

PHILIPPINES

BREWER, CAROLYN. *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521–1685*. (Women and Gender in the Early World) Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004. xxix + 240 pages. Map, illustrations, tables, glossary of terms, bibliography, index. Hardcover £45.00; ISBN 0-7546-3437-X.

The topic of gender relations in recent Philippine studies has become a focal point in many academic fields. Among the discussions, it seems that there are trends that relate some contemporary interdisciplinary theme with gender studies in the Philippines. One such trend related to global studies deals with female overseas workers in a global labor market. As the number of workers employed overseas is remarkable and their remittances cannot be overlooked as a significant contribution to the national income, the position of women and their roles has increasingly drawn attention in area studies. Another trend comes from gender and sexuality studies, in which the topics of transgenderism and transvestism are often taken up. And thirdly, some studies are related to colonial and/or postcolonial studies. Based on the methodology and concerns of historical studies, this trend of study focuses on the social meaning and image of women in the process of nation building in the Philippines.

The present book can be grouped with the third category because the author, Carolyn Brewer, is a historian and the book's central theme is gender and religion. Due to the circumstances by which Christianization of the Archipelago was achieved, it is virtually impossible to inquire into religion without looking at the colonization by Spain and nation building in the colonial and postcolonial context. The author's basic question is how the social construction of gender relations has been influenced by the impact of the confrontation

with Catholicism and the related shift from pre-colonial animism. In order to delve into this problem, the author focuses on the animistic-shamanic specialist in folk society called *baylan*. Of the many works produced on gender studies in the Philippines, this perspective is quite unique, even outstanding. The topic overlaps with historical studies, cultural anthropology, feminist studies, linguistics, and cultural semiotics. In addition to these fields, Brewer also required a good sense for literature. Although I am not a historian, it is easy to guess how difficult this kind of study was to undertake because historical sources on women's social positions are scarce. Most writers of historical documents in the period of first contacts with Filipino people were Christian missionaries, which means that they were male. For that reason, the author required a great deal of historical imagination. In other words, she needed to have the capacity to listen to the women's "silent" voices, or in William Henry Scott's term, a capacity to see through "cracks in the parchment curtain," on which the author relies.

One important argument in this book is the history of conversion. After arrival at the Archipelago, the Spanish missionaries had to renovate Filipino customs or ways of life in order to establish Christian morality. A variety of sexual behavior among women, such as fornication, adultery, and loss of virginity before marriage, were strictly prohibited. Also forbidden was divorce after marriage, concubinage, and polygamy/polyandry. From this point of view, the history of conversion can be seen as the process through which women were trained in self-discipline and self-punishment. The typical technique employed to arrive at such self-judgment is for the subject to refer to the list of sins used in preparation for confession, the so-called *confessionario*. Brewer's point of view contrasts with that of Vicente Rafael on this matter. According to Rafael, Tagalog people regarded confession as a kind of negotiation because the Tagalog term for asking forgiveness in confession is *tauad*, which literally means bargaining. When bargaining with Christian/colonial authority, they returned conundrums or riddles in exchange for the list of sins in order to "shift a word away from its functional connotations and create for it another constellation of associations" (RAFAEL 1988, 134). On the other hand, Brewer sees in the practice of confession both the regulation for self-policing and the power to mold women's sexual lives into Christian morality. In short, it was the "good/bad" dichotomy that activities of missionaries brought to the Philippines. Applied to women, this dichotomy could be replaced by the terms virgin/whore. The ideal image of a woman as a dutiful daughter, a caring wife, and a sacrificing mother was evoked through performing arts, such as music, song, and drama, the highest ideal being the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, dissoluteness and ethical and social vices were at the other pole of women's morality.

This point connects with a second important aspect of this book, the consideration of animistic and shamanic folk religion. Folk religious specialists who deal with spirit possession, sacrifice, and animist worship are referred to variously as *baylan*, *catalonan*, or *maganito*. While I am reluctant to follow Brewer's decision to "use animism and shamanism interchangeably" (xviii) because, from an anthropological point of view, the two overlap only partially, it should be noted that the author pays attention to European contacts with these specialists, in particular with female priestesses. The female *baylan*, as an extreme opposite of the Virgin Mary, embodied religious evil—for example, her worship of idols and sacrificial offerings were judged to be work of the devil. In this sense, the *baylan* represent the opposite of Christian order. But in the colonial order they were the symbols of social vice as well as of religious evil, because for Westerners, with their memory of witches in their own society, these women caused a biased view of Filipino society to develop. Actually, Brewer illustrates how the term *baylan* came to be replaced by *bruha*, a term for witch as a person who causes social disorder for the ruler. In this aspect, her

findings concerning witchcraft are similar to those of area studies in Africa and the Pacific where biased views led Westerners to discover witchcraft in the field. Together with the problem of transvestism, which is discussed in chapter 7 as the “third sex,” this issue offers the possibility for further comparative studies.

The third important aspect of this book is its contribution to local history. Bolinao is a town in the Province of Zambales in the northwest of Luzon Island. Brewer examines the so-called “Bolinao manuscript” written by a Dominican who was dispatched to the place in order to condemn and eliminate “paganism.” In part 3 Brewer presents a case study where she describes the striking contrast between female and male *baylan*: “While the female/feminine shaman was marginalized by both her femaleness and her femininity, the male shaman who dressed as a woman was advantaged both in relation to his maleness and his appropriation of the spiritually powerful feminine” (191). Considering that most documents are scattered and in other areas even lost, this manuscript is of a high quality. Taken together with the author’s analysis, it should be valuable for improving knowledge of Philippine local history.

As a cultural anthropologist, I would like to know about the difference between female and male *baylan* in more detail. In my research site, the Central Visayas, the *mananambal* (healer) is similar to the *baylan*, and both females and males can be found there. However it seems that their strong points are different according to sex; while female *mananambal* mainly deal with herbal medicine, males have a good knowledge of *orasyon* (magical words). In the *Libreto sa Orasyones* [Magical prayer book], there are many prayers for protecting themselves and attacking the enemy, such as *orasyon* for tightening one’s body, or for making an enemy unable to move. It is quite natural to infer from these examples that these were used in revolutionary movements, and one can understand how McCoy came to point this out, as is mentioned in chapter 5 (93). On the other hand, it can be assumed that present tendencies in the *mananambal*’s role must be the result of some historical development. If so, trying to understand how this role has been constructed is not really asking for the moon.

If we were to choose only one topic among all those Brewer is interested in, it is that of worship of the Virgin Mary. Worship of the Virgin Mary is widespread all over the Philippines, and she, as the Immaculate Conception, is the national patron saint. It means that the Virgin Mary is the symbol of nation building; a big image of the Virgin was constructed along EDSA road after the “February Revolution”, and even now, it appears in TV news of almost every political rally. Does this mean that the Filipino people have become well trained to follow the “good” woman? As the author suggests at the end of her conclusion, an exciting theme for further study would be to try to find out what the Virgin means for the Filipinos.

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