



## Trajectories

# Courage and resilience: Creating Filipino futures

Tony Stevenson\*

*P.O. Box 188, Noosa Heads 4567, Australia*

Available online 27 September 2006

---

There are mixed feelings as my evening plane for Manila comes down over the jewels of this lush archipelago. There is personal contentment and excitement at prospects of reuniting with friends in this beautiful country. Below are 7100 islands, depending on the tide. Through scattered cloud there are sandy beaches, and mud flats to leeward. There are bamboo fish traps, but I am saddened to know from bitter experience that the fish nurseries are in trouble. Few mangroves remain. Most fringing reefs, once sheltering brightly coloured fish, edible and ornamental, have been devastated by storms, global warming and invasive fishing.

Inland, remnants of extinct volcanoes push through the tropical carpet, rippled with palms. That is, where the forests have not been razed for cheap timber. Exported Philippines' mahogany was a carpenter's delight. Now the country is a net importer of timber. On some flights, an active cone pops up above the scattered clouds, a reminder of the continuing human struggle with the beguiling grandeur of nature: volcanic ash and mud slides. Yet, I conjure up warm images of the people I will meet: smiling villagers and the selfless civil-society workers transforming goodwill into action. I wonder about their futures.

These imaginings help me forget an earlier in-flight anxiety, that I must face the insistent taxi drivers at Ninoy Aquino international airport. While there is now a taxi organiser, drivers still hustle to win a few hundred pesos. Metered drivers are lucky to take the equivalent of four US dollars every day. Anything more, from tips, will make it easier to send the kids to school. With luck, there may be a little left to send back home to their families in the provinces. It seems that few taxi drivers were born in Manila, once a walled Spanish city, which succumbed in the last half of the 20th century. The surrounding rice paddies and estuarine stilt houses have been razed for today's Metro Manila, a smoggy

---

\*Tel.: +61 7 5447 4394; fax: +61 7 5448 0776.

E-mail address: [LagunaBay@bigpond.com](mailto:LagunaBay@bigpond.com).

URL: <http://tony.stevenson.org>.

grid-lock laced with murky waterways choking in plastic bags, occasionally dotted with smart high-rises and a new light rail.

On the ground, there are serious smudges not seen from the air, both in the social fabric and the landscape. Many are gaping wounds, from the urban shanties and street children, to slag heaps, bleached and broken coral reefs, and flattened tropical jungle. Yet, most Filipinos are courageous, having mobilised “people power” to depose two errant presidents without bloodshed. They are resilient to long years being downtrodden by their own *principales* as well as by uninvited foreigners. But they are often smiling; and ingenious. At least in the provinces, the villagers usually find their own solutions to brutality, poverty and official neglect—and more recently to pollution. It is something else for low-paid workers stuck sweating for the big landholders, and for those who have fled their villages for something “better”, only to become squatters in the city slums.

## 1. Web of life

Next day, having taken a domestic flight well beyond Manila’s strident din, the modernity of elsewhere seems remote. Crammed into the belly of a jeepney on a winding provincial road, I witness the web of communal life far from moon launches and money markets. Near bigger settlements, food stalls offer *lechon*, suckling pig roasted over hot coals. Restaurants advertise a local specialty, *batchoy*, a rich soup of pork, pig’s organs and herbs. *Sari saris*, serving the locals with drinks and snacks, line the bigger roads while fruit sellers offer bananas, mangoes, even the smelly, sweet-tasting *durian*, depending on season. *Carabao* (water buffalo) rest in the rice paddies.

Walking along the roads, or creatively piled on to tricycles, are the people whose cultures were “liberated” [1, p. 12] four times during modern history—by the Spanish, the Americans, then the Japanese and again the Americans. Even though the Americans closed their military bases more than a decade ago, they have a new armed presence under the guise of fighting terrorism on Mindanao, the main southern island.

