

## Chapter 8

### Estancia Revisited, 1974

The preceding chapters were based on research conducted in Estancia from late 1966 to early 1968. In October and November 1974, two years after the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, we visited Estancia for another three weeks, and there observed the end-result of a series of dramatic changes in the physical appearance, fishing technology, economy, and political life of the town. A few of the changes preceded or were independent of Martial Law, but most followed from it, whether intended or not. The brevity of the visit did not allow us to document them all fully. But, in view of the few accounts of the impact of Martial Law on the small towns of the Philippines as opposed to the more extensive reporting on Mindanao and Metro Manila, it seems worthwhile to describe at least briefly the major changes that had occurred.

#### *Physical Changes*

Approaching Estancia by road from Iloilo City, we could not help noting that the towns enroute appeared relatively unchanged since 1968. We were therefore unprepared for the physical improvements apparent upon arrival in Estancia. Lengthy sections of several streets had been concreted and more work was in progress. Metal signposts--with new names for all the streets honoring important figures in the history of the town--were now at all the corners. The market had new concrete flooring, better drainage, more roofed areas and two long stretches of brand new stalls. A large adjacent area was being reclaimed from the sea for further market expansion. A raised traffic island, filled with flowers, graced the major commercial street, and a large new cooperative store had been constructed where the old wooden gate to the fish market had been. Likewise, in comparison with 1968, the number of private houses of hollow block or wooden construction had substantially increased and many more homes seemed freshly painted. Most houses were relatively unchanged, but there was at least an outward appearance of increased prosperity.

Yet, there were negative signs as well. The long promised electrical system for the town had never materialized, and the previously operative municipal piped water system had completely broken down over a year before. Its repair, and badly needed expansion, seemed indefinitely delayed by conflicting desires of the municipal council and several provincial and national agencies. In January 1971, eight people were killed and over 10 meters of the municipal pier destroyed when an interisland steamer attempted to dock too rapidly. Three and a half years of claims, negotiations, and pleas with the government and the steamship company had produced only very partial repairs, and there was no indication when the pier might be fully serviceable again. In the meantime, larger ships refused to dock at the remaining portion of the pier for fear of further damaging the weakened structure, or themselves, on the debris still at the bottom. In consequence, direct shipments to Manila had sharply declined, and much more cargo was now being shipped via Iloilo City. The bus line to the City that had previously terminated in Estancia had gone out of business, but other lines based elsewhere and private trucks had apparently compensated for the loss. Altogether, many physical structures were improved, but many basic services remained problematic.

### *Technological Change*

As suggested in Chapter 3, fishing technology had been constantly evolving since 1900, but on our arrival in 1974 we did not anticipate another total transformation of the fishing gear. The *basnigan* and *largarete* that dominated the fishing industry in 1968 were no longer in use, and the few remaining boats in sight were permanently beached. In their place, a new gill-net fishing technique--totally unknown in Estancia in 1968--had taken over. The change-over had occurred in the year preceding our return, but especially in the last six months. The reasons soon became apparent.

Initially, the imposition of Martial Law did not affect the local fishing industry very much, and indeed its participants apparently smiled at the plight of local landowners suddenly concerned about retaining their holdings in the face of the newly stepped up land-reform program. But sometime in 1973 the Philippine Constabulary began to arrest people for violation of the long-standing, but little enforced, prohibition on the use of explosives in fishing.<sup>21</sup> It will be recalled that the deep-water fishing *basnigan* and *largarete* used small surface charges to stun the sardines, mackerels, and anchovies which gathered at their lights. These small explosions, ecologically harmless, reduced the fishes' awareness of and skittering away from the nets. On the other hand, many larger fish traditionally had been taken by the extremely destructive *palopók* technique, involving large charges dropped from a small *banka* among schools of bigger species swimming in the fairly shallow rocky

or coralline breeding grounds. With the arrest and lengthy incarceration of several local dealers and fishermen for possession of explosives, the owners and crews of the basnigan and largarete quickly decided they would have to do without these explosives, even though it noticeably reduced their catches. We do not know the exact extent, but local estimates of the reduction in catch ranged from 10 to 40 percent. Palopók fishing, at least in the Estancia area, came to a complete halt, putting an end to the shipment of larger fish on ice to Manila and Iloilo City (see Table 1, above).<sup>22</sup> Then, starting in late 1973, oil price increases resulted in a 400 percent increase in the cost of fuel for the large marine engines and generators on the basnigan and largarete. Strong inflation-linked cost hikes on their other necessary supplies soon tripled the monthly operating expenses for these boats. With substantially lowered production and substantially higher costs, the previous profitability of these outfits was vastly reduced and they were rapidly taken out of operation.

