

Book Review

Cruz-Araneta, Gemma. *50 Years in Hollywood: The USA Conquers the Philippines*. Makati: Cruz Publishing, 2019.

Public History and the American Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT

The historical field has two approaches: academia and dissemination to the public. There are academic and public historians who wrote extensively about history, where the former would write specialized papers while the latter would employ a relatively similar and/or general approach to history in the form of short essays. Regardless of content and the mode of writing, both of them are conveying thoughts from the past and retelling what has transpired. The author of the book being reviewed is a public historian and journalist, and her approach to public history focuses on different facets of the American Colonial Period in the Philippines.

The scholars of the discipline are strictly mandated to become experts in their respective fields. For example, in the field of historical studies, we have historians who can precisely answer questions regarding ideas or events that happened in past eras. The general perspective on these scholars are usually confined within the academia, or there has to be a certain acceptable degree of expertise that is fully recognized by the fellow experts. However, this case does not always follow. The world is not mainly made up of Intellectuals, but also of Public Intellectuals. The same is justly applied in history, which is, Public History. Robert Kelley defined Public history as:

Public History refers to the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia.... Public Historians are at work whenever, in their professional capacity, they are part of the public process.¹

Outside academia therefore, would refer to government, corporate institutions, museums, related cultural establishments, media, and the likes. Furthermore, a German scholar considered the said historical field as “Applied History”. Notwithstanding the notion of difference between academic and public history, they must be reasonably viewed as synonymous, as it is already prevalent in Germany².

¹ Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” in *The Public Historian*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1978): 16-28.

² Irmgard, Zündorf, “Contemporary History and Public History,” in *Docupedia- Zeitgeschichte*, 2017. Trans. David Burnett. http://docupedia.de/zg/Zuendorf_public_history_v2_en_2017?oldid=126406 (Accessed March 10, 2020)

Similarly, there are prevalence of literature in regards to Philippine history. Many aspects of it are being studied, and at the same time, being disseminated by the public historian. The nation, over the years, has seen the works of many public historians in the likes of Jose Rizal, Isabelo de los Reyes, Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil, to name a few. They were studying, at the same time disseminating the narratives and lessons from the past. One of them is the author of the book being reviewed.

The author, Gemma Cruz-Araneta, is the daughter of a renowned public historian, the late Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil. She won the Miss International in 1964 and devoted herself in working towards Philippine history and culture, following her mother's footsteps. In addition, she worked as the former Director of the National Museum (1969-1971) and Secretary of Tourism (1998-2001). She is also holding several positions in different organizations, particularly the ones that are close to her heart—culture and heritage of the Filipino nation.

Furthermore, the mother-daughter both utilized the traditional media in working for the field of public history. The approach of traditional media, however, would change in the latter's time—when they themselves would also upload their content into the web; hence, Cruz-Araneta's media approach became both traditional and digital.

The book is one of the “Gemma Books,” that she wrote. Although it is not a series, every book that she has written bears the said label. This is her latest book that focuses on several aspects of American colonial period. It is an anthology of her articles in Manila Bulletin from the years 2006-2019, covering 19 years into 334 pages. She began her introductory note with the quote, “333 years in Convent and 50 years in Hollywood,” which was her late mother's saying, and this is the reality of Philippine Colonial History, crystallized in an adage by a public historian.

The book has 65 articles, under different historical genres. The author clearly arranged these articles according to their respective themes,—although it is not stated in the said publication— but not in historical timeframe. The reviewer would classify these themes as: (1) The First Republic, (2) Philippines in US Politics; (3) Philippine-American War; (4) Colonial Education; (5) Dissension, (6) Perception and Misconception.

The first theme, The First Republic, is all about the late part of the First Philippine Republic. Cruz-Araneta tackled on the historical amnesia as early as 1900s, the historical film Heneral Luna, economic life and legal system of the fledging Republic, and her mother's narrations of national and family history during the American colonial period.