These liberations have created an ethnic melting pot in a faltering economy. Yet the US, Japan, China and Taiwan remain alert to investment opportunities under globalisation. Civil society activists remain cautious of demands for free investment, and for freer trade; it is the rich and powerful seeking short-term gain. Independent think-tank, IBON Foundation, estimates that up to 1.8 million farmers may have lost their livelihoods since the Philippines joined the World Trade Organisation. While global trade has grown 25% in the last decade, local agricultural productivity is plunging. Not only have Filipino farmers found it harder to export to richer countries but they must compete with a flood of imports. Filipinos’ vegetables may soon come only from Taiwan, mainland China, or the US rather than from the Cordilleras or Ilocos [4, p. 280]. IBON views a recent court ruling that upheld foreign control of mining as selling out the country’s sovereignty. Consequently, mining export receipts are under complete foreign ownership, enabling full repatriation of profits [3].

In the Philippines, the wealthy can flaunt their wealth. Wedged between the opulence of big land and big business, and the poverty of the bottom 40% of Filipinos who live in subservience, is an emergent middle class. Targeted by economic globalisation, they favour the new shopping centres and fast-food outlets while spurning the colourful local craft and mouth-watering tropical fruits.

Just under 90 million live on the archipelago. Another one million compatriots are overseas workers and migrant professionals. You see Filipino gardeners in Nice, nurses in California, construction workers in Dubai and maids in Manchester.

How has the Philippines got to this point and what futures lie ahead for people who dream of a life beyond their homeland?

This account, by an outsider who is a regular visitor, addresses the question standing mainly on Negros Island, in the Visayas, the central sweep of the archipelago. It concentrates on just one network of courageous people, most of them friends, striving to create very different Filipino futures over roughly the past quarter century. It reveals another country, glimpsing the uplift of a struggle ignored by the mainstream media for the shady underbelly. Yet the inspiring narrative *is* set in a socio-political landscape torn apart from the time of the early Negritos (later called the *ati*) well before the Spanish arrival in the mid 16th century. Since the last half of the 19th century, it has been plundered by sugar barons and political cronies.

## 2. Negros erupts

To show the need for different futures, look back to the end of the 1970s. Negros was a “social volcano” in the words of the late Antonio Fortich, champion of the poor and oppressed, former Bishop of Bacolod, the island’s largest city. The Catholic Church [5] found that only one in 60 to 70 people owned land. In Negros Occidental, the westerly of two provinces, one in a thousand, or 330 families, owned almost half the sugar-cane land. Twenty families controlled 60% of the fishing catch, and 14 families held most of the timber concessions.

There had been earlier eruptions, thanks to the stranglehold of big sugar. For example, a bitter civil war followed the planting of the American flag on Negros at the very end of the 19th century. Papa Isio, as anti-American as he had been anti-Spanish, led the *pulahanes* in burning the haciendas, the sugar cane and the mills of the pro-Americans. [1, p. 280] Sugar came to Negros during the last half of that century, changing its futures. The landscape swapped its tropical canopy for the shimmering green of vast waves of cane. Wealthy merchants brought their capital and legal skills from nearby Panay Island after the textile industry collapsed. They bought false titles to peasant farms from a corrupt Spanish regime.

One of the hungriest land grabbers was Teodoro Benedicto, ancestor of Roberto Benedicto, the sugar czar under disgraced president, Ferdinand Marcos. With an armed gang, Don Teodoro burned out peasant villages, bribed local officials, and amassed a tract of 11,200 Ha, by far the largest on Negros. [5, p. 82] Marcos handed Roberto Benedicto a monopoly by presidential decree. A Marcos classmate and fraternity brother, Benedicto came to account for 27% of the country’s dollar earnings. Then, through inept speculation and corrupt practices, he effectively ruined the industry, bringing starvation to thousands of peasant families already among the country’s poorest and most exploited agricultural workers. James Hamilton–Patterson believes it no accident that Negros became fertile territory for recruiting guerrillas to the New People’s Army (NPA) [2, p. 308].

When Benedicto fell in 1984, the coconut king, Eduardo Murphy (Danding) Cojuangco, took his favoured place. He has yet to quash a web of formal accusations that he used public funds from a Marcos levy on coconut farmers to build his personal fortune. He still controls numerous assets, including San Miguel Corporation, frozen after fleeing with

Marcos to Hawaii in 1986. Returning from exile, via Australia, his executive aircraft landed on a coconut plantation owned by one of his sequestered companies. Neither customs nor immigration records his reentry [7, p. 14].