They were immediately replaced, however, by *kurantay*, a day-fishing outfit using a small "pump-boat" powered by a single-stroke engine, and from two to six panels of gill net, 50 to 70 feet long and 10 to 12 feet deep. In fishing grounds fairly close to the shore, one or more panels of net with buoys for support are strung out from the boat. The nets hang as curtains in the water until increased bobbing of the buoys suggests that enough fish have gilled themselves to warrant pulling in, cleaning, and then resetting the net. The nets are lightweight, and of clear nylon thread to make them relatively invisible to the fish. (Basnigan and largarete nets are also synthetic, but heavier, and dark and fibrous, so as not to glint in the lights of the night-fishing outfits.) Daily *kurantay* catches are fairly small, at most four boxes, more usually one or two. Furthermore, although they normally carry nets of two or three different meshes, at least up until late 1974, they had only proven particularly successful in catching one type of sardine, the *tabagák* (*Sardinella fimbriata*). One man alone could handle a *kurantay*, though normally two, or sometimes three, men would go out together. In addition, they could be out fishing nearly every day--the nets need cleaning only once a week--unlike the night-fishing outfits which could only operate effectively during the *dulúm*, the relatively darker three weeks of the 28-day lunar month.

Though much smaller and technologically simpler than the earlier outfits, *kurantay* quickly proved more profitable. The initial cost for a fully-equipped *kurantay* in 1974 was ₱5,000 – 6,000. In contrast, a complete basnigan called for an investment of ₱25,000 – 30,000, and a largarete, ₱9,000 – 12,000. *Kurantay* operating costs, largely fuel, amounted to only ₱5 per day. The larger outfits called for ₱75 – 150 per day and also had to face occasional major repairs on their more sophisticated equipment. At the time of our visit, most *kurantay* operators were paying their fishermen--only rarely did the

owners do the fishing themselves—P10 per box of fish landed. Comparable boxes of fresh fish in the market were selling for P50 — 60 each. Boxes of salted dried fish (three boxes of fresh fish generally reduce to two of dried fish) had earlier reached P200 in the market, but were currently fluctuating between P115 — 130. Thus, even if a kurantay only managed to catch six boxes of fresh fish per week, the owner could still clear some P370: obtaining about P500 for the final product of four boxes of dried fish, minus P30 fuel (6 days), P60 for the crew P10 per box of fresh fish), P2 for salt, P18 for four new wooden boxes, and perhaps P20 for handling. This amounts to over P1,500 profit per month, on an initial capital investment on the order of P5,000. Whereas the basnigan and largarete were facing sharply reduced returns and in many cases substantial losses, kurantay were extremely attractive investments. Indeed by the time of our visit, it was suggested that there were as many as 1,000 kurantay operating in the Estancia fishing area, almost to the exclusion of all other types of outfit. The shift in costs and profitability had produced a quantum change in technology, but, somewhat surprisingly, to a relatively simpler form.

The effective ban on the use of explosives in fishing had other unanticipated consequences. As mentioned above, kurantay proved successful in netting only tabagák. Catches were being maintained, but the rapidly increasing number of outfits posed the likelihood that the species would soon be over-fished. On the other hand, the *tuloy*, a larger and highly prized oil sardine, which had disappeared from Estancia's waters shortly after World War II when the use of explosives began, now suddenly reappeared. In addition, ex-palopók fishermen were now sighting growing schools of larger species in their traditional shallow fishing grounds, but to their great frustration, they had no means of catching them, other than one by one, with the painfully slow hook and line.

