

# **philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints**

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

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**James F. Eder and Oscar L. Evangelista's, eds.**

*Palawan and Its Global Connections*

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*Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*  
vol. 65 no. 4 (2017): 526–30

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She shows that pre-Culion techniques of seclusion and isolation were already in practice at the Hospital de San Lazaro in Mayhaligue in present-day Manila long before the arrival of the Americans. However, she fails to pursue the inquiry as to why both the Spanish and the Americans came to prefer the carceral approach despite differing in the ways they framed their publics. Whereas Spanish missionaries viewed Filipino Hansenites as recipients of Catholic charity and relief work, American sanitarians saw them as colonial citizens entitled to certain rights but deprived of others. De Castro's chapter could have concluded by bringing the readers' attention to the lack of therapy and leprosy's biological threat and repulsive manifestations as late-nineteenth-century conditions that favored banishment and isolation as control regimes for both Spaniards and Americans. Instead, she throws off her reader by saying that the Spanish should be credited for being the first to implement leprosy control measures that are usually credited to the Americans, harking back to a trite complaint that Filipino scholars remain estranged from the Spanish language, continue to rely on English translations, and harbor an "extreme anti-Spanish stance" (58).

*Hidden Lives, Concealed Narratives: A History of Leprosy in the Philippines* reimagines the Philippine past from the perspective of the history of a disease and should pique the interest of scholars and nonscholars alike. The book is evidence of the continuing growth of the history of medicine and public health in the Philippines as a field of study. Although uneven in balance, the chapter essays are still welcome additions to the literature and the book should be followed through by similar projects, perhaps a history of leprosy in Southeast Asia. But if there is a book by the NHCP on another disease history in the offing, it is certainly worth looking forward to.

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JAMES F. EDER AND OSCAR L. EVANGELISTA, EDS.

## **Palawan and Its Global Connections**

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 392 pages.

*Palawan and Its Global Connections*, edited by James F. Eder and Oscar L. Evangelista, describes Palawan as the "land of the promise" blessed with

“beauty and abundance” (2). The volume is a collection of papers written by academics and development practitioners that situate, explore, and analyze Palawan’s rich cultural and natural treasures through the lens of competing dualities and power struggles manifested through state-society relations, cultural evolution and identity formation, and resource conservation and exploitation. The book, which is divided into three parts, provides in-depth discussion and analysis of these themes.

The first part highlights the evolution and (mal)development of the province of Palawan and its people. The contributing authors outline Palawan’s identity while underlining the influences of trade and migration. The second part examines and demonstrates the conflicting relationship between the conservation and exploitation of natural resources. It underlines the power dynamics between and across government bodies, capitalist institutions, as well as individuals and civil society groups, highlighting the pros and cons of development and how it can be made sustainable. The third part extends the discussion in the second part, with emphasis on the role and rights of indigenous peoples in the resource-extraction process. It is oriented towards advocacy, providing data and expert opinions that support the authors’ call for inclusive and responsible development. *Palawan and Its Global Connections* explores the underlying tensions involving culture, environment, and development. It emphasizes the pressing need to study and integrate sociopolitical issues in the study of the environment and natural resources and in the process makes a significant contribution to environment and development research.

Victor Paz opens the first part with a chapter that discusses the cultural and historical evolution of Palawan and its people. He challenges the traditionally accepted notion of land bridges connecting the Philippines to Southeast Asia during the prehistoric era, which the wave theory uses to explain the prehistoric migration of the islands’ earliest inhabitants. Paz argues that the concept of land bridges is derogatory and undermines human capabilities. He further explains that the existence of dry land passages, at the time, was a generally accepted notion (39); the way that they are used by proponents to explain migration depicts humans as incapable of crossing bodies of water. He argues instead for the presence of “maritime highways” that permitted trade and interaction between Palawan, neighboring Southeast Asian islands, and mainland Asia. He points to the remnants of sunken ships laden with trade wares found in the seas off Palawan to support this assertion.

These claims put Palawan in both a global and local position of relevance and serve as the basis for the author's pursuit of a glocal approach to history. Paz then encourages parallel discourses (59) on global and local perspectives, similar to his presentation of the history and development of Palawan.

Charles J-H Macdonald and Teresita D. Tajolosa's respective chapters discuss the downside to the more connected and hence more "open" Palawan. They examine the effects of trade, tourism, and immigration on the diversity and vitality of the cultures and languages in Palawan and its indigenous minorities. Macdonald focuses on the island's various minority vernaculars, while Tajolosa dedicates her work to the Batak people and their language. Their findings reveal the endangered condition of local vernaculars because of the locals' preference for the "dominant" languages of Tagalog and English. This situation is prompted by growing tourism and the increasing number of immigrants in the province. Both authors stress the importance of language in defining one's identity (85) such that they equate the death of a vernacular to the loss of one's culture and identity (75).