The second one, in which the reviewer entitled as the, “Philippines in US Politics,” focuses on the seemingly divided American nation on Philippine conquest. She discussed the pro-Filipino Mark Twain, American activists against colonization, as well as businessmen supportive of the cause. She also reviewed a historical novel about the conquest of Alamo and another one on the history of the conquering the U.S. latest “possession,” and narrated stories on possessing Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The third one is, “Philippine-American War,” wherein she put the spotlight on treacheries of the conquering army in the Philippines. She wrote extensively on Balangiga massacre, the “krag” policy of the colonialists, epidemics among the ranks and the populace, as well as solving them. She also highlighted silencing of the press regarding unethical war conduct during the Philippine-American War.

The fourth one is, “Colonial Education,” wherein she emphasized the soft power approach of the Americans. She discussed in this part the following: the entry of Protestantism, coordination of American Catholics with the government, the educational policy’s giving and misgiving, public school system and the Thomasites, Pensionados and Gabaldons.

The fifth one is, “Dissension,” wherein she discussed vignettes of activism in American Colonial Period. She highlighted the Moro struggle, the discomfort of American bureaucrats in the tropical archipelago, the now-defunct “Occupation Day” holiday, and Spanish-era Intramuros and Daniel Burnham’s Manila Plan.

The final one is “Perception and Misconception,” wherein she tackled on racism and superior view of the American on the Filipinos. Her articles contained the messages from Mrs. Dauncey’s communication, Macario Sakay, and on perceptions of Filipinos as savage, as well as the 1904 St. Louis Fair showcasing the “barbarians.” Also discussed were, the travails of Filipino migrants in the United States and the book ended with the “Kitchen Wars,” or battle of cuisines. The book, in totality, discussed political, cultural and social history of the Philippines during the American period, or as stated in the title, “Fifty Years in Hollywood.”

In writing the book, she had utilized several primary and secondary sources on the matter. She utilized books from Spanish-era and contemporary academic manuscripts. As observed in her articles, she had used the journalistic method in writing history. There are articles that she has her commentary or eyewitness account of in commemorating a historical event, or conducting cultural works. An example of that is an article entitled, “A Hundred Years of Gabaldons.” (p. 207)

The way she chooses her sources largely depends on her reaction on news, or what is the public trend. For example, in her article about Daniel Burnham, she wrote her reaction on the Government’s plan on covering the *estero* of Santa Ana as opposed to the architect’s vision of Manila (p. 245). Another example is her reflection upon reading the copy of Felipe Calderon’s, “*Mis memorias sobre la revolución Filipina*,” in which Calderon lamented the lack of historical knowledge as reflected in the test results of entrance examinations in *Escuela de Medicina* in 1905 (p. 2). This is a reflection in the present issue of historical amnesia.

The reviewer agrees with the Introduction written by Dr. Jaime Veneracion stating that the book is a mixture of “history with journalism and autobiography” (p. xi) and Cruz-Araneta wrote the way that she kept herself out of trouble. (p. ix) These two descriptions are prevalent in the entirety of the book’s content.

In her episodic narrations of history, Cruz-Araneta narrated them enough to be understood by the general public. As written in the last page, which is the

Colophon, she stated that these newspaper articles are 300-600 words, containing two-five word titles, fitting for an Op-Ed section in Manila Bulletin. She managed to write the bite-size chunks of the past into series of articles. In this book, she is not focusing on one subject, wherein she was able to highlight the role of Chinese, the Black Americans, the treacheries, and many more.

If one can ask what the contribution is of this book, is its benefits to the field of public history, rather than the academic aspect. Some might not notice its academic relevance because there is, “nothing new,” but it is useful for the ordinary mind. She managed to slice the chunk of history into bite-sizes meant for public consumption, particularly to the layman who might be interested in history, a wide reader or teachers looking for other references in teaching Philippine history.

Correspondingly, this book is useful for everyone, regardless whether a person is a history student or not, since the author knows the trend in the ivory tower of the field and what is missing into layman’s knowledge of history, thereby making the late Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil’s work on public history subsist.

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