On Sidel's Response and Bossism in the Philippines

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Part I

John Sidel commences his response by labeling my piece an "attack" on certain scholars including himself. The word "attack" appears five times in reference to my piece, betraying a deep concern over the effects of what he otherwise dismisses as my "misleading and unconvincing" arguments. At the outset, then, Sidel appears to be mildly critical of my essay. He announces that he is "dissatisfied with the "(mis)use of the term 'Orientalism' in [my] attack," and is "disappointed with a missed opportunity for a productive debate." But what strikes me more, upon a closer reading, is Sidel's agreement with me on some rather basic issues. He fully understands, for example, that "Ileto's criticisms do in fact correspond to some serious underlying problems confronting students of 'real existing democracy' in the archipelago." And he shows absolutely no sympathy for Stanley Karnow, whose influential book is said to exhibit some of these problems in a "tragicomic" manner. Since Sidel and I basically agree on Karnow, it is worth pursuing the matter further: at what point do our views begin to diverge?

Sidel continues with a reference to Carl Lande – a fellow American political scientist whose training in the "standard operating procedures of applying social-science models, frameworks and jargon to Philippine politics" was something he himself went through and formed his "point of departure." But as he commenced his own research, he broke away from the scholarship of Lande and others who continued to be locked onto the paradigm of "patron-client relations." The alternative path Sidel took is carefully outlined in a couple of paragraphs. Again, it is striking how Sidel in effect echoes some of the key points I raised in my critique of Lande, Glenn

May, and the early works of Alfred McCoy – e.g., the reduction of a complex power relationship to a reified, "culturalist," notion of superordinate-subordinate, patron–client, ties.

Sidel argues that the previous focus on "social relations and political competition" exemplified in Lande's work served to occlude the more important role of "coercive pressures" in real politics. He throws out cultural explanations altogether, employing instead a structuralist approach informed by revisionist literature on machine politics elsewhere in the world. For Sidel, the "reality" of Philippine politics can be better laid bare through the use of more sophisticated political economy and comparative politics approaches. He will overcome the shortcomings of his predecessors in knowing the Philippine "other" through the use of better social science.

The first time that Sidel makes reference to McCoy is not as an early exponent of Lande's clientelist paradigm, but as a scholar politically committed to democratization, whose work contributed substantially to the anti-Marcos struggle and to attempts at preventing the resurgence of authoritarianism especially at the local level. This is the McCoy who edited the influential book, An Anarchy of Families, aspects of which I link discursively to Karnow's patently Orientalist tome. Because Sidel's chapter on the Montanos of Cavite is directly implicated in my critique of Anarchy, his fate becomes very much entwined with McCoy's at this stage of my essay. Here, I think, is where Sidel takes vehement exception to my piece for having exceeded its quite-justified brief against Karnow and Lande by drawing into the picture three contributors to the Anarchy book: Sidel, McCoy, and Michael Cullinane. Here is where my essay becomes, in Sidel's words, a "crude and unconstructive caricature of scholarly efforts to understand and expose the nature of domination, exclusion, and exploitation under democratic auspices in the Philippines."

I can understand how feelings might be ruffled by the linking or juxtaposing of individual authors who exhibit

differing ideological standpoints and subject positions. How dare I suggest that there is some continuity between the conservative Karnow, the pro-establishment Lande, the progressive McCoy, and the muckraking Sidel! Before I explain any further, let me note at this point that my critical readings have not targeted American scholars alone, nor have I even hinted that the study of Philippine politics should be best left to Filipino nationals. Those who make this facile judgment would not have read my lengthy essay, "Outlines of a non-linear emplotment of Philippine history" (1997), where I subject certain works by Teodoro Agoncillo, Renato Constantino, Ferdinand Marcos and Amado Guerrero to a similar discursive reading. Having suggested that these ideologically diverse writings share common, linear-developmental scaffoldings has not endeared me to many Filipinos either.

It is all too easy to confuse my textual approach with an outright "attack" on some individual scholar's work or other. My essays on Orientalism and on Philippine linear history are confined to groups of texts which I feel have contributed towards the emergence and authority of discursive formations. These texts are performative; they circulate; they produce knowledge-claims about the objects of their scrutiny. These texts comprise statements dispersed from different subject positions – a Karnow, a Lande, a Sidel –b ut there are threads that link them and that enable us to group them as a discursive formation.

Edward Said dwelt on one such discursive formation – Orientalism – but his project was to a great extent simply an application of Michel Foucault's ideas in The Archaeology of Knowledge to a body of European writings about the Orient. Said introduced issues such as the representation of the colonial "other," the establishment of the other in relation to the self, the role of fear and desire in the making of a discourse about the other, and so forth. Foucault had made us sensitive to intertextual operations: to the way that writings are part of a system – a network – of references that connect them to other writings, other texts, and thus

work towards the establishment of a "regime of truth." Foucault it was who, through his notion of "genealogy," pressed us to look into the conditions that make for the rise of knowledge. For him it was not simply a question of developing more sophisticated or appropriate methods to grasp the "real"; rather, he made us question the kinds of "reality" that various methodologies and assumptions produced. I cannot claim to be in the same league as Said, not to mention Foucault; in a sense Sidel is right when he characterizes my critique as "crude." Nonetheless, my undisciplined appropriation of some of the ideas of these "masters" enables me to detect patterns and establish connections that were previously hidden or unimagined.

