

terms he thinks will help him to discuss time periods. The terms “Siam” and “Siamese” are used for periods before 1939, the year in which the country officially switched its name to “Thailand.” Aasen uses the term “Tai” to refer to the ethnolinguistic group inhabiting northern Thailand and “Thai” for those in Central Thailand. Yet, as he implies in the introduction, Tai or Thai people never called themselves Siamese, a term used by other people. Thais commonly identified themselves with the *Muang* (country, chiefdom, or city-state) they originally came from, such as Thai from Sukhothai (*khon Muang Sukhothai*) or from Ayutthaya (*khon Muang Ayutthaya*). Thus, it would be clearer to identify Thai ethnicity by period and regional context, such as Lanna Tai (northern region) or Ayutthaya kingdom. Similar problems occur with other terms (e.g., Theravada Buddhism). Hence, while this book can be read with benefit, it should also be read with some caution.

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Clash of Spirits: The History of Power and Sugar Planter Hegemony on a Visayan Island. By FILOMENO V. AGUILAR JR. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998. xiv, 314 pp. \$49.00 (cloth); \$28.95 (paper).

Aguilar is certainly not the first scholar to be concerned with the turbulent issue of sugar production in the Philippines, in particular on the Visayan island of Negros. For the last decade only, publications by such scholars as historian John Larkin or political scientist Alfred W. McCoy come immediately to mind. But Aguilar, who teaches in a School of History and Politics, feels entirely comfortable with the two fields that his affiliation entails. He does not hesitate to go across disciplines, trespassing and poaching in whatever domain might help him illuminate afresh and anew the production of sugar in the Philippines. Perfectly at ease on this adventurous path where cultural analysis treads along political economy, Aguilar invites us to revisit in the process the entire Philippine history and society from prehispanic to post-Marcos times.

The spirits that clash according to the title are to be understood in a richly diverse and multivocal way. As the book opens, the reader is presented with a late 1960s incident in which a steam-filled tank at a sugar mill on Negros exploded. Local people blamed the accident upon the new management who had refused to propitiate the spirits by “baptizing” the new machinery with chicken blood. The rites of appeasement belatedly performed, normalcy returned and “no devastating mechanical failures or accidents have since occurred” (p. 2).

In this conflict of beliefs a certain complicity is revealed between the sugar workers, mindful of intemperate intrusions of spirits in their daily experiences, and the spirit of capitalism manifested by the sugar planters who go along with rituals not only to quell spirits but to make their workers more compliant and of course more productive. Consequently, the spirits involved here are, on the one hand, to be taken literally as supernatural beings that can intervene to disrupt production and that must be soothed. On the other hand, they are to be understood in a figurative sense. The spirit of tradition clashes with the spirit of capitalism because, throughout the history of sugar production, the relations of production keep changing with the passage of time in consonance with the historical changes that are shaping the Philippines from prehispanic to post-Marcos times.

By the end of the book, the clash has taken even more subtle but also more sinister overtones. After having documented the progressive degradation of human relations that sugar production entailed throughout the body of the book, Aguilar almost ends his analytical effort on this sobering comment (p. 226):

Having little choice but to live in the material world of the Negros *haciendas* sugar workers have accepted their lots with submission as well as quiet resistance. To fight Mestizo Power in the spiritual terrain is useless because of the ruling class's powerful ties with the spirit-world, whence they have acquired mystified wealth and the prowess to make themselves invulnerable to competitors and recalcitrant workers who might resort to sorcery and black magic. To fight through the courts would be even more daunting since, due to mestizo power's peremptory control of the state apparatus, the complainant could lose his job, land in jail, or be brutalized by hired thugs.

One senses that Aguilar perceives the bleakness of the picture he has drawn and adds another two pages not to let the reader end on such a bleak note. And the book ends with the legend of Baringkot, the crawling creature who "promised to share his riches with everyone, especially the poor workers" (p. 226), became human and rich, but forgot about his promise, eventually lost all his wealth, and was turned back into a crawling creature.

Divine retribution may loom in an elusive, ideological, distant, other-worldly future. Meanwhile, down to earth, the sugar workers are stuck with their social conditions. Deprived of *suwerte*, the luck "conceived as somehow preordained yet amenable to purposeful circumvention" (p. 74), deprived of *dungan*, the strength "indicative of favor from and rapport with the spirit-world" (p. 29), the sugar workers are indeed "unlucky players in the game of life" (p. 228). Inheritors of a tradition shaped during colonial times, the sugar workers are left to gamble endlessly at card games and cockfights, betting and hoping to win, subjected yet complicit (agency obliges!) in the concomitant acceptance and rejection of their social and historical fate.

In addition to being a talented researcher, Aguilar writes with ease and grace. His book is particularly insightful, albeit a definite downer.

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Changing Lives of Hmong Refugee Women. By NANCY DONNELLY. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994. 208 pp. \$30.00 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper).

Nancy Donnelly has written what likely will stand as the definitive account of Hmong refugee life in the United States. *Changing Lives of Hmong Refugee Women* is well written, well documented, and informed by Donnelly's more than fifteen-year involvement with Hmong refugees in Seattle. This experience has included her status as founding board member of the Indochinese Farm Project, her volunteer work with the Indochinese Women's Project where she taught "Survival English" to a group of refugee women, and her volunteer work with the Auxiliary to the Hmong Artwork Association. Through these experiences she befriended a number of Hmong women