Oscar L. Evangelista and James F. Eder discuss Islam in Palawan and how migrant-origin (111) Muslims maintain their identity and at the same time manage their individual and collective relations with their non-Muslim neighbors, the state, and the variety of global Islamic influences reaching the island. Various Muslim groups in Palawan maintain their identities, partially through activities and associations established around mosques, which serve not just as places of worship but also as arenas for information exchange and cultural advancement. Although Muslims in Palawan form a visible minority that experiences some level of discrimination, their relationship with locals and the government is generally peaceful. Unlike in Mindanao, political Islam and Islamic separatism (134) have not gained much ground among Palawan's Muslims. One reason is the lack of historical grievance against the local Christian population. Another is that local governments function more effectively in Palawan than in many parts of Mindanao. Lastly, Muslims running for local political positions manage to succeed without politicizing religious identities (134).

The second part of the book contains four chapters that examine the duality of resource use and conservation. The residents' interaction with the environment is greatly influenced and bounded by their values and ideologies. Environmental governance influenced by neoliberalism, mainly

grounded on private property rights and the free market, according to Koki Seki, prompted the commodification of the environment—thus, the concept “natural resources.” Similarly, Wolfram Dressler utilizes the concept of first, second, and third nature to explain the current abuse of “abstracted nature” (198), a phenomenon in which people blur the realities of the state and the limits of the environment based on their needs, wants, and desires. Both authors highlight the reciprocity between agency and structure and its impact on environmental use and preservation.

Michael Fabinyi explains the influx of immigrants to Palawan as a result of the immense fishing opportunities offered by its rich marine life and resources. Since the growth of the fishing industry in Palawan during the 1960s, the municipalities of Coron and Busuanga have attracted foreign fishing companies, which have deprived local fishermen of opportunity and income. Moreover, the increasing trade in live reef fish for consumption and *muro-ami* fishing—a highly destructive technique that involves pounding coral reefs—is causing environmental and socioeconomic harm. These harmful effects include credit bondage, inhumane living conditions of fishermen, and large-scale environmental destruction that threaten the residents’ long-term livelihood security (153). Fabinyi warns about the potential consequences of these new forms of economic activity in the province.

Despite the apparent abuses of the environment as well as the evident harm posed to people brought about by the commodification of nature, there have been efforts on the part of both local and national government units as well as advocacy groups to address the environmental and socioeconomic challenges to development. The work of Rebecca L. Austin, for example, accounts for the tendencies of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to become utility-maximizing actors. Her chapter examines the policies set by the government and the programs initiated by NGOs and community groups aimed at sustainable and responsible resource use and how well these groups have been able to meet this objective. Her chapter also outlines possible areas of improvement in the participation of locals. Austin champions the valuable role of local communities in environmental preservation and in upholding human and environmental rights within the overarching web of power relations (243).

The third and final part of the book delves further into the duality of resource use and conservation while specifically underscoring how these

processes impact the lives and rights of indigenous groups in Palawan. The first two chapters deal with the mining and biofuel industries in the province and how their activities have harmed Palawan's environment and inhabitants despite the laws aimed to protect them. Dario Novellino and Dante A. Dalabajan initially present the gains that can be generated from these industries. Novellino illustrates Palawan as resource rich by citing the province's abundant mineral resources and natural gas reserves. Dalabajan notes that biofuel production is an opportunity for development, referring to *tuba-tuba* or *jatropha* biofuel production as "green gold" Palawan's supposed best bet to end poverty (293). Both authors, however, are also keen to present the downside of these industries highlighting environmental damage, which makes the indigenous vulnerable to the loss of ancestral abode, food shortages, and possible displacement.

The discussion by Eulalio R. Guieb III treads the same theme of inequality and vulnerabilities but focuses on the competing narratives of the Malampaya Sound, a body of water located in northwestern Palawan. He presents Malampaya Sound as a common resource pool that is exploited by the government and by private groups for personal and/or collective gain, against an image of Malampaya Sound as a protected area that needs preservation. Situated within this dynamic is the struggle of marginal communities seeking to participate in both the process of resource extraction and environmental preservation. Guieb underscores the plight of these marginal groups in the face of powerful groups, as manifested in songs and narratives (337).

Lastly, Noah Theriault promotes the overall theme of the book, social and environmental justice (364), by discussing the tale of the clash between Jewelmer, a pearl farming corporation, and Sambilog, a people's organization. Theriault underlines the urgency to include indigenous people's rights in environmental discourse and politics. In so doing, he caps off this cohesive collection of works that provide impetus for further analysis of Palawan's environmental politics vis-à-vis the quest for sustainable and responsible development. Overall, *Palawan and Its Global Connections* gives readers a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the island of Palawan, its peoples, culture, environment, history, development, and the dynamics and tensions within.

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