Others, however, had found means of taking advantage of the locally improved fishing conditions. One local operator had rigged up a "baby purse seine" with a simple but moderately large ring-net and a crew of 20 — 25. First reports suggested that he was earning large profits and at least three other local operators were looking for from P250,000 to P1,000,000 to invest in more modern purse seines. If successful, such outfits would spell yet another revolution in Estancia's fishing technology. In the meantime, and to the great anger of local residents, Manila and Negros-based trawlers (*manchurias*) were increasingly frequent in Estancia's waters. They were particularly resented because it was claimed they were using (illegally) fine mesh nets, and were thus capturing young fish which should have been allowed to grow larger. It was also said that they were destroying the coral beds which serve as breeding grounds by the use of wheels rigged beneath their nets to prevent them from snagging on the bottom.

The kurantay had also brought about a remarkable change in the basic rhythm of town life. Where before, the night-fishing outfits impressed a lunar cycle on the economic (and social) activities of the town (see page 9), the state of the moon made no difference to the day-fishing kurantay. Fishing could now be as continuous as the weather permitted. The earlier weekly and annual cycles were unaffected, but the lunar cycle of three weeks' hard work followed by a week of relative relaxation during the full moon, had completely disappeared, apparently without regret.

### *Economic Changes*

Aside from the effects of nationwide price inflation, the most dramatic economic change apparent in Estancia was a sharply altered pattern of outfit ownership, and consequently, of income distribution. In 1966 – 1968 about 20 individuals or families owned all of the town's commercial fishing outfits. Few others could manage or were willing to make the necessary investment in relatively capital-intensive basnigan and largarete. As a result, the very substantial profits those outfits could generate accumulated in only a small number of hands. Furthermore, because their operation involved a fairly sizeable labor force, many of the outfit owners had also become major social and political figures in the town. With the advent of the relatively inexpensive kurantay, many more, and much less wealthy people could and did become outfit operators. The requisites for entry, both in terms of capital and management skills, were much less. We were not able to determine the exact number of kurantay owners in the town, but easily identified 60 people, and there could well have been twice that number. Several of the earlier outfit operators were among them, but most had been small-scale buy-and-sell fish dealers, or were local shop owners (tailors, druggists, sari-sari store operators). A new array of people had become outfit operators. And while even a single kurantay could bring a substantial income, many of the new owners had rapidly re-invested their profits in additional outfits. One man, a very small-scale dried-fish dealer before, with the assistance of three close relatives, was said to be operating 30 kurantay from Estancia and the nearby coastal and island communities.

Much of the capital for investment in kurantay was locally generated. However, some people were beginning to take advantage of a new Philippine National Bank *Selda* loan program specifically intended for groups of five co-making fishermen. The bank offered a loan of ₱3,500 to each of the five, or a total of ₱17,500, for fishing equipment, upon legal agreement of mutual responsibility for repayment. Loans were to be paid off in five years at an annual interest of about 9.4 percent, much lower than rates normally available in Estancia. (Local private moneylenders had long been charging 10 – 20 per-

cent per *month*.) The bank loans were intended to enable fishermen to improve their gear and become independent operators. And indeed, a few local fishermen had, with the help of more educated townsmen, gone through the formal application procedure, and received their loans. However, because a *kurantay* costs ₱5,000 – 6,000, each could not own his own boat. With a total of ₱17,500, three boats could be purchased, but this necessitated complex systems of joint ownership. But far more troublesome, was that some well established local businessmen and outfit operators had begun to organize their groups of five fisherman to sign the necessary documents. Then when the loans were paid, the fishermen would turn the funds over to their organizer in exchange for “gifts” of ₱100 – 200. The ready availability of the loans and the low interest rate was too much of a temptation, and the intent of significantly assisting individual fishermen, was being frustrated.

Despite cases of this sort, easy access to ownership of *kurantay*, in effect, opening up the economy for new entrepreneurial talent, appeared to have improved income distribution in the town. Many of the better constructed or painted houses we noticed on arrival later turned out to be the homes of the new *kurantay* owners.

For those that remained fishermen, improvements were much harder to discern. Though much smaller in size, the greater number of *kurantay* seemed to have fully absorbed the displaced work force from the abandoned *basnigan* and *largarete*, and local estimates suggested that comparable, if not greater, quantities of fish were being landed. In addition, assuming a catch of one box per day, an earning of ₱10 daily, even if divided between two or three men on a *kurantay*, provided a much higher income than earlier derived from the *diario* and shares on *basnigan* and *largarete*. Furthermore, and as before, the fishermen keep the fish caught by hook and line while the nets were set. Surreptitious sales at sea to local dealers, however, while apparently somewhat reduced, had not disappeared. Nonetheless, fishermen bitterly complained of inflation, and it had obviously taken a heavy toll on their new income. Real income (purchasing power) may have been slightly improved, but more systematic study than we had time to conduct would be required to determine the accuracy of that impression.