Take the case of Lande's 1965 text. As far as Sidel is concerned this text is not worth taking seriously because, among other things, it belongs to a past when political science was mired in culturalist and behaviorist methodologies. Sidel's work is as much a debunking of such Lande-era paradigms as it is an attempt to more thoroughly explore and faithfully represent what he calls a "picture of Philippine politics." My "take" on Lande's text is quite different. I treat it as an enabling, productive, statement that made possible a host of further statements about Philippine history and politics. I see it in the context of the times in which it was produced: the academic institutions that shaped the author's subject position, the critical state of Philippine politics at that time, the Cold War milieu that empowered some arguments while marginalizing others, and so forth. In my discussion of Lande's encounter with Philippine "difference," and how he tried to tame an otherwise messy political scene through the application of social science theory, I bring up many of the issues that Said identified in the texts he read and named "Orientalist."

Perhaps the "problem" is with the name, for "Orientalism" carries with it a baggage of commonsense meanings that suggest the colonial subjugation of the "other"– a far cry, indeed, from the anticolonial proclivities that Sidel claims for himself and some of his colleagues, and which we need

not dispute. But what this negative connotation of "Orientalist" sadly occludes is the productive power of this discourse. If we can understand how Lande's 1965 classic continues to haunt subsequent texts, including those that seek to debunk it, then we can begin to identify the features of a discursive formation that operates beyond the subject-positionings of individual authors. This is one way, I submit, in which we can open up really new paths in Philippine political studies.

Owing to the contentiousness of the term "Orientalism," I shall drop it from this discussion and proceed now to scrutinize some of Sidel's claims about his work. In what way is it claimed to be a drastic departure from previous studies and hence rightfully exempt from the body of texts I assembled for my original critique? Among the strategies Sidel claims to have employed is the focus on "'objective' circumstances" and the concomitant bracketing of "subjective conditions, thus arguably denying the Philippines any distinctiveness and Filipinos any voice or agency in the making of their own politics." He claims to have avoided entirely the issue of the "phenomenology" of bossism. This radical stance is necessitated by his rejection of the literature that misconstrued the bossism phenomenon by subsuming it into notions of political culture as Lande did, or by reducing the legitimating claims of local bosses "to the realm of instrumentality and mystification."

Sidel then faces a massive challenge. By focusing on the "macro-political," "macro-sociological" and "micro-economic" conditions that altogether make up the politics of bossism, how does he come to grips with the "relationship" between bosses and people that, he admits, still lies at the crux of the bossism phenomenon? To manage this he claims to have adopted Michael Cullinane's strategy of listening to and translating "the language of legitimation used by local bosses as they wield power and project their authority." Further on he also says that to make sense of the "big man's" authority, it is necessary to understand the manifestations of charisma, the signs of which are "so difficult to

disentangle from the effectiveness of charismatic authority as a relationship." In thus bringing in language and charisma as crucial for an understanding of bossism as actually experienced, isn't the bracketed concept of "culture" in fact being reinstated?

Sidel is really not against the factoring in of culture in the attempt to grasp the contours of real, existing bossism in the Philippines. What he takes exception to, rather, is the reification and essentialism that flawed previous attempts at knowing – a point I myself make and which he concurs with, as he himself admits in his concluding paragraph. The discussion is unfortunately complicated by the fact that Sidel has chosen to define "culture" in narrow terms. In connection with his study of the Montano phenomenon, he asserts "there is nothing essentializing about this picture of Philippine politics. To the contrary, this is a portrayal of Philippine democracy utterly devoid of culturally specific references to Filipino values, preferences, and practices. No references to utang na loob here." This assertion, however, paradoxically appears after Sidel has just highlighted the need to understand the "ideology of boss rule" which comes into view "not in a narrowly instrumental sense, but as the lived experience of domination by ruler and ruled." How does one grapple with "lived experience" without a nuanced understanding of culture, language, and perhaps even the phenomenological method?

