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Slum As A Way of Life

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Book Reviews

SLUM AS A WAY OF LIFE: A Study of Coping Behavior in an Urban Environment. By F. Landa Jocano, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1975. xxvi, 318 pages.

Virtually every city in the world has its slums and Manila is no exception. The popular stereotype portrays the slum as a physically deteriorated area of the city peopled by the poor, many of whom prey on other urbanites through illegal activities ranging from bag-snatching and pickpocketing to running brothels and engineering house thefts. Jocano's *Slum as a Way of Life* does not so much dispel these stereotypes — in many ways, alas, it reinforces them. Rather the book tries to maneuver the reader into a position of accepting slum dwellers as they are and empathizing with them, certainly a laudable stance. He explains their behavior, values, and attitudes as adaptive in distinctive physical and social surroundings. This is of course the standard anthropological approach, and it should come as no surprise that Jocano, being an anthropologist, should take it.

Assuming this context, let us look at the way the author has carried out the anthropological mandate to give the reader an inside view of community life. This is possible, according to anthropologists, only if one actually lives in the community over a long period of time, the desired span being no less than one year.

Jocano and his wife lived in Looban, Sta. Ana, for over three years. Their arrival apparently elicited no more attention than any of the other five to ten families who move in or out of the community daily. To the neighborhood people, they were simply shanty-dwelling residents like the rest of the local populace. Never did Jocano betray this illusion of sameness by going out with pencil and questionnaire in hand to interview local residents. Rather all his information was gathered through informal chats in the course of friendly neighborhood visits. Questions and answers were committed to memory and later recorded more permanently when he returned to the privacy of his Looban home. This technique was bolstered by extensive participant-observation entailing a good deal of "hanging around" street corners, bars, and sari-sari stores.

In this manner, Jocano covered 300 households encompassing some 2,797 members. From them he gives us an idea of the demographic profile of Looban — household composition, province of origin and mother-tongue language grouping (presumably of the household head, since this was not specified), and occupations of the 567 gainfully employed adults 15 years and above. Comparative figures are listed for Manila as a whole in 1969 derived from the Manila social welfare office study, *Manila: Its Needs and Resources*. Unfortunately, Jocano lists only frequencies for Looban, leaving it to the reader to compute the percentages that would allow the desired comparisons. This is but one of the many complaints one can lodge about the rather carelessly prepared tables. While Jocano's general abhorrence of standard tables might be traceable to his traditionally anti-statistical ethnographic bias, one would wish that when he does go to the trouble of preparing a demographic chapter, he would present the material more systematically.

Jocano's strength lies in description. He gives us an interesting picture of the community — its daily round of activities; the process of growing up in slum street-corner gangs, deviant females' activities, family life and neighborhood norms — and concludes with the personal insights he gained from his three-year slum involvement. The outsider little acquainted with the inner workings of such neighborhoods can gain valuable information and empathize with its people as Jocano leads him on a guided tour of this "way of life." He will understand the importance of the *kalye* (street), *tianggi* (corner store), *kainan* (restaurant), *pagupitan* (barbershop), and bar as "the major ecological units" where "norms and values are defined, developed, modified, or discarded." If the reader is a woman, however, she will readily revise in her own mind Jocano's citation of these sites as "key points in appraising Looban life style," and add "from a man's point of view." Like many of his male colleagues, Jocano falls into the trap of describing the community largely in male terms. A less chauvinist view would at least acknowledge another, sometimes overlapping but nonetheless distinctive, communications system embodied in the daily round of *women's* activities.

This tendency to select those points that interest him as presenting a "holistic" view of the community and shunting the rest aside is of course an occupational hazard faced by all ethnographers. As one who has also studied Manila slums, this reviewer finds particularly disquieting Jocano's tendency to emphasize, indeed almost sensationalize, the "deviant" groups. While the descriptions are undoubtedly accurate — down to their most intimate and titillating details in the case of young women describing how they were lured into prostitution — one wonders how much this attention to deviance contributes to the "holistic" portrayal of slum dweller's lives.

For example, the author lists 110 bargirls and massage attendants out of 1758 adults, or presumably 879 women. Adding on the more than 100 outright prostitutes, these 200 or so deviant women would represent less than

one-fourth of the Looban's adult female populace. While this proportion may well justify the special focus on prostitutes of various types, it should also make mandatory a description of the *rest* of the three-fourths of women not engaged in prostitution. By failing to give a balanced picture of the community, Jocano sells it short. Whether he intends to or not, he strengthens the outsiders' view of slumdwellers as basically criminals and prostitutes, hardly a service to people who can also legitimately be portrayed as godfearing poor people striving to make their way in the city through the normal rather than deviant channels.

