

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Saving the Earth: The Philippine Experience edited by Eric Gamalinda and Sheila Coronel

Review Author: Queena N. Lee-Chua

Philippine Studies vol. 47, no. 2 (1999): 281–285

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

The sheer mass of detail make the reading often exasperating, even despairing. It convinces one of the sheer necessity of building the state and its apparatus as essential in the process of long-term development.

However, these are the two main failures of the book. First, it does not present some detailed proposals on how this can be undertaken. It lacks a detailed model of a working rational-legal bureaucracy to appraise rigorously the actions and policies of the CB and the present BSP. This appraisal can then yield workable proposals on how to strengthen the bureaucracy of the BSP. This would have been an excellent extension of the work done by Filomeno Sta. Ana and colleagues in *The State and the Market: Essays on a Socially Oriented Philippine Economy* where various policy directions have been proposed. It may well be not the aim of Hutchcroft, but it is certainly disappointing that after a thorough analysis of the banking system, a set of policy proposals—both ideal and workable—to redirect the banking system toward more developmental avenues is absent.

The other failure may well be an unfortunate case of timing. The book was clearly completed before the current economic crisis. This can be ascertained by the footnote on page 225 that quotes IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus rather presciently that the next international economic crisis "could well begin with a banking crisis." The banking system in the various East Asian economies has been pinpointed as the spur that caused a severe economic dislocation throughout the region. There seems to be a consensus that the Philippine banking system has been more resilient than the others. One would like to see how Hutchcroft's approach would deal with this issue. The possibilities are quite tantalizing. Were the bureaucrats in the other East Asian countries also at fault? Are there basic commonalities between bureaucrat capitalists and booty capitalists? Which capitalism would survive and recover faster or more steadily?

Nonetheless, this book is certainly a welcome contribution to political economy and economic history in the Philippines. One hopes it can generate more controversy, if only to focus more discussion and action on feasible state-building in the country today.

Victor Verida
Department of Economics
Ateneo de Manila University

Saving the Earth: The Philippine Experience. Edited by Eric Gamalinda and Sheila Coronel. Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1993. 3rd edition. 203 pages.

It has been predicted that the next millenium will be the age of high technology. Although the computer revolution started in the middle of this century, it shows no signs of abating. Within the span of only a few decades,

giant machines have given way to pocket-sized wonders which can process information with a speed and power that we could only yearn for twenty years ago. In fact, the worldwide Y2K bug problem is primarily one of underestimation. Never in their wildest dreams did the computer pioneers of the 40s and 50s imagine that their invention would become so ubiquitous that a mere shortcut in inputting dates (of all things) would lead to global panic and the consequent laying-out of millions of dollars just to deal with that single pesky problem.

Yet technological development often comes at a high price. Philosophers and social scientists write commentaries on the alleged "dehumanization" of society obsessed with machine rather than human interaction. Psychologists and parents worry that their clients and their children spend more time communicating with a faceless entity (and who knows what else) rather than with their friends and loved ones. The ethical implications of high technology have spurred heated moral and religious debate on issues ranging from genetic engineering to euthanasia.

Another frequent victim is the environment. The need for more power to mechanize even more areas of society necessitates utilization of more resources (most of which, in the Philippine case, are non-renewable). The national desperation to catch up with our more technologically-advanced Southeast Asian neighbors (embodied in the slogan "Philippines 2000") has relegated our environment even more into the background. Our basic human greed for more luxuries requires more ways of earning money, whether by fair means or foul (including illegal logging, illegal mining, illegal wild-life trading).

Saving the Earth: The Philippine Experience documents the various ways the environment is pillaged, in the name of progress, greed, or whatever. All the articles had first been published in major dailies, but this redundancy (especially in Part One: Forests, which includes nine stories on illegal logging alone) is not grating—indeed, such repetition only serves to highlight the repeated rape of our resources. Without exception, all the stories have the ring of doom, but the writers (almost all of whom are journalists, most good investigative ones) can be forgiven for that—the environmental crisis is too severe not to be taken seriously.