Sidel himself provides an answer. In the end he is forced to admit that he and others have "tended to neglect questions of language, legitimacy, audience, and consent, as Ileto charges." He insists, however, that such limitations notwithstanding, his "efforts not to 'blame the victim' should not be mistaken for cultural essentialism or American-style Orientalism." I wonder if my critical comments on his chapter in Anarchy of Families can in fact be reduced to these two "mistaken" conclusions. On the question of "American-style Orientalism" alone, it is not clear that Sidel has escaped contamination. There is an urgent need to probe into what

this form of "Orientalism" might mean and how it hovers over current scholarship on the "Third World." Just as the now-discredited "clientelism" can be associated with Cold War discourse, one wonders why the current preoccupation with "bossism" and its analogues in various parts of the world sits rather well with the new global capitalist order and its concern to abolish obstacles to its consolidation. No matter how sound or productive, the analytical tools to uncover bossist phenomena everywhere did not emerge in an ideological vacuum. Although the United States, with its different history from Europe's, cannot boast of a deep tradition of Orientalist imaginings, the same processes that Edward Said underscored in his 1978 book are still at work today. In our post-9/11 world, in particular, the constitution of negative "others" in the global superpower's national imaginary and war agendas is a phenomenon of grave concern. Filipinos, for better or for worse, are fated to have been implicated in this process for over a century.

In the end Sidel caricatures my essay as "crude and unconstructive" but is strangely silent about an alternative approach to the study of politics that I endorse, which is exemplified by Resil Mojares's chapter in the same volume as his. For Mojares, the question is not whom to "blame" but whether, in the first place, we can reduce the non-elites to "victims" and politicians to predators. Sensitive precisely to issues of "language, legitimacy, audience and consent," Mojares is able to explore the relationship between bosses and their constituents and fill in a dimension woefully missing in Sidel's work. I wonder if Sidel's forgetting of Mojares is a consequence of the latter's training in literary criticism rather than political science, and the fact that he is based in Cebu. Have we come face to face here with issues of authority and positioning? By asking such questions, and taking seriously how Mojares's style of "knowing the Philippines" differs from Sidel's, we can better understand the "constructive" agenda behind my critical essay. In the following section, I make my agenda more explicit.

Part II

Sidel's response to my critique of "Orientalism" in the study of Philippine politics has actually given him an opportunity to present the basic arguments of his recent book, Capital, Coercion and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines (1999). This is surely the most important study of Philippine politics to have appeared since Anarchy of Families back in 1995 and I wish it had been available when I finalized my "Orientalism" lecture in 1997. As a historian I am drawn to it for its attempt to understand municipal and provincial politics today in terms of its historical lineages. The historical dimension of the book is rather muted in Sidel's own summary of his arguments – for good reason since this is pitched toward a political science readership. He takes exception, of course, to my depiction of him as a "social historian." But because he draws massively upon this book in his response to my piece, I feel it is not only fair but mandatory that I delve into it. I shall do so in the light of my own research on the local histories of a number of towns in Quezon province only 80 kilometers or less from those in Cavite that Sidel focuses on.

Bossism in the Philippines highlights the impact of American colonial policies and institutions in shaping the peculiar character of Philippine democracy. The reason it is peculiar in the first place is because Filipino politicians, according to the author, bring into their encounter with American colonial institutions a long pre-history of local politics under Spanish colonial rule. The original "boss" was, after all, the native chief or datu, the "big man" who turned agent and beneficiary of Spanish conquest and religious conversion. Under Spanish rule he became the gobernadorcillo or mayor of the basic administrative unit – the pueblo. Sidel's book, while ostensibly inspired by studies of American and Italian machine politics, really builds upon our present state of knowledge, in English secondary sources, of the history of the late-Spanish period. This applies, at least, to the book's chapters on Cavite, which elaborate

the arguments Sidel had put forward in his chapter in Anarchy of Families.

Filipino readers who pay close attention to the historical dimensions of the Bossism book will probably be surprised to find that the Revolution, supposedly the great watershed that divides the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Philippine history, is really a non-event as far as Sidel is concerned. If the bosses of the Spanish pueblos easily reappear as the bosses of the American towns, it is because during the revolutionary period they figure as, well, revolutionary bosses. And so Emilio Aguinaldo, a former boss-mayor of Kawit, becomes a kind of rebel warlord whose attitude towards his rivals is said to be no different from that of a typical mayor – get rid of them! And so Sidel makes the 1897 execution of the Katipunan founders Andres and Procopio Bonifacio ("approved by revolutionary General Emilio Aguinaldo") the first in a series of violent murders that include the Maragondon massacre of 1952 (supposedly ordered by Senator Justiniano Montano) and the Ternate massacre of 1992, supposedly ordered by Governor Juan Remulla – all of them mayors at an early stage of their careers. Each of these events really did take place, and no doubt Aguinaldo, Montano, and Remulla were deeply implicated in them. What interests me, rather, is the way the three discrete events are strung together in a series so that sameness and repetition are highlighted. This is done deliberately, I feel, so as to efface the specific factors underlying Aguinaldo's supposed ordering of Bonifacio's execution at the height of an armed conflict with Spain. If they are all caciques and bosses behaving in accordance with structural forces and constraints, why bother to make the story more complex than that? This is what I mean by the Revolution becoming a non-event in the hands of Sidel.

