

Book Review

McCoy, Alfred W., ed. *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*. 7th. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017.

Blood is Thicker than Water: Philippine Politics and Families

Glenn-Dale John C. GO

University of Santo Tomas
goglenndalejohn@yahoo.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5805-8844>

ABSTRACT

This book review surveys *An Anarchy of Families: State and Families in the Philippines* by Alfred W. McCoy. Notable for his work on Philippine political and social history, McCoy studied the influences of families in Philippine politics that have remained dominant in the country for the past decades. The said author, along with other scholars, chose notable elite families throughout the Philippines in relation to the study, such as the Duranos and the Lopezes who would dominate the Philippine political scene not only in the metropolitan Manila, but also in the provinces. Furthermore, this review hopes to examine the said author's use of the methodology and framework in discussing the influence of these families, and how these patterns continued into the twenty-first century.

Keywords: *Philippine politics, political dynasty, political families, elite families, rent-seeking*

Philippine politics has notably been one of the main themes in the writing of Philippine history. It has become a general theme in Philippine historical writing, as politics is always viewed to be interrelated with history. The writings of political history in the Philippines, in general, were traditionally on the elites of the society focusing on the chronicles of political events in relation to the achievements and

challenges of the administrations.¹ However, in the postmodern trend of historical writing, this methodology would change.

Alfred W. McCoy's *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* went out of the tradition of writing Philippine political history by analyzing Philippine politics through the paradigm of the elite families. He earned his doctorate degree in Southeast Asian History at Yale University and the J.R.W. Smail Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Philippines has been McCoy's major focus of research, particularly on Philippine social and political history. Published in 1994, the book is a pioneering work on the study of Philippine political families as there have been no previous attempts by historians, local or foreign, to venture on this topic despite the observable influence of families in Philippine politics.

McCoy, aside from being one of the authors of the book, assumed the editorial role in compiling the articles for the book from various historians and scholars who selected the political families in relation to their field of expertise in Philippine history. The scholars who contributed to this study include Brian Fegan, a senior lecturer in anthropology at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia; John Sidel, a Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics; Jeremy Beckett, an emeritus professor of anthropology at Sydney University; G. Carter Bentley, an anthropologist, and private consultant who completed his dissertation in 1982 at the University of Washington-Seattle on "Law, Disputing, and Ethnicity in Lanao"; Michael Cullinane, a historian of the Philippines and serves as the associate director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Resil B. Mojares, a professor emeritus at the University of San Carlos, Cebu and a National Artist for literature primarily for his immersion of Visayan history and literature; and Ruby Paredes, a historian of the Philippines and served as an assistant vice chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Upon browsing the said monograph, several factors may contribute to the lack of scholarly analysis on either individual Filipino families or family-based oligarchies. These families are influential in their respective regions, so conducting a study on their political activities that were dubbed controversial may be dangerous during that time for Philippine-based scholars as it is

¹ Bernardita Reyes Churchill, 2012. "Philippine Historiography – Looking Back and Looking Forward: The History of Historical Studies." Edited by Virginia A. Miralao and Joanne B. Agbisit. *Philippine Social Sciences: Capacities, Directions, and Challenges* (Philippine Social Science Council) 143.

considered life-threatening to publish studies that would destroy their political images. Hence, studies on these families or individual politicians are focused on the biographical side, which tends to be more hagiographic, written by their relatives, followers, or friends.²

Throughout the discussion of the political families, the elements of rent-seeking and political violence were employed as the framework for the survey of these families from different regions which were patterned after the three Gs of Philippine politics, Guns, Goons, and Gold. Rent-seeking was defined as the economic relations between the Filipino elite, notably entrepreneurs, and the Philippine state where the state gives the elites an advantage by restricting “freedom of entry” into the market.³ Although this concept is known to be used by most political families, this is notable for the families who are in the urban regions. Families from the provinces, on the other hand, are known to resort to political violence by hiring personal armed goons, thus proclaiming themselves as the warlords or the big man of their respective provinces. In addition, McCoy proposed the four Cs in Philippine politics in response to the emergence of new trends in the Philippine society following the fall of the Marcos regime. These are Continuity, the persistence of the family legacy in politics; Criminality, the reliance on illegal activities such as *jueteng* networks in support as part of the political machinery; Chinese, the participation of Chinese elites in rent-seeking in the preservation of their wealth status; and Celebrity, the usage of fame in the pop culture industry in seeking political positions.⁴

Since the monograph is considered a pioneering work, McCoy and the scholars utilized various sources in support of the study of political families. One of the best sources the scholars utilized in the study were the biographies and the autobiographies of the prominent member of the family. For instance, the biography of Sergio Osmeña, Jr., authored by Resil Mojares, was utilized in the study of the Osmeña families’ gaining political influence in Cebu. In addition, the autobiography of Ramon M. Durano was also utilized in studying the legacy of the Duranos in Cebu. Despite some being hagiographic in nature, these biographic works can be the best source as it provides a background profile of the families in narrating the political career of each generation. Aside from biographies, genealogical charts were also presented in each chapter of the families as they provide an organized view of the families.

² McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, 4.

³ McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, 11.

⁴ McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, xvii-xxv.

In addition to the biographies, scholars also relied on provincial records and reports in relation to the governance and election results of the members of the political families, which provided further data in relation to their achievements and dominance. Periodical reports from newspapers such as *Sun Star Daily*, *El Tiempo*, *The Tribune*, *Daily Mirror*, etc. were also utilized in the narrative.

Aside from applying the descriptive-analytic approach to narrate the study, some of the scholars also employed other methodologies. One example would be the methodology of oral history, which in accordance with Marcelino A. Foronda is a tool in Philippine historiography in obtaining new data by means of an interview to fill the gaps in history.⁵ In the case of this monograph, oral history became a suitable methodology notably for scholars Ruby Paredes and John Sidel as they conducted an interview with Mita Pardo de Tavera and Justiniano Montano respectively in providing accounts from the perspective of the family relative or for the case of Montano, himself.

McCoy also surveyed international works in relation to the topic of political families. McCoy, known to have expertise in Southeast Asian history, surveyed the political families of Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia in comparison to the political families in the Philippines. He mentioned, that despite the Philippines having strong elites for over two centuries, it has never enjoyed the aristocratic lineage compared to its neighboring countries.⁶ The Philippine state, in accordance with McCoy, has remained weak and incapable of controlling the powerful families and developed hybrid capitalism of rent-seeking compared to the strong monarchy of Thailand and the bureaucratic elites of Indonesia.⁷ Additionally, studies from Latin America, in contrast to Southeast Asian studies, were surveyed as they offered rich details on elite family history which can be patterned to other regions. McCoy employed a study from the Brazilian perspective on family-based oligarchy, particularly the generation of President Epitacio Pessoa who built his political legacy from the cotton loom economy in Paraiba.⁸

The book is divided into different journal articles studied by the scholars who contributed to the study of Philippine political families. Employing the

⁵ Marcelino A. Foronda, *Kasaysayan: Studies on Local and Oral History*. Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991, 25-26.

⁶ McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, xii-xiii.

⁷ McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, xiii.

⁸ Dain Borges, 1988, "Politics and Parentela in Paraíba: A Case Study of Family-Based Oligarchy in Brazil." *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Duke University Press) 68 (4): 871-872,

framework of political violence and rent-seeking, each chapter discussed political families selected by scholars in accordance with their expertise.

Throughout the discussion, political violence was the main tool for political families notably in the provinces, especially after the war. A pattern would appear in the governance of provincial government in some chapters which would become a model for political families. Strong elite families would rise from a weakening autonomous state by gaining positions in the local government that they may utilize eventually to gain a national government position. With some of these families lacking the economic machinery and the political ties with the national government, they employed armed guards over the province against their political rivals and opponents imposing fear and dominance through violence, thus gaining the reputation of a political warlord or a kingpin.

Brian Fegan, for instance, surveyed the de Guzman brothers who relied on political violence in the span of their political careers over the peasants of Central Luzon. Employing the political two-class dichotomy theory of Carl Lande, Fegan discussed the political dominance of brothers over the region as they presented themselves as the *magaling na lalaki* exerting the combination of force and terror.⁹ While managing the hacienda of Doña Narcisa de Leon, one of the founders of the LVN Pictures, Inc., the de Guzmans were the kingpins of the Central Luzon.

John Sidel illustrated the importance of rent-seeking for the political longevity of a warlord. Despite successfully dominating the province of Cavite for decades through political violence, Justiano Montano encountered numerous setbacks during the latter part of his career notably when Marcos declared martial law in 1972. The elimination of the oligarchies by the Marcos administration became the downfall for Montano. Lacking the resources and political patronage to return to provincial power, Montano would not recover from the demise. Furthermore, without an effective political heir, the Montano name would disappear from the political limelight.¹⁰

From one warlord to another, Michael Cullinane studied on political influence of the Duranos of the City of Danao, Cebu. Ramon Durano would be

⁹ Brian Fegan, "Entrepreneurs in Votes and Violence: Three Generations of a Peasant Political Family," in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 7th, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017) 39.