Cojuangco's name usually invokes anger. His thirst for power continues unabated internationally, nationally and on Negros where he has turned his vast haciendas into orchards. San Miguel's tentacles have acquired, among other morsels, a boutique brewery and two big food processors in Australia.

It is such cronyism among privileged families that activated the social volcano Fortich spoke of during the martial law of Marcos. Many had their own private armies. In return for political favours they handed the president power and helped fill his offshore bank vaults, as well as their own. Corruption reached its worst during the two Marcos decades (1965–1986) [8]. The presidential family may have stashed away between US\$ 5 and 10 billion [7, p. 8], in a country where so very many people were living in poverty.

Anyone not cooperating was liquidated. Carla Gomez, now editor of the *Visayas Daily Star*, recalls how she had developed an important news source in a Bacolod funeral parlour. She was tipped off when bodies turned up after an ambush. It got to the point where fewer than about 10 bodies no longer made news.

Martial law, from 1972 to 1981, had Washington's express approval. It was particularly brutal on Negros, the fourth largest island in the human tapestry that attained nationhood in mid-20th century. Marcos said he needed the powers to end communist-led subversion but they helped him remain beyond his constitutional term. Martial law "left a deep mark on an already scarred national psyche". Human rights were suppressed, elections were rigged, and there was tinkering with the constitution, censorship, jailings and torture [2, p. 54]. Perhaps 2000 people disappeared [2, p. 317].

### 3. Gunship landing

Not long afterwards, Fathers Niall O'Brien and Brian Gore felt the sting of this tyranny. On 6 May 1983, after morning mass, O'Brien, an Irish Columban missionary, was at an afternoon fiesta in the barrio of Inapoy, south of Negros' iconic volcano, Mt Kanla-on. About a thousand parishioners from his and the adjoining parish of, Gore, an Australian Columban, had gathered in a clearing. A Vietnam-vintage helicopter gunship swept in raising dust to disgorge armed soldiers in fatigues. Their provincial commander toted a chrome hand-held machine gun, the gift of a US army colonel. Illegal cockfighters, at the fiesta, scurried through the panic trying to restrain their frightened birds on the end of a string [6, p. 14].

Helicopters were a common sight. But this one was not chasing the growing insurgency in the uplands, the communist NPA. It was responding to the fears of the guardians of the status quo, as O'Brien calls them, who were incensed that local communities had dared join non-violent protests against injustice and violations of human rights. The colonel wanted O'Brien and Gore to attend a conference in Kabankalan. Filipino priest, Father Itik (Vincente) Dangan, and six of Gore's lay leaders were to go, too. They set off in Gore's parish jeep and were stopped along the way, arrested and thrown into Kabankalan jail.

The three priests were reluctantly persuaded to leave the jail for house arrest, following negotiations in Manila by their superiors. Not wanting to desert their lay companions in jail, they plotted to break back into jail—in Bacolod—where the *Negros Nine* were held together during their trial on a trumped up charge of murdering the mayor of Kabankalan.

More than a year later they were freed under international political and media pressure, particularly from Ireland and Australia.

Even though Marcos had lifted martial law before their arrest, the military's enemies remained: their own landless citizens. Gore, a gentle Aussie bear, and O'Brien, an Irish sprite starkly paler than his black-haired parishioners, had moved closer to the poor to empathise with their plight and to help change their futures. "Caught in a crossfire between dictatorship and revolution", historian Alfred McCoy saw the priests as victims of the growing conflict between church and state. They had spent more than a decade shattering the subservience of Negros, mobilizing them in democratic Christian communities that threatened the control of the planter elite. Their exposés of torture and murder embarrassed the military. A church publication of mismanagement in the sugar industry angered the most powerful politician on Negros, Marcos ally and "sugar czar", Roberto Benedicto, and embittered the president. In revenge, local planters, Benedicto, the constabulary and Marcos combined to frame these priests for murder [5, pp. 49, 5–6].