Since my current research involves tracing how the ranks of the principalía – the collective body of elected and hereditary officials of a town and its barangays – produced the revolutionary leaders of 1898-1902, the focus of this interrogation of Sidel's "bossism" paradigm is the municipal

scene. Sidel's book, in fact, begins with an examination of the basic building blocks of Philippine bossism: town mayors. Specifically investigated are the "mafia-type" municipal bosses of Cavite province, but there are suggestions in various parts of Sidel's book that Cavite is a microcosm of the whole: "In countless small towns throughout the Philippines," states the author, "the mayor's political longevity, economic preeminence, and personal control over the local agencies and resources of the state create a degree of monopoly that contrasts starkly with the bi-factional competition between rival patron-client networks described in the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s. In short, such municipalities constituted the bailiwicks for what might be described as small-town bosses." (my italics)

The Philippines-wide scope of Sidel's project is exemplified in the first example he gives of the municipal boss phenomenon: it is not from Cavite, but from Tayabas (now Quezon) province. In the opening paragraphs of this chapter Sidel narrates his discovery among the Quezon Papers of a letter that then-Senator Manuel Quezon received in 1935 from Juan Rabellana of the town of Dolores in Quezon's home province of Tayabas. "In breathless and long-winded Tagalog prose, Rabellana enumerated a laundry list of grievances against Mauricio Luico, the mayor of the municipality, whom he described as

> an abusive, greedy, and corrupt man who takes bribes for tolerating illegal lotteries and gambling dens; he alone profits from the lottery and gambling den collections and the contracts for the construction of the school and the municipal building. The police – who respect no one but him – are put to work on his coconut lands . . . and all the public employees are his relatives: two sons-in-law and one nephew and two second-degree nephews. And he's the head of a gang of cattle rustlers, and the municipal treasurer pockets all sorts of traveling expenses beyond his allowance.

Sidel reproduces for the reader the full contents of the Rabellana document, quoting much of it in English translation. Rabellana complained how Luico had recently won reelection "through fraud, vote-buying, and violence," but noted especially the complicity of Quezon and other high-ranking government officials in the mayor's "predatory behavior," to use Sidel's terms, since he first assumed office in 1922. Further quoting from Rabellana:

> The town residents are powerless, as you are said to be his close friend and if he goes to see you, he's free to sleep in your bedroom and eat in your kitchen, and so we can't do anything, for he's also said to be a friend of Judge Recto and other judges of the Court of First Instance and especially close to Secretary of Public Works Guinto and Secretary Perez.

After narrating this event, Sidel jumps forward in time to the 1990s with an account of the notorious career of Mayor Antonio Sanchez of Calauan, Laguna, which is similar in content. These are, in a way, foundational events in Sidel's book. For immediately after their narration he states: "Inspired in part by the cases of mayors like Luico and Sanchez, this chapter provides an alternative paradigm for the examination of municipal politics in the Philippines."

What was it about the case of Mayor Luico of Dolores that "inspired" Sidel to write his chapter about Cavite's boss-mayors – a chapter which presents an "alternative paradigm" for the examination of municipal politics in the Philippines? No doubt it is because Rabellana's complaint about Luico compresses into one or two paragraphs all the attributes of the boss-mayor that will be excavated in the Cavite scene. Mayor Luico is the quintessential corrupt local magnate. He takes bribes from local gambling lords, profits from bingo-type lotteries, and monopolizes public works contracts. He employs relatives in the municipal government. The policemen respect only him, and work personally for him. The municipal treasurer manipulates travel allowances for

the mayor's benefit. Reflecting on the significance of the Rabellana document, Sidel concludes: "some 60 years of 'modernization' notwithstanding, shades of Mayor Luico are still visible in contemporary accounts of municipal executives of a distinctly similar ilk. Manila newspapers frequently feature articles implicating town mayors from various parts of the Philippines in murder, extortion, robbery, illegal gambling, illegal logging, and land-grabbing."

Anyone reading this, who is attuned to what has been happening in recent Philippine politics, will not fail to draw the obvious parallels with Joseph Ejercito Estrada. Estrada began his political career as boss-mayor of San Juan, Metro Manila, for several terms. With the restoration of constitutional democracy after martial law, he rose through the political ranks, becoming senator, vice-president and finally president of the country. The accusations of corruption made against Estrada as president seem to be just magnified "national" forms of corruption at the boss-mayor level. This is precisely the analytical thrust of Sidel's book – to establish continuities not just between the past and the present, but also between the local and the national, so that the paradigm of "boss" established at the town or municipal level can be projected onto the provincial and, finally, national scenes – these become so mutually-intertwined owing to the character of American colonial policies and institutions which are carried over into the post-independence period.

