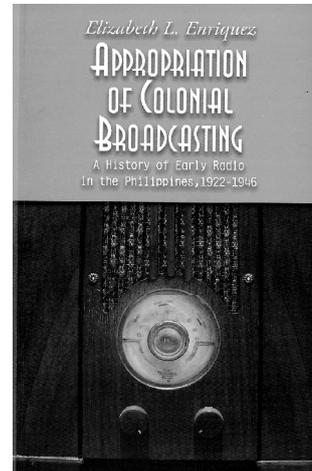


Reading Radio Texts
Ricardo T. Jose



Book Review of
***Appropriation of Colonial Broadcasting:
A History of Early Radio in the Philippines, 1922-1946***
By Elizabeth L. Enriquez
Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008
(235 pp with CD)

For too long the history of Philippine mass media has waited to be written. In this volume, Elizabeth L. Enriquez has presented media practitioners, scholars, and the general public with a book that will establish itself as a classic in its field, and sets new levels for presentation and analysis of its subject matter.

The history of radio in the Philippines is colorful, filled with individuals of different persuasions and personalities. First, radio was introduced to the Philippines during the American colonial period. The colonial accoutrements were there, as Enriquez aptly points out: business interests (both in selling radios and advertising products made in the United States or U.S.), dovetailing with the colonial policy of molding Filipinos in the American image. What

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better medium to use than the new technology of radio which could reach anyone who could afford a radio set?

But the Americans did not have the last say. The thrust of this book is how Filipinos appropriated the colonial tool of radio and made it their own; how, in the process of its growth and development, the medium was indigenized or Filipinized. In fact although the station owners were mainly American, the broadcasters were Filipino and they catered to the Filipino audiences' tastes and developed their own styles.

This is a pioneering work. There have been earlier, shorter histories of Philippine radio, among them the standard work by American John Lent. In fact, much of modern radio and media theory did come from the U.S. But these works tended to be very brief, more of outlines or anecdotal works rather than fully developed histories. Others were difficult to access as they were not widely available. Sources were scattered, and the ephemeral nature of radio programs was such that very few remained to be documented and analyzed. Most scripts were simply thrown away after use, thus resulting in a shortage of this type of primary material. Few radio programs were recorded then, considering the difficulty and cost of audio recording technology in those days (i.e., using heavy equipment to cut disks; magnetic recordings were still experimental then). The destruction in Manila in 1945 resulted in the loss of many documents and historical materials, not to mention the destruction of radio stations themselves. Thus the early attempts at writing histories of radio were brief and incomplete.

Enriquez has done an excellent job of tracking down various types of sources and tying them up together into a cohesive and probing narrative. A quick glance at the notes and bibliography reveals the great amount of research done – from archival materials in the U.S. National Archives (it is ironic that there is no similar institution covering the same area here), to periodicals of that era, to articles and documents in Japanese and interviews with surviving radio personalities or their next of kin. Enriquez was



Koko Trinidad (above) and Tiya Dely Magpayo (leftmost, picture on the right). With Tiya Dely are Chichay (center), Dely Atay-Atayan (rightmost), and Andoy Balun-Balunan (sitting). (Source: ***Appropriation of Colonial Broadcasting: A History of Early Radio in the Philippines, 1922-1946***, pp. 100 and 158.)



fortunate enough to have documented the lives and stories of some of these radio greats, such as Francisco “Koko” Trinidad and Fidela “Tiya Dely” Magpayo. Both have since passed away, “Tiya Dely” only last September 1, 2008. In documenting these personalities and assembling the vast amount of historical material, Enriquez is to be commended. The amount of research is very impressive, and much information is unearthed and brought back to life.

But this book is not just a compendium of data; it is not a simple chronicle or tabulation of radio stations, dates of first broadcasts and radio station owners. It is an interpretative history and discusses radio not by and for itself, but within the context of the colonial administration, war, and changing peoples’ lives. In short it relates radio with its milieu, and in the process brings out the emergence of a Filipino medium from its colonial beginnings.

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Enriquez is careful not to focus entirely on Manila; she also brings in stations in Cebu to show that Filipinization was not a monopoly of Manila.