There were also other new sources of income in the town. Thanks to two new mills in northern Panay and the removal of the milling quota system, sugar was booming in the area. Large areas that had been barren or used for rice in 1968, had for several years now been planted with sugarcane. At world market prices, local sugar planters might have been netting ₱5,000 per hectare. However, since all sugar had to be sold to the Philippine National Bank at a price fixed well below the world market, returns to planters were more in the range of ₱2,000 – 2,500 per hectare. Nonetheless, this still represented a substantial improvement over anything known locally in 1966 – 68.

At the same time, and despite the loss of hectareage to sugarcane, rice production was said to be maintaining past levels. This was achieved through the widespread use of high yielding varieties, not for their yield, which remained relatively low due to little fertilization and poor water control, but because their shorter growing season allowed extensive double-cropping where only one crop had been possible before.

One effect of this continuing high level of economic activity, along with somewhat increased tax rates, and more vigorous collections, especially since Martial Law, was that municipal income grew from about ₱98,000 in 1967 to an estimated ₱240,000 in 1974. This enabled the town to double the salaries of municipal employes--though many claimed that they still fell behind the rate of inflation--while carrying out the physical development projects described at the beginning of this chapter.

Inflation was clearly taking its toll on the real income of many families. It was also cited as the reason for the apparent decline of certain earlier co-operative systems among market vendors described in M.C.B. Szanton (1974). The vendors claimed they simply could not afford it any more. Nonetheless, there seemed to be a generally increased interest in business expansion and new investments, motivated by expectations of substantial new profits and increased prosperity in the immediate future.

### *Political Changes*

Obviously, the most dramatic political changes in Estancia had resulted from the imposition of Martial Law in September 1972. However, the November 1971 elections had also constituted a major political trauma for the town, worth describing here because the particular events were indicative of certain general political processes which on a larger scale contributed to the ultimate imposition and acceptance of Martial Law.

During our initial period of field research we witnessed the 1967 national and local elections. The incumbent mayor, by profession a doctor, was re-elected for his fifth consecutive term, and for the second time without opposition. While part of a wealthy and powerful local family which his mayoralty helped to protect, he was generally regarded as personally selfless. He often provided free medical services for those who could not afford to pay, and worked hard at being mayor for the town. The traditional epithet, "our beloved mayor," heard on many a public occasion, was in this case genuinely heartfelt. Thus although he and his family had rivals, the political atmosphere of the town had been comparatively relaxed and stable for an extended period of time. However, in 1969, less than midway through his fifth term, the mayor died and his term was completed by the vice-mayor.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1971 elections, the late mayor's family ran his young nephew for the post. But without the personal stature of his late uncle, his candidacy was effectively challenged by the family's traditional rivals. The uncertainty of the outcome of the election reportedly led both sides to hire expensive well-armed urban thugs, or "goons," to help "protect" their candidates and persuade the voters whom to elect. The preelection period was extremely tense, shots were fired on a number of occasions, and at least one person was killed. Both sides accused the other of initiating the unprecedented political violence. The late mayor's nephew won the election, but many townspeople were incensed and embittered at the violence and fear engendered by the two armed camps. Many other Iloilo towns had previously experienced comparable political violence, but nothing of this sort had ever happened in Estancia before. In effect, the semblance of moral order that had previously characterized the politics of the town was now in ruins. This situation, repeated with variations in many other towns, provided both for President Marcos and in the minds of the local townspeople much of the justification for the imposition of Martial Law less than one year later.

At the time of our visit it was not possible to reconstruct the exact order of events in the town immediately following the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972. Nonetheless, certain major structural changes and trends in the political life of the community seemed fairly evident. The loci of power and authority, and the very nature of politics in the town, had dramatically changed.

