

section III do not seem to go far enough to spell out these linkages fully. While blunt biopolitics can be overlooked without losing sight of the main argument of the book (p. 38), the concept could have benefited from greater elaboration given its frequent mentions.

Overall, *Rights Refused* is an important book that illuminates state-society dynamics in Myanmar in rich empirical detail. The book's discussion of blunt biopolitics and its deep dive into the concept of refusal make a significant contribution to the study of the state and contentious politics. It will be essential to readers who wish to better understand the workings of state and society, and those who aim to alter those dynamics, in Myanmar.

Jae Hyun Park

Geppert School of International Studies, Sogang University, Republic of Korea;
email: parkja11@sogang.ac.kr.

DOI: 10.1355/sj40-3i

The Drama of Dictatorship: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines. By Joseph Scalice. Cornell University Press, 2023. xvi+366 pp.

The Drama of Dictatorship weaves together an original account of the events leading to the imposition of dictatorial rule by Ferdinand Marcos Sr. on 23 September 1972 and a scathing critique of the role of the Philippine communist movement in this tragedy. Reworking parts of his dissertation (2017) into a five-part narrative modelled after the drama genre, Scalice offers not only an empirically rich exploration of historical events but also one that is incisive and gripping. The first act, "A Storm on the Horizon", introduces the leading actors from elite factions, including the dictator Marcos and oppositionist Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., as well as the older Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, Philippine Communist Party) and its breakaway group, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The chapter covers the impacts of the Cold War and the Sino-Soviet split in shaping the unrest that laid the ground for

the ensuing acts: the First Quarter Storm of 1970 (chapter 2), the February 1971 “Diliman Commune” (chapter 3), and the August 1971 Plaza Miranda bombing and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus (chapter 4). Scalice highlights the political opportunism of the *dramatis personae* as part of the many twists and turns that ultimately led to the declaration of martial law (chapter 5). Dressed as high drama, the book takes a form that aptly represents an equally dramatic period of Philippine history.

Scalice effectively utilizes archival documents in Tagalog and English, drawn from the University of the Philippines Diliman’s *Philippine Radical Papers*—a special collection that primarily contains documents, pamphlets and propaganda materials of the CPP, PKP and other radical groups from the martial law period—to build his argument. However, his assertion of methodological superiority unnecessarily undermines the value of other studies on the Philippine communist movement. He criticizes earlier research as unreliable for depending on interviews with communist cadres, who inevitably narrate the past from their current political stance or may deliberately falsify the past. Yet his exclusive reliance on archives entails its own drawbacks, including forgoing a deeper understanding of the archival materials from key informants who are privy to their content and context regardless of their present positionality. Despite the constraints Scalice emphasized, interviews can enhance the analysis of events under study, particularly when examining organizations that operate clandestinely. Key informants help shed light on the motivations and lived experiences buried behind the texts of insurgent documentary materials.

Notwithstanding its debatable methodological assertion, the book’s fiery prose challenges mythologized anti-Marcos narratives and offers a nuanced view of events leading to martial law, demystifying the oversimplified short-circuiting of the youth revolts of the early 1970s and the 1986 People Power Revolution as a linear progression towards liberal democracy. This critical stance helps explain the polarized reception of Scalice’s book in the Philippines, especially among left-nationalist circles. Scalice’s critique is informed by his Trotskyist perspective linked to the International Committee of the

Fourth International (ICFI), which criticizes the CPP and the PKP for “Stalinist” betrayals connected to the programme of “socialism in one country”, “two-stage revolution” (first national democratic, then socialist), and bourgeois-led “popular fronts”. Noteworthy contributions to this discussion include the charge that some PKP leaders sought patronage from Marcos and engaged in violence to help justify the 1972 imposition of martial law. Despite being contested by voices close to the PKP (see Fuller 2023, pp. 25–27), this revelation still reflects the willingness of some party factions to ally with the Marcos regime even prior to their 1974 political settlement. Scalice also exposed the involvement of the CPP in The purported conspiracy by Aquino to instigate a military coup and install himself as dictator through martial law. This discussion provides a new context for the senator’s implication in the Plaza Miranda bombing, which CPP founder Jose Maria Sison allegedly orchestrated to incite violent repression to boost recruitment of insurgents.

While Scalice brings more nuance in his approach to the broader historical canvas, he tends to simplify the complex dynamics in the communist movement to fit his critique of Stalinism. Throwing the baby out with the bathwater, Scalice tends to dismiss different forms of resistance that emerged during martial law simply because activists took them up within the overall framework of the CPP (see Briones and Mongaya 2024, pp. 59–62). For example, Scalice believes the idea of “decentralized operations, centralized leadership” enshrined in the CPP’s *Specific Characteristics of Our People’s War* (1974) accelerated the degeneration of the CPP, a degeneration that manifested in a narrow, nationalist thinking and even the bloody purges carried out by the party in the 1980s. Things were more complex in reality as the relative autonomy afforded by the operational principle of the CPP to the party’s territorial commissions actually spurred politico-military innovations and a search for international revolutionary models beyond Sison’s scriptures. The debates on these models would lead many party elements to break away by the 1990s. Nevertheless, these issues do not diminish the value of the book.

Even as Scalice overemphasizes the ideological and the ghosts of Stalin in his analysis, his work is a significant step towards

capturing the complex realities of the historical events that led to the imposition of dictatorial rule by Marcos in 1972 and of the realpolitik beyond romanticized narratives and the mythmaking of contending political forces. His revisiting of and sharp reckoning with the long shadow of the dirty dealings, cynical conspiracies and power plays of the insurgent leadership in the Philippines is long overdue. By the epilogue of *The Drama of Dictatorship*, the earlier ruthless criticism shifts to a melancholic reflection on how the past is restaged in the present. Scalice suggests that the struggle for socialism is the way forward, echoing Trotsky's view that it provides the best defence of democracy. This idea, however, requires further elaboration in future work.

Karlo Mikhail I. Mongaya

Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines; email: kimongaya@up.edu.ph.

REFERENCES

Briones, Jervy, and Karlo Mikhail Mongaya,. 2024. "Did Stalinism Pave the Way for the Rise of the Marcos Dictatorship? A Review of Joseph Scalice's *The Drama of Dictatorship*". *UP Los Baños* 22, no. 2: 51–79.
Fuller, Ken. 2023. "Book Review: With Scalice Aforethought". *Communist Review* (Autumn 2023): 23–29.

DOI: 10.1355/sj40-3j

Indigenizing the Cold War: The Border Patrol Police and Nation-Building in Thailand. By Sinae Hyun. University of Hawai'i Press, 2023. xxii+226 pp.

How did Thailand's Border Patrol Police (BPP) evolve until today? To what extent did it build a "human border" in terms of inoculating the hearts and minds of the people (p. 5)? What role has the BPP had in state formation? This well-researched book, based on original fieldwork, addresses these questions. The author is a historian specializing in the Cold War, nationalism and Southeast Asian studies