

reforms, and intellectual and psychological adjustments. Thus, the volume rightly draws attention to the import of “discipline and focus”, culture and philosophy, and “people-power”.

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***The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General***, with the original Tagalog text and translated into English by Paula Carolina Malay. By **Santiago V. Alvarez**. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992. 476 pp.

This book narrates a chapter in the struggle of an Asian people to overthrow a European conqueror that ruled them for more than three hundred years. It registers the negations and affirmations of the revolution that transformed events and personalities into a subject worthy of remembering.

At the background of this struggle is the attempt by Spain earlier to conquer the Filipinos. Magellan, the leader of the expedition in 1521, failed in this and paid for it with his life at the hands of native chief Lapulapu in the battle of Mactan. Subsequent expeditionary conquests succeeded, however, during the last years of that century, and the Spaniards thereupon dominated strategic areas of the archipelago through the tactic of divide-and-rule. This enabled them to establish a foothold in Asia for the spread of the Catholic faith and the galleon trade in spices, and Oriental and Latin American goods. The conquerors enjoyed the fruits of domination at the expense of the freedom and honour of the conquered.

The human and social costs of oppression were tremendous. Filipinos paid for these with their lives and liberties, the destruction of their indigenous cultures and traditions, their forcible conversion to Christianity, the subjection of men to military conscription and of women to Spanish lasciviousness. Spain exploited its subjects through land rent, unjust taxation, and corvée labour. They were regarded as a lower species of human being, brutalized by friars and officials to make them unthinking vassals of the Crown and Papacy.

The people resented this, but held their anger in brief interregnums of peace. However, when opportune moments came they rose in

arms against the colonizers. Early liberation efforts failed because the natives lacked unity. The obstacles to unity included formidable archipelagic, linguistic and cultural divisions. Some tribes got co-opted by colonial rule. The militants refused to surrender; they held the flag of defiance in secret conclaves and, when the time became propitious, raised it aloft once more in the battlefield. As a result, the ruling class never experienced genuine peace throughout its reign. More than a hundred revolts led by local leaders flared up now and then. These efforts gradually formed a great revolutionary stream that, embedded in their memories and institutions, flowed through time.

In the nineteenth century, internal and external factors became ripe for a great historic change. Filipinos woke up as a community through the efforts of propagandists led by M.H. del Pilar, Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Antonio Luna, and others, and were galvanized into action by a working man, Andres Bonifacio. The latter organized in 1892 a secret revolutionary party, the Katipunan, to overthrow the colonial regime. The "Sons of the People", as members called themselves, worked hard to recruit members and spread the word of freedom.

The party eventually grew into a massive revolutionary force. Bonifacio's discursive formation, essentially counter-hegemonic and liberative, moved people to seize state power. From Manila and its environs, his movement spread to the provinces. Its pent-up energies finally exploded in August 1896, engulfed eight strategic provinces, and eventually grew into national proportions. The revolution was on.

In the years that followed, the rebels declared national independence, overthrew the Spanish masters, and in 1899 established the Philippine Republic. In no time at all, however, this first Republic in Asia was attacked by U.S. military forces. The Americans had joined the fray in the Philippine theatre on account of the Spanish-American War. Manifest destiny goaded them to expand commerce and conquer new lands for commodity and capital exports. The ensuing military encounters between the Republic and the new enemy resulted in a war that lasted way beyond the first decade of the twentieth century. This war cost the Americans some 8,000 casualties and US\$600,000,000. And the Filipinos? More than 250,000 were killed and an incalculable amount of property destroyed.

Santiago Alvarez was keenly aware of the deep roots of these struggles. Needless to say, he learned from them and wanted to share his knowledge with others.

So he published his memoirs in serial form for *Sampaguita* magazine (1927-28). Like the philosopher, he wanted the youth to remember the past so that they would not be condemned to re-live it. As a young man

full of idealism three decades earlier, he had risen fast in the Katipunan ranks and participated in armed struggle. Now at his mature age General Alvarez, his idealism alive and strong, responded to the challenge of altered conditions where the younger generation knew little about the Katipunan revolution. He wanted to share with them its history and his own experience. While death was decimating the ranks of former revolutionary leaders, he believed that their ordeals in the upheavals should be told again so that time would not erode revolutionary traditions and institutions. Kept alive, these would make it difficult for the Americans to make people forget their glorious ideals through such social engineering projects like "free trade", public education, English, and pulp culture.

A man of conviction and great understanding, Alvarez presented a realistic account of what he knew quite well about people's positive and negative characteristics, as well as the sentiments and forces that drove them to join the movement for radical social change. Thus, he dealt with events "in the interest of honourable truth" so that readers would learn, as he himself had learned, from the lessons of history.