¹⁰ John Sidel, "In the Shadow of the Big Man," in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 7th, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017) 145.

dubbed as the “Caesar of Cebu” as he possessed private resources and armed goons, thus the image of a warlord. Employing violence, political patronage and an independent financial base on firearm manufacturing, Danao became “Durano Country” as he and his family would dominate the province.

The region of Mindanao in the political history of the Philippines is not far from building a reputation out of political families as some scholars would see it synonymous with them. With the names like the Ampatuans, Sinsuats, and Mangundadatus, these families seek political positions in the representation of the Muslim sectors. Nevertheless, there are also other families who assumed political positions and resorted to violence. G. Carter Bentley surveyed on the political career of Muhammad Ali Dimaporo of the Lanao Province. In his study, Dimaporo, donning the image of a warlord, employed violence in defending the Muslim supporters against the Christian settlers in Lanao.

Rent-seeking, on the other hand, is of utmost evident in the urbanized regions of the country which are evident in families who are in possession of economic and political advantages. What makes these elite families different from the elites of the provinces is that they purely employed rent-seeking in aspiring for political and economic longevity.

National Artist for Literature Resil Mojares examined the political career of the Osmeñas through a different methodology as he studied the political identity of the family within the electoral system in Cebu. The Osmeñas, through the concept of *pulitika*, would play their way into the political scene by practical means. Since the American period, Sergio Osmeña, Sr. created his political base from the local government scene as a governor to the national scene in 1907 when elected as the Speaker of the Philippine Assembly. This political reputation would carry on to the generations of Osmeñas as they became the antithesis of the warlords of Cebu. By monopolizing the electoral public spaces and the mass media and with a persuasive political speech, the Osmeñas have successfully marked their legacy in Philippine politics.¹¹

The Lopezes, which was discussed in the last chapter of the book, would be another family who purely relied on rent-seeking as McCoy would discuss how they became successful in the political and economic arena. The economic success of the Lopezes in the Visayas region, from sugar plantations and the

¹¹ Resil B. Mojares, “The Dream Goes On and On: Three Generations of the Osmeñas, 1906-1990,” in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 7th, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017) 321-322.

Panay Autobus business, would be their leverage towards the national scene. The Lopez brothers, with these achievements and credentials, rose to success with Eugenio becoming a successful entrepreneur, while Fernando achieving a government position in the national arena from being a senator to the executive position on two separate occasions. By gaining the political leverage, the Lopezes sought patronage from the government notably in the executive position, by supporting the president in position even before their ascension to power. These successful attempts in rent-seeking enabled them to preserve their economic corporations and business from the Manila Electric Company to the media station now known as the ABS-CBN. Despite a setback during the Marcos regime, the Lopezes remained to be an influential elite with the economic legacy they built.

Alfred McCoy presented a new take on the political study of the Philippines through a case study of political elite families. This was an initiative at the time of its publication as it was a risk to study these families due to their reputations. Scholars who studied the same topic before McCoy's publication of "An Anarchy of Families" had to rely on existing biographies on politicians to survey the legacy of the political families. Furthermore, this monograph also provided a case study on municipalities and provinces through the administration of the political families, which was a leeway from the then study of political history which were focused on the Manila area. In effect, this provided a glimpse for scholars who wishes to study the local history of the provinces mentioned in the book.

Nevertheless, the monograph has become a source to study the contemporary issue of political families and dynasties in the Philippines through a historical perspective. This monograph may catch the interest of audiences who wish to conduct further research on political families.

Bibliography

- Borges, Dain. 1988. "Politics and Parentela in Paraíba: A Case Study of Family-Based Oligarchy in Brazil." *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Duke University Press) 68 (4): 871-872.
- Churchill, Bernardita Reyes. 2012. "Philippine Historiography – Looking Back and Looking Forward: The History of Historical Studies." Edited by Virginia A. Miralao and Joanne B. Agbisit. *Philippine Social Sciences: Capacities, Directions, and Challenges* (Philippine Social Science Council) 141-163.
- Foronda, Marcelino A. 1991. *Kasaysayan: Studies on Local and Oral History*. Manila: De La Salle University Press.
- McCoy, Alfred W., ed. 2017. *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*. 7th. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.