

## GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

MICHAEL A. COSTELLO

*Xavier University*

"The blood of the poor man," Leon Bloy once wrote, "is money." The papers in this volume amply demonstrate the veracity of this observation. The tenant farmer who must promise to pay usurious interest rates just to be able to plant his crop, the handicraft worker who ruins her eyesight threading *ipil-ipil* seeds by the light of a flickering kerosene lamp, the parents of working minors who must mortgage their children's future — all of these exemplify the wretched and life-draining bargains that millions of poorer Filipinos must make in order to earn enough money to provide for themselves and their families. And the situation is not getting any better, given the grave economic setbacks that have struck the country since that fatal day in August 1983.

It was in response to this situation that the Philippine Sociological Society chose as its theme for the 1984 PSS Convention, "Coping with Crisis: The Filipino in the Mid-80's," which was held from January 4 to 5, 1985. For only the second time in the Society's history (and the first time since 1965), the convention was held in Mindanao. The host institution was Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City, and a lively exchange of views was manifested among the more than 130 persons who were officially registered. Obviously, this was a theme that held deep personal, as well as professional, meanings for the bulk of those attending the conference.

In all, nineteen papers were read at the convention. Financial constraints brought on by the same economic crisis which served as the conference's focal point have necessitated that fewer than half of these could be published in the present issue. The decision as to which articles to include was in many cases a difficult one, and the reader should be warned that there is much of value in those ten papers which have not been reprinted in this issue. Nevertheless, the decision had to be made and I would like to personally thank the panel of referees —

Erlinda M. Burton, Alfonso C. del Fierro, Fr. Antonio J. Ledesma, Marilou Palabrica-Costello, Lita Palma-Sealza, Isaias Sealza, and Amanda Te (all of Xavier University) — for the very generous and able assistance which they gave me in reviewing the conference papers.

At least two objections might be raised against the "Coping with Crisis" theme of the 1984 Convention. On the one hand, it could be claimed that the past decade has already seen a heavy emphasis upon studies of this sort of problem. Indeed, the previous PSS Convention (held in Diliman in November 1980) focused exclusively upon the social and economic problems of the Philippine countryside, while recent issues of the *Philippine Sociological Review* give evidence of a strong and sustained interest in rural poverty, income inequality, malnutrition, economically dependent international relations, and the like. The question might thus be raised as to whether our social scientists have concentrated so much upon the topic of Philippine underdevelopment that they are beginning to repeat themselves.

Fortunately, this is not really the case, at least for the papers in this volume. For one thing, the bulk of the studies included herein are truly contemporary, with over half of them reporting on research projects that were completed during the year immediately preceding the Convention. In that sense, they provide us with some of the first scholarly studies to be published on Philippine society in mid-crisis.

A second virtue of these papers lies in the fact that, when taken as a whole, they depict clearly the heterogenous nature of poverty in the Philippines. Thus, we have studies not only of tenant farmers in rural agricultural areas, but also of landless and migrant workers (Suñer and Cabacungan, Veneracion). In addition, there are analyses of home industry workers (Maquiso), fishermen (Ardales and David), working children in Metro Manila

(Rivera), and the impoverished tribal minorities (Cadelina, Burton). For those of us "born and bred" on the two-class model of Philippine social structure, as is widely held by both those of a functionalist persuasion (e.g. the writings on this subject of Frank Lynch) and those who adhere to the conflict or Marxist schools of thought, this serves as a useful reminder that the human condition is too complex to fit easily within such simple frameworks. Furthermore, and as Suñer and Cabacungan point out, anti-poverty programs must necessarily be equally diverse, and oriented to the specific needs of distinct target groups, if they are to succeed.

A second criticism of the convention's theme was already raised by Randolph David nearly a decade ago. In an essay entitled "The Sociology of Poverty or the Poverty of Sociology?" David pointed out that the "sociology of coping mechanisms" begs the question of the ultimate meaning of Third World poverty, insofar as such widely adopted behaviors as the resort to pawnbrokers and usurious money lenders, use of traditional healers in lieu of modern medical specialists, and eating only once or twice a day "are not adaptive behaviors — they are what the poor are mercilessly driven to do."

There is much that is true in this criticism and surely we would not want a new wave of studies which purport to show how Filipinos are "smiling through" (as a recent issue of *Asiaweek* has put it) the current economic and political crisis. But neither should we ignore the manifold and creative ways by which most Filipinos have somehow managed to "cope" with present circumstances. In some instances this involves continued adherence to such long-established devices as social networking (Cadelina), reliance upon the welfare and productive

functions of the family system (Veneracion, Rivera), resort to informal credit arrangements (Veneracion, Suñer and Cabacungan), and dogged adherence to the hope for a better future, despite present-day difficulties (Ardales and David). In other cases, a more innovative stance may be taken, as shown by the entrepreneurial activities of workers who have returned from the Middle East (Aban *et al.*), as well as by the spirit of "resourcefulness, alertness and independence" that is fostered in those children who have been forced by circumstance to find employment in the informal sector (Rivera). These findings give evidence that the cliché of the "adaptive Filipino" is more than a mere stereotype and that there is still some reason — however small — for hope, even in the midst of the most objectively destitute and exploitative conditions.

The final three papers (by Cadelina, Burton and Lacar) deal more with the country's ethnic minorities than with current social problems *per se*. The nearly continuous state of political and economic crisis that has beset these groups during the past three to four decades, however, makes appropriate the inclusion of these studies within the present volume. Again, these papers reflect the interplay between the objective social problems and injustices facing Philippine minority groups and the spirit of social and cultural innovation, through which some sort of solutions to these conditions may be seen as slowly evolving. On the whole, these authors would seem to argue that, given sufficient time and a reordering of national priorities (admittedly a very tall order), there can yet be hope for achieving that goal of genuine national reconciliation and unity which Ninoy was seeking when he landed in Manila International Airport two and one-half years ago.