Let us take a closer look at Rabellana's complaint: Mayor Luico is said to be the head of a gang of cattle rustlers. Moreover, his activities lie unchecked because his is protected by, among others, Judge Recto (i.e., the Claro Mayo Recto of nationalist fame, and a native of Tiaong) and no less than Senator and upcoming President Quezon himself. National and nationalist politicians are thus implicated in, or contaminated by, the boss-mayor politics of Dolores town. These are striking details that would certainly have inspired Sidel's depiction of Cavite town politics in the chapter that follows. According to him, "enjoying considerable discretion over municipal police forces, Cavite mayors have used

violence and selective enforcement of the law to control lucrative illegal activities. In the late Spanish colonial era, the province was already known as 'la madre de los ladrones,' or 'the mother of thieves'." In the 20th century the situation would only worsen as "the mafia-style mayors of Cavite" became involved in land grabbing, smuggling, and carnapping, protected and encouraged by warlord-strongmen with connections to the national political scene. The examples of Mayor Casal, Senator Montano, Governor Remulla and a few others are carefully selected to highlight this image.

That Dolores in Tayabas province should figure in Sidel's opening paragraph on Cavite is not purely coincidental. Dolores and its mother-town of Tiaong were in fact notorious in the late Spanish era for being hotbeds of crime. It was not uncommon for Dolores to be called "a den of ladrones" in Spanish reports. And in the late 1870s the countryside of Dolores and Tiaong was the scene of a massive anti-crime operation led by Lt. Col. Villa Abrille to flush out gangs of highway robbers, smugglers, and cattle rustlers, "illicit associations" of fanaticos, "undocumented" vagabonds, as well as barangay headmen suspected of dealing with ladrones, and to bring them under the sway of the law and the Spanish state. In the early 1880s the provincial court of Tayabas and its satellite office in Tiaong were clogged with criminal cases pertaining to the Tiaong-Dolores zone. Viewed from a certain angle, the local histories of these towns do not clash at all with Sidel's portrayal of criminality in Cavite during the late nineteenth century. It is not my aim to deny or justify those often-violent acts of crime that were sometimes perpetrated by members of the principalía themselves.

I want instead to shift my focus from Mayor Luico to his accuser Juan Rabellana. To me what seems just as "inspiring" as the depiction of boss-mayor Luico, is the daring exposé by Rabellana. Says Sidel, this was delivered in "breathless and long-winded Tagalog prose." Unfortunately we are not provided with this Tagalog text, because I think it is the style

of this Tagalog prose that enables Rabellana to tell Quezon what the problem is with Mayor Luico and to even dare say to this powerful senator that part of the problem is precisely the protection or patronage that he, Quezon, gives Luico. One can imagine a wrongly worded complaint leading to grave consequences for its author. But Rabellana, though taking a risk, seemed to know what he was doing. There was a certain form, a certain medium or framing device, through which grievances and complaints against local excesses could be communicated to higher authorities. The endnotes of Sidel's book reveal that most of the data about bossism is drawn not from state or government sources but from court cases, complaints, election appeals, and newspaper exposés by Filipinos who often are part of the very same communities in which such corruption prevails. In other words, the data for the bossism paradigm is generated from within the same field of discourses in which the boss is located. While those contesting voices may not possess the instruments of violence that the bosses sometimes deploy, they nevertheless exert power in their own way.

In 1878 the Spanish traveler Juan Alvarez Guerra observed two main characteristics about Tiaong: first that it was a town besieged by criminality all around and second that its principales were "cavilosos." Caviloso, whose English equivalent is cavillous, means someone who is over suspicious, distrustful, hasty in making judgments and accusations, or prone to making complaints. Perhaps, through his friendship with the provincial governor, Alvarez had come to learn of the many complaints, objections, and formal court cases emanating from the mayor's office of Tiaong. This is not particularly unique to Tiaong, but in that part of Tayabas province Tiaong had this reputation of being the scene of both criminality and complaint. Criminal cases tended to cluster in barrios in the peripheries, especially near Dolores (a former barrio of Tiaong) which lies in the foothills of Mt. Banahaw. Complaints, on the other hand, emanated from the tribunal, the mayor's office.

Complaints by whom and against whom? One of my most interesting discoveries in the National Archives is a thick file comprising a queja or complaint of the Tiaong principales in 1861 against the abuses of their Franciscan parish priest. They sought to pin him down on a whipping incident that led, they claim, to the death of one of their members. Attached to the complaint are the Franciscan superior's response, the liberal governor's own assessment, about 24 records of interrogation of various indios from the town mayor down to the victim's servant, an opinion by the secretary of the local diocese who happened to be a Tagalog priest, and several other attachments. This is not the place for me to discuss this extremely interesting complaint. Let me just point out a few relevant observations about the event and its documentation.