Alvarez defined his narrative parameters in terms of events and personalities with an indigenized liberal paradigm. His loyalty to Bonifacio (a victim of the movement's bitter factional strife) did not make Alvarez idealize him but portrayed him as he really was. He focused on the centre of rebel action; yet he also wrote about other men and women involved in the grand spectacle: the reactionaries and the rebels, the rich and the poor, the leaders and their followers, the true believers and the traitors, the friars and the millenarians.

He explained, understandably enough, that mindless categories in a mass movement of such a magnitude falsify reality because popular uprisings blur personal, sectoral and class boundaries as conditions change at a breathtaking pace. Amid such sweeping conjunctural crisis, one realizes that if nobody can rule guiltlessly, then nobody rebels innocently. This explains the revolution's minor mistakes and major glories, the glory spectacles and the joyful moments, the tragic and the comic incidents, the horrors of defeat and the thrills of victory.

The movement's central concern was the rebels' determination to construct a new order of things as an alternative to the oppressive colonial reality. They hated oppression and refused to be exploited any longer. They engaged in massive action to free the Motherland, and these became significant social events that forged the foundations of a new nation. Its crowning glory was the Republic. "They were actually the poorly armed yet determined men and women in united action from various ethnic groups: intellectuals and artists, workers and fishermen,

merchants and peasants, professionals and artisans. They formed a congregation of warm bodies, principles and languages whose collective power mobilized looms as large as those faiths that move mountains.”

The classic conflict between good and evil in the colonial order tested in due course the limits of life unto their glories and of strength unto their deaths. People created new grammars of expression and identity while blazing their path towards empowerment and salvation. Patriots strengthened the framework of nationhood in the smithy of the age until the Yankees came to tear this apart.

Through the years, they eroded many material and institutional bases of nationhood through hegemonic engineering, but failed to wipe out its ideals. Many Filipinos kept these alive in their hearts, or else in the legal struggle that politicians and intellectuals waged in the ensuing years for “immediate, complete and absolute independence”. Alvarez was one of those who kept the torch of freedom afire and the passion burning. His language had the tone of the prevailing oral tradition. The human voice then, unlike perhaps in other times, proved more enchanting to warriors.

Their objective to obtain freedom inspired them to engender the nation as the Motherland. In her captive state, her calls for national salvation proved irresistible. People regarded her, as they marched forth to the terrains of armed confrontation, as the rallying point in their manifestos, songs and poetry. She proved warm and real as she was true and beautiful. Her plaintive voice, haunting restless patriots, drove the Americans to fits of apprehension. Continuing threats to law and order pushed the new regime to stifle her voice, uproot traditions of the revolution and her apotheosis through brutal means. How else could they make the Americanization process succeed?

The answer to that problem, the surviving leaders saw, was through an imperial stratagem. Hoping that some would remember the revolution and perhaps act accordingly, they aired anew remembrances of their revolutionary experiences. Personal and political proclamations, new reassertions and memoirs were written by icons like Apolinario Mabini, the theoretician of the revolution; Pio Valenzuela, one-time second-in-command to Bonifacio; Artemio Ricarte, the recalcitrant anti-American up to his death in the 1940s; Emilio Aguinaldo, the President of the First Republic; and Jose Alejandrino, the general who fought in the Philippine–American War.

Their reaffirmations yielded a good harvest of memoirs. Alvarez’s work became part of this grand narrative of human liberation. It shines forth among them with a distinct luminance all its own because of his

sense of drama, his compassion and integrity. His memoirs resonate with the truth of the saying that the style is the man himself.

This apparently shows in his quest for the inner, overall relationships of facts inherent in the constellation of popular experiences. His candid narrative shows that he has well-rounded knowledge, the guts and the integrity to shape events by portraying people as they really are in conditions of historic flux. This is an essential quality that historians have to learn and realize at each new age.

Now that the country is celebrating the centennial of the Revolution, the renewal of this quality becomes urgent for a very good reason. Destructive trends are becoming dangerously popular as new geopolitics redefine existing paradigms. The first trend is some historians' blind idealization of their favourite hero and events; the second is their trivialization which reduces history to nothing better than showbiz columns. The latter commits itself to a "perpetual present" and not to a continuing engagement with problems of fundamental interests, power and representation. Deprived of social meaning, facts become trivia that emasculates the mind.

This is avoided by the Alvarez memoirs. His virtue as a narrator harks back, in fact, to the time when knowledge and integrity are the historian's main weapons in interpreting events and people according to their own right in his own light. This method enabled him to analyse perceptively variations in rebel character and experience in their universe and to dramatize their actions as makers of history without fear or favour. For actors of history are not mere dots or signs in space, nor names in books and memorabilia, nor just floating signifiers. They are human beings who lived their lives dangerously in the actual world of blood and fire according to their decisions to act or not within prevailing conditions.

Thanks to the painstaking effort of the translator, Alvarez's authentication of personalities and events during the revolution has now reached us. Through the translator's efforts, we know how one man at least felt when these were happening. What emerges are two versions that complement each other separately and jointly. The author's capability shines through the translator's work and vice versa.

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