Most immediately striking was the nearly complete disappearance of the congressman as a source of power and symbol of the political system. In dismissing the Philippine Congress with the imposition of Martial Law, President Marcos eliminated the direct access to the national treasury and the central government agencies essential to the maintenance of the traditional patronal role of the Philippine congressman. Without national level resources to redistribute, congressmen quickly lost their followers and thus control over a local power base. Some were subsequently given administrative positions, but their roles as power brokers and mediators in their home districts were drastically reduced. Some were in fact jailed. In the case of Estancia, the local congressman, who resided in a nearby town and who had been extremely influential both locally and nationally, was suddenly no longer of consequence. He was not jailed, but at least one close relative and several other local politicians were, and he rapidly faded from the scene.

Simultaneously, the indefinite postponement of elections made political mobilization at the local level not only pointless, but dangerous, because of the ease with which it could be construed as potentially seditious. Thus no one not already in office could organize an attempt to gain power, and with



no elections in sight, those already in office had little reason to concern themselves with an electorate. At most, all that officials had to fear was high-level credence of local accusations of "backsliding." All of the rewards and punishments of the political system were now coming from the top. In effect, Martial Law radically reduced the distribution of power among the middle and lower rungs of the traditional political system, increasing, and concentrating it instead at the apex. In Estancia, this effectively demobilized local political ambitions. It also served to reinforce the largely economic decisions of the larger commercial fishing outfit operators to beach their increasingly profitless *basnigan* and *largarete*, for there were no more political advantages to be had by maintaining a large and loyal workforce. Indeed, throughout the system, the saliency of patron-client relations, based in the reciprocal exchanges described in Chapter 7, were at least temporarily reduced.

As the representative of, and almost surrogate for, the President, and for good motives or bad, locally based military officers in many cases attempted to fill the new power vacuums created by Martial Law, at the lower and middle levels of the system. In the case of Estancia, a military figure assigned nearby rose from previous obscurity to become a major political figure. As an outsider to the area, unable to speak the local language, and without the detailed familiarity with local relationships which only a long-term resident might have, he was not able to play the subtle but effective games which characterized the pre-Martial Law politics of the area. On the other hand, there was little need to do this. The local campaign to collect "loose firearms" appeared to have been highly successful. With nearly total control over the use of force in the area, any manifestation of his authority proved effective. Local accounts suggested that he used his position to enforce the laws, with both patriotic zeal and an eye to his own personal gain. In consequence, a number of local townspeople were detained for varying lengths of time for a variety of real or alleged offenses. Ultimately, his activities moved five mayors to seek the assistance of the provincial governor in having the individual removed. This was accomplished following a meeting between the governor and higher military authorities. During our visit, efforts were being made to establish warmer relations with his replacement, but equally difficult, though somewhat different, problems were beginning to emerge.

The intrusion of the military in local affairs had been made possible by certain institutional changes after Martial Law declaration. The presence of a military detachment in the area and the addition of a member of the constabulary to the local police force provided constant and direct experience with the military. Most important, the creation of an integrated national police system removed the local police force from the control of the mayor's office. The chief of police reports directly now to a district constabulary

officer and members of the different municipal forces may be reshuffled and reassigned from one town to another. These changes caused some town officials to feel they were losing control over their community.

One positive effect of this new situation was a clear improvement in "peace and order," to which everyone pointed as a major--though often the only--benefit of Martial Law. And indeed, although both discussion with townspeople and the local court records showed that violent crimes (murder, robbery, arson) still occurred, their incidence in the town had fallen to about half of the level of the six years preceding Martial Law. In addition, many minor offenses such as the operation of the "daily-double," the popular "numbers" game in the town, had been completely suppressed. But it should also be noted, that the overall municipal "crime rate," derived from the total number of cases brought before the local judge, had substantially increased, because of the more rigorous enforcement of the laws by the reorganized and expanded police forces, and because, for reasons that remain uncertain, barrio residents appeared to be making greater use of the municipal court to settle disputes than they had in the past. The increase in the total crime rate, however, can be traced to the adjudication of petty offenses which previously would have been ignored.