#### 4. Civic collaborations

Such injustices foretold a bleak future for most Filipinos. Yet, before his arrest at Inapoy, Niall O'Brien had urged his parishioners not to be afraid. Having seen the barriro grow into many vibrant Christian communities, he could sleep in peace. No-one would go hungry or sick without being touched by the caring hand of the community. He knew the people were now well aware of the causes of the deep injustices that had recently seeped from the coast into the mountain villages and that they were prepared to expose and oppose them non-violently [6, p. 15]. Such was his "revolution from the heart".

Meanwhile, others in civil society were actively seeking non-violent solutions. My main link to the Negros network would be Cesar Villanueva, a much valued friend, who eventually brought community foresight to local communities. But when the priests were on trial, he was still in Bicol, in the shadow of Mayon, the iconic cone-shaped volcano still smoking on Luzon, the big island in the north. He had gone to Bicol in 1980 after graduating from Ateneo de Manila University where he took first-year macroeconomics under Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, now his country's president. He was immersed for two years as a Jesuit volunteer, learning close-up in the community. And he started a development office at Ateneo de Naga in Bicol before it was a university.

Villanueva was influenced by Senator Jose (Ka Pepe) Diokino, who could "think outside the box". He joined the human-rights advocate to boycott the "farce election concocted by Ferdinand Marcos in the early 1980s". Villanueva saw personal fire in Diokino's struggle against the dictatorship and in his quest to establish a nation for its children. "His famous lines of *food and freedom, jobs and justice, land and liberation* have always guided me in the work for authentic sustainable development and people empowerment in the Philippines".

These were tough times. Cesar saw people tortured. And he lost friends who went underground. A peace worker, Edmundo Garcia, inspired the concerned young Villanueva to start a local group, introducing non-violence to resolve conflicts in the church and civil society. As a mentor, Garcia taught him the value of "the parliament of the streets", authentic grassroots democracy, popular education of the masses and the unrelenting search for opportunities to apply moral and ethical imagination to the political resolution of armed conflicts, step by step. "I learned from him", Villanueva emphasises, "that at the heart of every conflict is an open invitation to a *spirituality of transformation*".

It was not until 1987 that Villanueva met Father O'Brien who was running a seminar on active non-violence in Bacolod. Today Villanueva leads the Niall O'Brien Centre for Active Non-violence Reconciliation and Community Futures, inaugurated in Bacolod in mid-2004, just after O'Brien's death in Italy, a favourite retreat where he had been nursing failing health. The O'Brien Centre trains youth, educators, community workers and journalists in peace and conflict resolution. The O'Brien-Villanueva connection is another core loop in the mosaic of collaborating and competing networks that are creating alternative Filipino futures. They weave through church and state, non-government and people's organisations, academia and business.

## 5. Creating alternative futures

Just before meeting O'Brien, Villanueva had returned to his home town, Bacolod, with his new wife, Jo Villareal, because of another important link, that with Brother Rolando Dizon. Then the new president of La Salle College-Bacolod, Dizon had invited Cesar to head its extension program which later became the community development and volunteer formation office, *BALAYAN* (framework), something he continued for 15 years. The College became the University of St. La Salle (USLS) in July 1988 and it would incorporate a community futures viewpoint in its outreach and teaching under Villanueva.

Roly Dizon is nationally respected for his courage in challenging and helping dismantle the Marcos dictatorship. His calmness belies his forceful passion for an alternative future. He headed the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), representing more than one thousand schools, during a time of political, economic and social turmoil. He also played a lead in forming the volunteer organisation, the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). As a civic watchdog, NAMFREL first monitored election results to expose the vote rigging that led Marcos to his downfall under the "People Power" of 1986. It maintains this role today.