On the surface the book seems to be a semi-scientific tract, but in reality, it is a book about power—power misused, power abused. Again and again the articles reveal that the horrifying desecration of our forests, our mines, our seas, our air, our wildlife, our energy resources, our dumpsites is the result of cold-blooded systematic abuse of influential people—presidents, senators, tycoons, other elite. Environmental destruction starts not so much when the logger's chainsaw fells a *lauan* or the fisherman blasts a reef but when a high-ranking official successfully lobbies for repeal of the log ban or bribes a Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)

official. The fate of our environment is usually sealed in the political and economic corridors of power.

Let us list this litany of shame:

- Alan Robles studies seven logging areas and delves into the murky politics of logging. He also does a major case study of Cagayan, which used to be "heir to a priceless legacy: a magnificent stretch of mountainous virgin forest...a legacy that is being spent wantonly" (p. 21).
- Criselda Yabes zeroes in on the wanton destruction of the forests of Samar, where the people (most of whom are poor) are virtually helpless. In Bukidnon, farmers have decided to take united action (including fasting) to call attention to their plight, as portrayed by Joy Hofer. Some fisherfolk (in regions ranging from Negros to Bicol and Laguna) have also campaigned against dynamite fishing, as Eric Gamalinda discovers. Gamalinda also reports on depleted fishing grounds, which have driven starving villages to hunt dolphins for food.
- In Isabela, a powerful clan (with direct connections to some of the highest positions in the region) controls the forests—and the lives of the people it purports to serve. Interestingly, writer Red Batario also reports being the target of an attempted bribe.
- Rita Villadiego laments on the "last days of the Sierra Madre" (p.41); Horacio Severino revisits Ormoc and tries to make sense of the environmental tragedy there; Mae Buenaventura goes to Iloilo and discovers that diminishing forests leave our country little protection against the El Nino; Marites Danguilan-Vitug boldly identifies politicians who have strong connections to commercial logging interests which have flagrantly violated the law. (Read this book in order to know who they are.) In a separate article, Danguilan-Vitug also reports on the danger of CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons, for word buffs) to the ozone layer and ultimately, to world climate.
- Raul Alibutud describes the Calancan Bay, the formerly rich fishing ground in Marinduque now nearly barren of marine life because of mine wastes.
- Illegal mining is rampant in T'boli ancestral lands, courtesy of government officials and military personnel. Aside from the desecration of their homeland, Joey Lozano warns that the T'bolis themselves may soon become a lost tribe.
- In Palawan, "it is not what you know but whom you know in the province that counts" (p. 91) and this is reflected in the battle over Tubbataha Reef, described in detail by Yasmin Arquiza. In perhaps the most scientifically-detailed article in the book, Arquiza also reports on cyanide-flavored fish, especially expensive ones like groupers and humphead wrasse—the stuff of lauriats in Chinese restaurants in Hongkong, Singapore, Taiwan, Manila. A handy reference chart comparing normal fish to

dynamited ones is included (p. 109). Beware of fish with reddened eyes (due to ruptured capillaries), loosened scales, bloody epidermis and gills, dull color, soft texture, ruptured and bloody air bladder, crushed internal organs, bloody vertebral column, reddish brown flesh (instead of the normal translucent color), ruptured spine (signifying internal hemorrhage), fractured abdominal ribs, bloody body cavity. She also writes on illegal wildlife trading, and in still another article (co-written with Lan Mercado Carreon), she directs our attention to Mount Apo, a national park which is the site of a battle between the Philippine National Oil Corporation and the DENR

- Isagani de Castro insists that the Calabarzon (Cavite-Laguna-Batangas-Rizal-Quezon) Special Development Project may not be as rosy as it seems—more industries equal more pollution. In Leyte, a similar situation exists, as investigated by Sol Juvida.
- Henry Empeno writes on a coal plant in Zambales which aims to answer Luzon's energy demands, but to which many residents are still in opposition; Benjamin Pimental and Louella Lasola revisits Subic and Clark, and finds that the most lasting legacy of the US may be environmental damage; Jo Soto Tipon discovers "another Smokey Mountain" (p. 172)—the Payatas open-pit dump which may be filtering poisonous toxins into Metro Manila's water supply.