To situate the general reader, Enriquez starts by providing the concepts, theories, and unique features of constructing a history of Philippine radio. She then explains her sources and methods, before proceeding to the history itself. She also includes a brief history of U.S. radio which is very important in situating Philippine radio. One gets to understand how strongly molded the management and broadcast styles of Philippine radio were influenced by the U.S. in concrete terms. (For example, the origin of the radio call signs such as KZRH – K standing for radio stations west of the Mississippi). In essence, she covers two climactic periods in Philippine history, during which time radio in the Philippines was born and adapted to Philippine conditions: the American colonial period and the Second World War (Japanese occupation) in the Philippines. Enriquez shows how radio, while initially serving colonial ends, grew and matured, and assumed its own character, beyond colonial aims. Radio could be used – and was used – as a form of resistance against the colonizer through critical commentaries and indirect hits at the Americans. But the importance of Filipino radio emerged during the Japanese occupation, when Filipino broadcasters risked their lives to broadcast the Voice of Freedom and defy Japanese control and propaganda. Enriquez spotlights the radio heroes who have been largely forgotten by later generations.

Enriquez then concludes by showing how radio was not simply accepted by Filipinos without question. While there was some very obvious copying (or mimicry still evident to this day), there was more of appropriation – molding the medium to suit Filipino needs and temperament – and even resistance. Radio eventually became a form of Filipino cultural expression.

The book ends with some comments on the author's experiences and lessons in constructing this history, as a guide or inspiration to future researchers and writers. Enriquez points out

that her work is one way of looking at Philippine radio's past, and advises: "More histories should then be written, from as many viewpoints as possible, in order to enrich our knowledge of the past. Then we might have a fuller view of the present."

The book particularly benefits from Enriquez being a radio veteran herself. She writes as a practitioner, familiar with the ins and outs of the industry. Her own experience and insights into the radio industry proved valuable in writing this history. As an insider she could identify issues and points which outsiders would not generally be aware of.

Since this is a history of radio in the Philippines, audio recordings of actual broadcasts, announcers and music of the period are likewise invaluable in evaluating radio's performance. Enriquez has very thoughtfully provided readers (buyers) of the book with a compact disc (CD) containing period music recordings and a recording of Gen. Wainwright's surrender of Corregidor in May 1942.

Equally interesting and important are the photographs reproduced in the book, many of them published for the first time. The pictures give more life to the text as the individuals, studios and ads can be seen, not through the mists of time but as clearly as they were when they were still current.

Any history cannot hope to be complete – one cannot hope to find every radio program, every radio announcer, and every radio ad here. That should not be expected – and this is pointed out by the author herself. One shortcoming is the reactions of listeners, since surveys were not yet in practice then. However, perhaps a little more depth could have been given to the owners and founders of the radio stations – Henry Herman, Isaac Beck, Samuel Gaches who were very important Americans in the pre-war Philippines. What made them decide to open their stations? How much did they benefit from them? Publicity-wise, they reaped much, but this is not too clear in the book. A little more exploration into control measures might have been made, especially since some news anchors and analysts were considered dangerous by both

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Filipino and American authorities. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the local police did watch over some broadcasters before the war. Did the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and security regulations apply to Philippine radio? There are, too, a few typographical errors which are distracting to the discerning reader.

But this is not meant as a complete history of Philippine radio. In fact, as the author notes, there can never be a complete, objective history, given the gaps in sources. But Enriquez, in this book, presents a history of the early years of Philippine radio which will be hard to match. She has set a standard in the writing of mass media histories that raises the level of scholarship in institutional history. Doubtless there are other scattered historical materials on radio to be found (there are other articles in the American Chamber of Commerce Journal, for example). But they will not alter the basic thesis Enriquez propounds, for it is sound.

As the book ends in 1946, the need for a follow-up volume on the years following becomes obvious. That should be a challenge for future researchers because the post-war Philippine radio had its own high points.

Enriquez and the UP Press should be congratulated on this very readable, thorough and well-researched book. It should be must-reading for media practitioners so that they will be aware of the roots of their craft – and the pride in being a Filipino.

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