First of all, the complaint is expressed in respectful and impeccable Spanish prose. There was obviously a set discursive framework within which an attack on no less than God's representative in Tiaong could be mounted. Carefully worded, the complaint did not overextend its claims, and it attempted to back up everything by file attachments. When I first read this document, my immediate reaction was to reduce it to another exposé of friar abuse. But upon successive readings of the entire file, I could see that it was really telling me about the different ways in which Tiaong society and politics could be read and narrated, depending on one's standpoint.

The Franciscan Order's rebuttal is very convincing, and would be the sort of document that a Jesuit historian like John Schumacher would lend credence to. Someone like James Scott would be attracted to the interrogations, which point to hidden transcripts and weapons of the weak. There is something in that thick file about caciques and about criminals, and, yes, the Franciscan provincial did argue that the mayors of Tiaong often acted like little bosses manipulating the friars for their own private ends. The indio Diocesan secretary, on the other hand, was sympathetic to

the complaint but appeared more concerned about the damage to the prestige of priests, in general, that could arise if such complaints came to proliferate. The liberal Spanish governor's opinions would prove attractive to nationalist historians. Governor Domper was a proponent of good governance who regarded the friar orders as obstructions to the smooth operations of the colonial state. Like the liberal Governor General Carlos Maria de la Torre, he encouraged indio assertions against the friars. We must be careful to note, however, that this same liberal Governor later became embroiled in a complaint himself. When he went to the office of the mayor of Dolores on a surprise visit and the mayor did not rise immediately from his seat to greet the Spaniard, Domper was so incensed by this show of indio insolence that he grabbed the mayor's symbolic cane and struck him with it, breaking it to pieces. Predictably, this story was originally penned by the Franciscan priest of Dolores.

The 1861 complaint is crisscrossed with different, often contradictory, discourses, which have to be acknowledged even if, in the end, the historian makes certain choices about which sort of narrative to construct. I wonder, therefore, about the Rabellana complaint of 1935 which inspired Sidel – how its contents would be read if it was part of an ensemble of documents about the Mayor Luico case, instead of appearing out of the blue as a decontextualized affirmation of the boss-mayor phenomenon. One of the things I've noticed about studies that are obsessed with proving a theory or demonstrating some novel characteristic of a social formation is that they fish out of complex documentary collections only what is needed to make their point. Sometimes this is done out of necessity because the files are huge and intractable, often in a difficult script like 19th century Spanish which would take ages to process thoroughly.

My second set of reflections on the 1861 complaint by the principales of Tiaong stems from the question: who actually wrote it? I've had to assemble a series of such

complaints and court investigations, from 1861 up to the early 1890s, in order to figure out where this sort of activity was coming from and who the actors were. Most of the principales of Tiaong until the early 1890s were fluent only in Tagalog. This was particularly true of headmen or cabezas, who were classified as "principál" with all the privileges that came with the title, but who actually lived most of the time in the barrios among their constituents. The mayors were sometimes bilingual, sometimes not, although towards the 1890s ability if not fluency in Spanish was becoming an important precondition for attaining that position.

That most mayors had difficulty with Spanish did not matter, though, because in the tribunal or mayor's office there always was a bilingual native, called Directorcillo, who drew a salary and who did all the interpreting back and forth between the mayor and the Spanish priest and functionaries. There were also interpreters and court clerks who routinely transcribed testimonies and court proceedings, maintained the town archives, and penned copies of communications to higher channels. Whenever a complaint was made by the principales against abusive officials, unjust exactions of tribute and labor, or whenever permission was sought for new projects, this small army of bilingual natives in the poblacion was pressed into action. We can see the results of their handiwork in the nicely-penned complaints complete with copies of testimonies, copies of relevant documents from the tribunal's archive, citations from the Law of the Indies, and of course the signatures of all those involved in the production of the document.

Many of these clerks and scribes were initially trained by the Franciscan priests. At a young age - about 10 years old - talented boys, some from principal families, some not, were "adopted" by the priest who taught them Spanish and a bit of history, ethics and arithmetic. They often served as sacristans and porters of the church for which they actually were paid a stipend. Some went on to study for the priesthood in the diocesan seminary in Manila, or, because of their training in Spanish were employed as clerks in the town or

provincial government offices. In my research on Tiaong, I came across the colorful career of Isidro Herrera who was trained in such a manner in the 1870s. By 1881 his name appears in Tiaong court records as a clerk. When the Spanish administration was toppled in 1898, he again appears prominently as a caretaker-governor of Tayabas province and later adviser to a succession of provincial leaders.

Let us follow Herrera's career a bit closer. In the early 1880s this talented, biligual native won a job as the personal secretary of a Spanish commissioner of religious affairs, whose job it was to inspect parish record books to insure that the indios were not being charged excessive fees for religious services. In this capacity, Herrera moved out of Tiaong and got to travel as far north as Vigan and south to Iligan with his Spanish boss whom he sometime referred to as "my protector." In 1886 Herrera married a mestiza teacher he had met in Marinduque and got appointed as a desk officer in the office of the notary public at Boac. He sent part of his earnings to his widowed mother in Tiaong who bought land, parcel by parcel, and built up a sizable farm, which was directly managed by her. Herrera eventually returned to Tiaong in 1887 where he again found work in the mayor's office as a clerk, while his wife, who was even more fluent in Spanish than him owing to her Manila education, obtained permission to open a Spanish language school in their house.

