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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

The social arrangements that human societies weave around elements of nature—land, trees, and animals, as those discussed in this issue—are mediated by specific ways of life that influence the manner in which these are perceived. The change in the perception of trees from merely useable wood to commercial timber started in the country from around the mid-nineteenth century, as Greg Bankoff demonstrates. Bankoff observes that the major impetus for the market in timber was domestic demand. Timber extraction was also justified because trees were cast as “enemies of men.” His argument contradicts the prevailing view that the capitalist exploitation of forest resources occurred only during the American colonial period.

The changing manner in which crocodiles are regarded implies a complex history of culture change. Augusto Gatmaytan suggests in his account of a Manobo ritual that crocodiles are a major actor in the spirit-world. Most Filipinos today probably see the Philippine crocodile from a disenchanted perspective as simply an animal to be feared or a predator to be exterminated. But a dramatic change has occurred in San Mariano, Isabela province, where the crocodile has become an object of conservation efforts and a source of pride. Jan van der Ploeg and Merlijn van Weerd document this change in attitude and attribute the success of conservation efforts to the local government unit, concerned local groups, and an active citizenry. Contrary to fears about the pitfalls of devolution, its application in natural resource management has resulted in an unprecedented success story.

In charting the changing views of nature the linear narrative is quite strong, such as that implied by the transformation from subsistence to

commercial forestry and from magical to disenchanted, and now protected, crocodile. This linear trajectory dominates the notion of landholding, which usually posits a transition from communal ownership to individualized property. In Philippine historiography, the preponderant plot tells of *the* European system supplanting indigenous practice.

Glenn Anthony May's critical intervention proves that this accepted historical tenet rests on very slim evidence. He reveals that John Leddy Phelan's frequently cited proposition about "communal" pre-Hispanic land tenure is mistaken because, at least in Luzon, individual landholding definitely existed alongside the common lands of the whole settlement. Moreover, May points out that an analogous pattern of multiple landholding schemes existed in Spain. It can be argued that what Spain introduced here was a formally institutionalized system of private ownership that built upon indigenous notions of individual property, which in time resulted in an extremely iniquitous land distribution.

In reaction to the colonial past, the idea of a preconquest communalism is attractive. In 1977 the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) codified this view, thus imposing an inappropriate legal mantle that may prove injurious to those it seeks to protect.

Given the grave implications of a fundamental error in Philippine historiography, May's proposition merits serious discussion. *Philippine Studies* has invited three commentators to share their views on his article: anthropologist Fernando N. Zialcita, and historians Jaime B. Veneracion and Fr. John N. Schumacher, S.J. With grace May declined the offer of a rejoinder.

Grappling with another error in the literature essayed by John N. Garvan's pioneering ethnography of the Manobo is Gatmaytan's exposition of the *hakyadan*. It is not, he argues, a "community celebration" or a healing ritual per se but an individual's performance of an obligation to honor that person's relationship with a particular spirit, set in the context of a kin group. The richness of Manobo culture is further seen in *The Song from the Mango Tree* that is featured in the section on Book Reviews.

Old scholarship debunked. Nonlinear, unconventional possibilities explored. Please read on.