through a middle-class intellectual optic, significantly highlighting the impressive role of intellectuals in social transformation (not only interpreting the world but changing it, as famously said by Karl Marx). While it reminds us that no revolution will have a prospect of success without the intellectual class siding with—and leading—it, the memoir also forces us to realize how intellectuals can lose control of the revolution when the movement becomes popular (taking deep root among the non-intellectual masses and reaching the non-metropolitan ends of the archipelago) and generates its “organic intellectuals.” Should they now abhor the revolution that their prodigious intellectual and mass-organizing work helped to produce, similar to nineteenth century *ilustrados* who repudiated and denigrated the anticolonial revolution that their writings had solemnly formulated and prophesied? There is also the sense of superciliousness, stemming from the belief that their own moment in history, this “synchronization of individual time and historical time” (Aguilar *et al.* 2011, 131), was *the* time of revolution and everything that follows marks a “fall” from revolutionary esteem, pushing one (or all) of the authors to wonder why the youth of today still join the revolutionary armed struggle and “die young” (p. 453). Such martyrdom of youth exemplified by Sherlyn Cadapan and Karen Empeño is perhaps a reclaiming of not only an unfinished revolution but also an ongoing history and points to a struggle that far exceeds the hopes and errors of yesteryears. Failing to fulfill the “obliged affections” and “affective obligations” of the “family spirit” (Bourdieu 1998, 68) when they were at the height of their commitment, “retired subversives” return to this family when their revolutionary endeavors come to an end. A “teleological shelter, however frail, against the remorselessness of history” (Berger and Mohr 1982, 105), their family is still where their hearts are. Can it be that because communism wreaked havoc on conventional social formations such as the family, it has been proscribed from the official discourses of nationalism, in the sense that the Filipino nation is assumed to be composed of bourgeois, Roman Catholic, and patriarchal families? The specter of communism mercilessly haunts Philippine nationalism.

As the revolution is continually being waged, and questioned as it is being waged, the breadth of scope and depth of focus achieved by the Quimpos in this memoir set the standard for future biographies of socio-political involvement. The Quimpo siblings rightly call on other families to write their own memoirs. So now, other narratives need to be told; other closures ought to be reopened.

JPaul S. Manzanilla

*Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore*

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### *The Chinese Question: Ethnicity, Nation, and Region in and beyond the Philippines*

CAROLINE S. HAU

Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2014, ix+379p.

Close observers of Philippine politics and society might have recently come across two newsworthy stories of the year 2014: One was *Forbes* magazine’s list of the 50 richest Filipinos (Brown 2014). A cursory look at the list would reveal that at least half of the individuals listed are Filipinos of Chinese or mixed Chinese descent. Another is a major daily newspaper’s ranking of China “bullying” the Philippines over the disputed reefs in the “West Philippine Sea” (from the vantage point of the Philippines; “South China Seas” for China) as the second most “raging” event of the year (Inquirer.net 2014). As an ethnic minority in the Philippines, the Chinese in the Philippines have