This all happened in the 1880s in the relatively "backward" town of Tiaong which was notorious for criminality. Through this brief story we get a glimpse of the municipal scene that produced well-crafted complaints in proper Spanish, demonstrating a sound grasp of the laws and procedures of the colony. There were many other Tiaong-Dolores natives like Isidro Herrera who, through their own individual experiences of education, travel, trade, intermarriage, and other forms of correspondence with the "outside" from at least the 1860s on, brought into the Tribunal a variety of skills and even forms of consciousness,

and it is from within the resulting "pool" that one must locate the impulse towards local despotism, among other impulses.

Isidro Herrera's career took a particularly interesting turn in 1892 when his mother was ordered incarcerated by the parish priest, Fr Jesus Roman, owing to her refusal to pay some burial fee. Whether for the sake of justice or revenge (depending upon one's perspective) Isidro decided to mount his own counter-offensive against the abusive priest who was known to have beaten so severely a member of the church choir that his death shortly afterwards was attributed by town gossip to the priest. It was Isidro's job now to collect evidence from relatives and witnesses of the deceased choir member who hailed from Dolores. Having assembled all the data, he mustered all his talents and single-handedly wrote the official document, attaching all the relevant testimonies. This complaint eventually reached the government in Manila and, interestingly enough, resulted in victory some years later – Fray Jesus was transferred out.

I mention this story not just to further illustrate the power of the local intelligentsia, for I think we can call them that, but also to bring in another important figure in the municipal scene. When Isidro traveled to Dolores to locate witnesses and secure testimonies, he was secretly assisted by the coadjutor or assistant parish priest there named Padre Inocencio, an indio priest. Padre Inocencio acknowledged that Fray Jesus was a fellow priest and agent of God, but, he remarked, "poor Fray Jesus, he has succumbed to the attractions of Money." And so he directed Isidro to a key witness who had become a member of a Colorum sect in Mt Banahaw.

The role of the native assistant priests in the local history of Tiaong and Dolores cannot be underestimated. We should include in their ranks the seminarians who did not finish their training, often due to falling in love and marrying, and thus returned to their hometowns to become interpreters, court clerks, book keepers, and private tutors. These were bilingual figures that had been trained in the big city. The priests had often served in other towns before being assigned to Tiaong and Dolores. They knew what was happening

elsewhere in the archipelago and in the world, for that matter. They were in close touch with the 1860s student movement in Manila led by Padre Pelaez and Padre Burgos seeking equal rights for native priests. Indirectly they assisted the intelligentsia in the Tribunals in dealing with the higher echelons of the church and state. And they often paid the price for their actions.

Padre Inocencio, reassigned to the Naga cathedral where he served as choirmaster, was arrested shortly after the outbreak of the Katipunan revolt in late 1896, and executed in January the following year. Perhaps his involvement in the case leading to Fray Jesus Roman's ouster had leaked to the authorities; perhaps he was secretly engaged in "filibusterism" in Naga, as was alleged. The same set of events led the mayor of Tiaong to declare the town independent from Spain in mid-1898. During the war with the United States, Mayor Masangcay left the Tribunal to assume the post of Jefe Teniente Coronel of one of the town's two guerrilla columns based in the barrios. Unable to write in Spanish, a secretary who had previously served as Directorcillo handled all of his correspondence. A member of the local intelligentsia, Norberto Mayo (Claro's uncle), in fact headed the town's other guerrilla column.

While awaiting the American invasion of southern Tagalog, Isidro Herrera and his family hid themselves in their family farm between Tiaong and Dolores, feeding and protecting the guerrilla units of Masangcay, Mayo, and others who passed through, until the time came for Isidro to return to the poblacion and "collaborate" with the Americans while still secretly aiding the guerrillas. Behavior such as this led Captain William Johnston, the commanding officer of the US garrison, to describe Tiaong as "a criminal community" in early 1902, after the zoning of the town and the exhaustive interrogation of its citizens had uncovered such two-faced activities. Johnston also accused the guerrilla chiefs of coercing the townspeople to continue resisting American occupation. (Ileto, 2002) There is some truth in this, and one might thus readily slot the Tiaong principales' wartime activities into the boss-faction-violence paradigm, as Sidel does in his account of boss-mayor, and later General,

Aguinaldo. But Captain Johnston's judgment is also a manifestation of US pacification discourse; it constructs as much as it reflects "reality." It is, furthermore, only one among several judgments or voices in the documentary file. The richness of the stories themselves belies any attempt to slot Tiaong's civilian and military leaders into any particular mold. In any case, it would be a real challenge to reduce to local despotism the story of Isidro's grandson, Congressman Narciso Herrera Umali, who was accused of being a "Huk-coddler," stripped from office, and jailed by Defense Secretary Magsaysay.