This is but one of several contradictions apparent in the book. On the one hand, Jocano deplures surveys as inadequate for reaching an understanding of slum life; on the other, he uses them himself. What he really is against, one realizes, is the *open* pencil-and-questionnaire interview, not the gathering of mass data as such. Moreover, he sets up straw men in, for example, rejecting "the stereotype of normative behavior of Filipinos as presented in the literature — that of meek individuals who aspire for smooth interpersonal relations (SIR) all the time." Stressing the amount of conflict that actually goes on in the slum, he "disproves" this alleged stereotype.

But the first proponent of SIR never implied such a conclusion in the first place! Lynch's "Social Acceptance" did not suggest SIR as operational "all the time." His later "Social Acceptance Reconsidered" discusses in fact the role of conflict in conjunction with SIR. One wonders why Jocano continues to raise issues long since put to rest, especially when he himself states (p. 191) that avoidance patterns, bolstered by the value-orientations of *hiya*, *pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, and *amor propio* (p. 179) are two common and effective strategies for tackling problems; or put his way, "these are valid and acceptable coping behavior" (p. 191).

Part of the problem, it would appear, stems from Jocano's "loner" orientation. He seems to want to do his "ethnographic thing" almost in a vacuum. One looks in vain in this and other of his writings for references to comparable studies of people in situations similar to those he has investigated. For then one could begin to draw from existing empirical data the comparisons and eventually the theory that anthropologists and scholars in general are committed to develop. He cites quotations from Redfield, Nadel, and Kluckhohn, true anthropological giants; but they are referred to usually for supportive quotations only.

The fact is, a number of reputable scholars have written on Manila slums, yet no single mention is made of their works, e.g., Aprodicio Laquian, *Slums are for People* (1965), Richard Poethig's *Cities are for Living* (1972), Richard Stone's "Mahirap: A Squatter Community in a Manila Suburb" (1968), Sylvia Guerrero and Elsa P. Jurado's "A Microview: Low Income Neighborhoods" in *Metro Manila Today and Tomorrow* (1972), The Manila Complex Study (1971), and this reviewer's numerous articles on Tondo slums

from 1968 onward. By ignoring the works of his colleagues here and indeed of numerous slum studies in other developing societies, Jocano dissipates the understanding promised in his title. Where he does succeed is merely in adding still another body of specialized data to the literature. Other social scientists will have to grapple with the problem of building more appropriate theoretical models of Asian cities.

The slum may indeed be "more than a phenomena of urbanization," as Jocano says (p. 6). But until someone defines more clearly just how it fits into the urbanization and modernization processes in a developing society like the Philippines, the policy makers whom Jocano wants to enlighten will be hard pressed to construct the appropriate conceptual frameworks, much less action programs. They could rightfully demand that social scientists writing books on the subject should do this for them. For all the insights Jocano has provided them – and let us give him his due, they are many and valuable – he must be faulted on several counts, namely: (1) not presenting a rounded picture of Looban by overstressing deviance, by taking a heavily male orientation; (2) unnecessarily reinforcing many unfavorable stereotypes of slum communities; (3) ignoring simple canons of statistical survey methodology, with which other anthropologists seem to have little difficulty; (4) failing to build on the comparable local and foreign literature on slums; and, therefore (5) not adding sufficiently to the building of social science theory and the policy implications that can emerge from it. Jocano yielded many insights in *Slum as a Way of Life*. He could have contributed more.

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AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PHILIPPINE BIBLIOGRAPHIES: 1965–1974. By Donn V. Hart. (Occasional Papers no. 4). DeKalb, Illinois: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1974. 160 pages. Paper \$7.50.

This bibliography of Philippine bibliographies continues the work of providing indispensable tools for scholars concerned with the Philippines begun by Charles O. Houston, Jr. in his 1960 work covering the period 1900–1957, and Shiro Saito in his 1966 work, adding bibliographies published 1958–1964. Hart's compilation brings the list up to 1974, as well as including items missed by his predecessors, or excluded from their scope (such as natural science bibliographies which Saito did not attempt to include in his *The Philippines: A Review of Bibliographies*). Moreover, Hart extends his scope to bibliographies in languages other than English, even including Japanese, though he concedes that his coverage of the latter language is probably very incomplete. Only bibliographies solely devoted to Spanish-language items are excluded from the compilation. Occasional bibliographies that are