Major crimes were no doubt being deterred. Petty corruption, and thus the ease with which, for example, election expenses could be recouped, had also been reduced. Nonetheless, the immediate references to "improved peace and order" which almost invariably initiated discussions of the local impact of Martial Law, were frequently followed by expressions of fear and resentment over what was perceived to be the high rate of arbitrary arrest for admittedly illegal activity. At issue was both the selectivity of arrests and detentions; that is, the almost random quality of punishment for some, but not for others engaged in the same activities, and also, a very strong sense that many of the arrests were for activities, such as petty gambling over the mahjong table, pitching pennies (*tombo*), or littering, which, while illegal, had long been socially acceptable, or seemed too inconsequential to warrant incarceration. External forces, external laws were impinging erratically, but with effect, on what had always been considered local rights and freedoms. One never knew when some trivial, or even imagined, violation might lead to the stockade, where, according to widely circulating stories, indignities, maltreatment, extortion, even torture, might be anticipated. Under these circumstances many were uncertain whether the improved peace and order was worth the lost freedom and the fear and resentment that Martial Law also engendered.

These feelings were compounded by what was considered continuing petty harassment by the local military personnel. For example, sanctioned by the threat of large fines, owners of the bigger fishing boats were required

to report in elaborate detail to a newly established Coast Guard station in the harbor, each time one of their craft departed or arrived in town. Such a regulation in an active fishing community is an obvious nuisance. The government's fear of potentially subversive activity at sea was well understood. But, if that were the intent, the owners' report could obviously be falsified, and furthermore, comparable reports were not required of boats going in and out of the smaller barrios, which seemed to defeat the purpose of the entire exercise. Similarly, because of the midnight curfew, special authorization was required from the local military detachment to conduct traditional religious and curing ceremonies which had normally continued well into the night. But fear of even such limited contact with the military discouraged townspeople from even broaching the question, and these ancient and innocuous rituals had to be substantially truncated.

The inability to speak out, to criticize injustices for fear of accusations of subversion, and the lack of reliable information or credible news from the media, only compounded the feelings of frustration. People were well aware of the conflict and high rate of casualties in Mindanao from relatives still there, and from others who had returned to Iloilo. Many were also aware of skirmishes between students and the military in the mountains of southern Panay. It was also said that several hundred young people were being held in the stockade in Iloilo City. But the Maoist rhetoric attributed to the students was not appealing, and all the other traditional means of expressing discontent seemed foreclosed.

Almost invariably, discussion of political questions eventually turned to the President, who had created and clearly commanded the situation. Views of his motivations and goals of course varied. He had both supporters and critics. But it is interesting to note that he was often held responsible for the, in fact, worldwide inflation which was commonly perceived to have sharply lowered real incomes locally, on the grounds that having taken absolute power, he should be able to control prices if he really wanted to. On the other hand, he was also charged with leading the country toward totalitarian Communism by promoting the massive intrusion of government into the lives of the people. From other viewpoints, neither of these charges might seem well founded, but they clearly indicate the Estanciahanons' perception of an extraordinary new concentration of power at the top of the system, and the loss of control over their own lives and community.

### *Conclusions*

The numerous changes outlined in this chapter are testimony to the adaptive and creative powers of small town society. Much had held constant and most of the motive forces for change were external. Nonetheless, in a mere

six-and-a-half year period, there had taken place a minor technological revolution and a set of major transformations in the economic and political life of the town. Some of the changes seemed clearly beneficial (physical improvements, new openings for entrepreneurship, improved income distribution, greater peace and order); others were questionable, or negative. Some might have occurred in any event, but most must be attributed to the imposition of Martial Law. Clearly, Estancia was responding, though not always predictably, to decisions, programs and events well outside the confines of the town. The responses, however, often took the form of relatively unpredictable chain reactions, and the unintended effects were often as dramatic as those which were carefully planned. Thus, the dismissal of Congress by President Marcos broke a central link in the political order and demobilized local political aspirants. By simultaneously eliminating the traditional active critical participation of the populace and concentrating power at the top, Martial Law sharply reduced the townspeople's sense of independence and control over their own community. Similarly, the sudden enforcement of an old law prohibiting the use of explosives in fishing brought about a quantum shift in technology and a totally unanticipated redistribution of income in the town.

There is of course no reason to presume that Estancia is representative of all or many small towns in the Philippines. Nor that the general changes between 1968 and 1974, or those specifically in response to Martial Law, will necessarily be found elsewhere as well. Nonetheless, they are suggestive of larger processes which could be examined across a range of small communities and, indeed, across the nation itself. They may also provide some sense of the unpredictable chains of reaction which may follow actions based on even the best of intentions.