In conclusion, let me situate this snapshot of Tiaong and Dolores within the broader panorama of political paradigms and local history. One characteristic of the "municipal boss" thesis is that it reduces the narrative of 19th century Philippines to the rise of a predatory local elite that would become the mafia bosses of the 20th century. Says Sidel,

> Gobernadorcillos exercised judicial and executive powers, enforcing Spanish legal statutes, collecting taxes, administering corvee labor, controlling local police forces, and serving as the local business agents of the alcaldes mayores. As agents of the colonial state, their power rested essentially in law and puwesto-position within the state . . . By the end of the nineteenth century, the basis of local strongman rule had shifted from personal martial prowess and armed followings to resources drawn from the colonial state and private capital.

The only "check" on the predatory inclinations of this municipal elite are said to be the Spanish priests who by the 20th century had left the scene. This account leaves out entirely the crucial roles played by figures like Isidro Herrera and Padre Inocencio. They were fully part of the town elite. After all, Isidro's wider clan produced all sorts of municipal officials in Tiaong. But they are better classified as part of the rural intelligentsia, a middle element.

In a recent essay, "Middle Class Politics: The Philippine Experience," Temario Rivera calls our attention to the fact that "in the country's political history, the middle classes have in fact played important political roles in varying conjunctures since the declaration of independence in 1946." He stresses that fractions of this middle class operate both within and outside the control of the state. One cannot predict the roles that this class can play, and their activities have ranged "from right-wing conservatism and radicalism to liberal and left-wing political causes." In order to fully understand the various shifts in democratic politics, or the authoritarianism of Marcos, we must look closely at the workings of this class whether in government or in opposition.

Reflecting the standard narratives of Philippine history, Rivera locates the educated middle class in urbanized areas, dates its birth in the US colonial period, and observes its rise as a political force after 1946. I would suggest that a middle element (which is not necessarily identical to a "middle class") could be identified as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, not just in the cities but in small towns as well. In fact, the middle element is both absent and present in the "bossism" thesis drawn from Sidel's research on Cavite municipalities. It is absent in the sense that active politics has been reduced to the bosses and other strongmen that structural factors have produced; it is present in the sense that someone from within that society had had to write, to produce, the data on the excesses of municipal politicians that Sidel could then harness for his paradigm-building. In other words, for a boss-mayor Luico to be known there had to be a Juan Rabellana to write the complaint – this is where I would locate the middle element in Dolores.

One question that I raised earlier is what Rabellana's allegations would look like if they were read as part of a whole file of documents on the Luico case instead of being fished out of context to prove a point. Did he speak the whole truth? Did he embellish the facts to destroy a political opponent, or at least to tarnish the reputation of rising Judge Recto, if not Senator Quezon himself? Even in the 1861 case that I have read exhaustively, a strong argument can

be made for "black propaganda" conducted against the priest. Each case needs to be judged carefully from as wide an array of sources as can be obtained. Rivera's point that the "middle class" has been an indeterminate entity whose fractions could put their talents to contradictory aims and purposes, is relevant here.

What I have found in my research on Tiaong, Dolores and Candelaria are the conditions in those towns that have led to predatory behavior and local despotism, true, but also expressions among the town elite themselves of the common-good or a sense of community, and the need to assert oneself or one's group in order to attain justice and fairness. These sentiments are not just the effects of recent democratizing experiences, the birth of the radical movement, or, as is commonly stated in our textbooks, modern education since American-era tutelage. They were already present in those "backward" and "crime-ridden" towns from the 1860s in a form that was, of course, suited to those times or to the structural conditions prevailing then. The problem is, while we recognize that the likes of Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar and Apolinario Mabini originated from similar towns in the Tagalog provinces, we view them as having already moved out of this "feudal" environment dominated by some despot or other. Perhaps this is a natural consequence of their relegated status as "national" heroes.

The fact is that many of these Rizal, del Pilar or Mabini types were in the towns, had never left, or had returned from their sojourns. They were part and parcel of the municipal government complex that could be dominated by a boss-mayor, but not always, and maybe not even as often as our current EDSA 2 buzzwords lead us to believe. If Rizal had stayed or returned home for good he could have ended up being an Isidro Herrera or a Juan Rabellana or, if he had lived much longer, maybe even a Mayor Luico. I can accept the Sidel thesis that municipal bossism's origins can be found in the nineteenth century. I submit, however, that we can only understand "real existing bossism" if this is located within a field of possible responses to structural conditions, and if we recognize that its materialization also spawned the elements that would critique and possibly subvert it. A "history

from above" should exhibit the same sensitivity to the complex interplay of structures and lived experiences that we have come to expect from a "history of the inarticulate." ❖

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