Filled with dates, names, statistics, *Saving the Earth* is investigative journalism at its best. However, the very nature of the articles also contributes to what I believe to be their biggest shortcoming: lack of scientific explanations for the claims they make. Aside from Arquiza's article on cyanide-flavored and dynamited fish ("Dining with Danger") and to some extent, Alan Robles' piece on illegal logging ("An Ecological Crisis"), none of the other articles even ventures into popular science explanations. Danguilan-Vitug's story on the CFC's ("Something in the Air") does attempt a drawing of the effect of these toxins on the environment (p. 122), but it would have been more effective with a short accompanying explanation of how CFC's lead to ozone layer depletion. A few pages later (p. 127), a chart showing the ozone layer between the stratosphere and the troposphere is depicted, but again, with no accompanying explanation. On the next page (p. 127), graphs are drawn on skin cancer deaths, but no mention is made of the source (I assume the statistics are from Western samples). Science writers (and investigative journalists) should be careful in throwing around such data—yes, ozone depletion does lead to skin cancer, but then again, recent research has shown that Filipinos (and other Malay groups) may perhaps have the *least* number of skin cancer cases in the world. In short, skin cancer is not to be sniffed at, but the chances of a Filipino getting it are certainly a lot less than the average American.

As for the other articles, most of the accompanying non-textual material are (cute) pictures of endangered wildlife (the tarsier, the Philippine eagle, the tamaraw, the Palawan peacock pheasant, marine turtles, and so on). Perhaps a separate edition can be made of this successful (winner of the 1991 National Book Award) book—with colored pages to do justice to the animals and habitats pictured therein!

Still, written in a lively and engaging style (which has become the trademark of the PCIJ), this book is one of the best local reports I have read on the environment. It is must reading not only for environmentalists but students, teachers, lawmakers, public officials, and anyone who cares about our world.

Queena N. Lee-Chua
Mathematics Department
Ateneo de Manila University

Wordsmith with a Slingshot: The Gerry Gil Book. Edited with an Introduction by James S. Ong. With a Foreword by Cipriano S. Roxas. Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1997.

The sudden death of the journalist Gerry Gil in 1995 when he was but 53 stunned his colleagues and readers in the *Manila Standard*. Aside from being one of the country's finest columnists, he was, at one time or another, a seminarian, campus pamphleteer, doctoral fellow, population researcher, and psychology professor. He was the associate editor of his paper and its opinion editor at the time of his death. He was also the treasurer of the Philippine Press Institute and a teacher at the Ateneo de Manila University, the University of the Philippines, and the Asian Institute of Journalism.

But beyond all these, he was a columnist par excellence. We should thank Phoenix Publishing for coming up with *Wordsmith with a Slingshot: The Gerry Gil Book*. As Jimmy Ong, who edited and introduced the book, put it: "Gerry's opinion writing was superb [because] he was extremely literate. This is not always true of journalists . . . The editorials, more serious and weighty, were marvels of construction, clarity, and phrasing. The columns had all of the latter, plus a bit more whimsy and wordplay."

In an issue of the *Philippines Herald* dated Feb. 25, 1972, Gerry wrote on "The Tiger Lady's Fascinating Past." He went to town satirizing the life of "a smokey-eyed beauty [with] sweet singing voice who married a powerful man . . . She is known to have gone after the wife of another official who happened to have a necklace that offended this powerful lady."

Who is this woman?

"Yes, indeed, Chiang Ching, better known to the world as Madame Mao, is one of the most powerful—as well as intriguing—women of this century."