

## Book Review

*To Suffer Thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated Its Own*, revised ed., by Robert Francis B. Garcia. Mandaluyong: Anvil Publishing, 2017. Pp. 180. ISBN 9786214201426.

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This book is an account of the anti-infiltration purging in the 1980s within the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), leaving a shameful trail of executions and a seemingly hopeless but continuing search for missing victims. When it was first released in 2001, the book forced into the open this dark secret of the revolutionary movement, sending shockwaves that jolted many into taking a hard look at the causes and implications of this horrific phenomenon. This revised edition, which came out in the midst of relentless extrajudicial killings perpetrated against the most vulnerable and defenseless, is a timely reminder to us all about what it means and what it takes to be human.

Garcia's book reads like an engaging novel that transports the reader into every setting through a gripping narration of his ordeal in the hands of his own comrades. That this is a documentation of a true-to-life experience rather than fiction is gut-wrenching. Also heartrending are the public confessions of survivors about their experience of deception and violence, and the enduring pain and torment that have been inflicted on them, their families and friends, and to the rest of their civilized community.

The main revision of the book's new edition is found in Garcia's reintroduction of his book. He discusses that one most notable impact of the book is the formation of an organization called Peace Advocates for Truth, Healing, and Justice (PATH). He shares the story of Weng, who was only five years old when both of his parents disappeared without a trace in 1985. In 2005, Weng was already a grown man when,

through the persistent efforts of his parents' former comrades who are actively involved in PATH, he found the skeletal remains of his parents in an unmarked grave in the hinterlands of Cebu. Weng began his painful journey back into time to know the truth about why they were taken away from him. Garcia points out that there are still countless stories to tell and that the struggle for justice continues. The recovery of our morality is the mandate embedded in the recovery of the mortal remains of countless victims and the meaningful retelling of their lives and death.

It is important to understand how such a sordid tale of cruelty and betrayal could happen even in an organization that has always stood for selfless service to others and for incorruptible loyalty. The first edition of this book was groundbreaking and the process of its writing has reportedly become a collective effort at healing and catharsis. Because of this, it was acceptable and maybe even necessary at that time not to let the rigors of research interfere with the flow and innocence of the storytelling. But after almost two decades, it now becomes imperative to finally subject these narratives to a more meticulous analysis that would wring out the crucial lessons from this collective experience of tragedy.

Analytical leads that abound in the first two chapters of Garcia's book and his montage of hypotheses in the last chapter, which remain unpursued, should be revisited. Succeeding editions of this book would have to offer a clearer analytical lens by providing a more nuanced and critical engagement with the literature and a more seamless fusion of theory with empirical evidence. The collection of narratives and personal observations could be treated as anecdotal evidence for succeeding studies on such topics as a genealogy of the CPP's code of discipline and morals, a critical discourse analysis of revolution and violence within the CPP, a phenomenology of revolutionary practice in everyday life, and many more. For example, Garcia identifies a number of alarming tendencies within the CPP, the most frightening of which are the glorification of violence within the organization, and the readiness to kill and maim a fellow human being upon the orders of superiors. A critical understanding of the social psychology of violence within revolutionary organizations may be the direction of a study that interrogates these personal observations against empirical and anecdotal evidence. The challenge is to come up with a multi-vocal and multi-perspectival account of this unnecessary and shameful chapter in the CPP's history through rigorous analysis.

Garcia also argues that a combination of underlying vulnerabilities within the Party as an organization led to the unmitigated slaughter of its comrades. He claims that the Party made a mistake in celebrating the victories of earlier anti-infiltration procedures rather than scrutinizing and condemning its excesses, and in delegating limitless authority to Party cadres in handling the alleged problem of mass infiltration. He also claims that the Party dismissed universally accepted principles of due process as bourgeois and refused to abide by these principles. Given that it is incapable of conducting an internal investigation based on acceptable standards of justice, it led to the use of torture as the method of choice to coerce confessions from comrades who were suspected to be enemy agents. Here, he quotes Foucault's (1975) observations about torture but misses out on clearly discussing the discursive context and discursive shifts within the Party that enable these practices, which was the point of Foucault's book, *Discipline and Punish*: to render visible the fusion of knowledge and power at given periods, which frames specific practices of domination. Thus, what is Garcia actually referring to when he zeroed in on the Party's intolerant ideology and undemocratic power structure?

Garcia laments the dissolution of individuality within the Party in favor of collectivism. What does it mean to be an individual or to be collectivist within the Party and why do these matter for the revolution? Was he referring to George Herbert Mead's (1934) concepts of reflexivity and agency, or to Marx's assumptions about human nature (cf: Geras 1983), rather than to the liberalist notion of individualism? All of these warrant a more nuanced discussion because the new public of this book deserves an explanation that is beyond the usual anti-communist rhetoric. The intention is to provoke courageous conversations, even after an unspeakable tragedy like this, and to inspire the building of a society where human dignity is upheld unconditionally.

Read this book and join the life-changing conversation that it initiates.

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### References

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