Dizon's friend, Sister Luz Emmanuel Soriano, also supports NAMFREL. A friend and supporter of Cory Aquino who succeeded Marcos as president, she stood defiant to the Marcos might on EDSA Avenue, Manila, in the people's revolution. This small bundle of energy, an Assumption nun, was among 20 Filipinos featured in a 20th anniversary report on EDSA by the Philippines Centre for Investigative Journalism in January 2006. She had been preparing sandwiches when the tanks came. Luz Soriano thought she would die in EDSA but the soldiers in the armoured vehicles were daunted by the crowds of unarmed civilians and refused to fire.

Before EDSA, the public assassination of President Cory Aquino's husband, Benigno "Ninoy", as he stepped off a flight returning him from the US, had added to the people's disquiet and their revolution, along with the deteriorating health of Marcos and the economy. Benigno Aquino had been allowed to go to the US for medical treatment where he ran an opposition to Marcos, as he had earlier from jail in the Philippines. In a bizarre loop, Benigno is related by marriage to Danding Cojuangco whose cousin, Jose (Peping), is brother to Cory Aquino.

Just after Marcos tumbled in 1986, Dizon was appointed to La Salle, Bacolod. The former mathematics and religious studies teacher was home again. He had come from the La Salle Brothers' Greenhills school in Metro Manila, latterly as president. He teamed with provincial leaders to restore Negros after the dictatorship, after a plunge in world prices of sugar, its main crop, and after the Escalante massacre the year before.

At Escalante, thousands of sugar workers, farmers, fisherfolk, students, urban poor, professionals and church people were protesting on the 13th anniversary of martial law. They carried placards, some bamboo sticks, and chanted anti-government slogans. Twenty dead were found at the rally site and in nearby cane fields; 30 more lay wounded, cut down by automatic rifles and machine guns.

Roly Dizon helped give birth to a new economy for Negros Occidental: training and financing of small entrepreneurs; and, with, former governor, Daniel Lacson, diversifying agriculture. He set up a local program for street children and helped convene a national conference. He established the JRR Dizon Foundation to give scholarships to gifted students and promoted sport as a way to keep young people away from drugs. La Salle was one of the institutions that did not shy away from employing former rebels, who had thought revolution the only way out of their difficulties, as they came down from the hills after Marcos was toppled.

Dizon remained in Bacolod until the end of the 1990s when he moved to La Salle's university in Manila. He is now back at Greenhills as the Brothers' Provincialate. It was from Manila that Sister Luz Soriano spearheaded the greening of schools in the Philippines, using as an example her Assumption College where she used to be president and remains treasurer. She likes to show visitors around the small forest, greenhouse, frog pond, herb garden, organic farm, recycling system, resource centre, and of course her beloved butterfly garden. Soriano was a Filipino delegate to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and wrote a text for college students explaining the meaning of Agenda 21 for the Philippines. Irrepressible, she is active in housing the poor in Metro Manila, and serves on the boards of several colleges, universities, foundations and educational associations.

## **6. Futures studies in Asia**

Dizon and Soriano worked well together building bridges between social classes, rich and poor. They attended many conferences exploring socially progressive issues. I remember them both at meetings of the World Futures Studies Federation (WFSF), an international non-government organisation, then representing futurists in 90 countries, and affiliated with the United Nations system, particularly with UNESCO. Dizon button-holed me about the Philippines taking a more active role in futures studies. Then in 1990, at Dizon's encouragement, Cesar Villanueva turned up to a WFSF course in Dubrovnik, open and earnest, and to the world conference that followed in Budapest. Here he was deeply influenced by leading futurists, Johan Galtung and Robert Jungk. It was Villanueva who impressed me; I knew immediately we would work closely together. He needed only gentle nudging to succeed me as WFSF secretary-general in 1997, and the secretariat moved for the first time to Asia, to USLS at Bacolod, leaving Brisbane, its first rotation to the southern hemisphere.

Dizon placed a great deal of trust in Villanueva. "If Brother Roly believes in someone, he supports that person fully. He believes in the capacity of a passionate person to make a difference." Villanueva's passion for peace and social justice was engendered well before Bicol, at St John's, a Chinese school near his home in Bacolod. He mingled with Spanish, Chinese and other Filipinos, learning to consider the other. When he went to Ateneo de Manila, a Jesuit institution, it was strong on liberation theology and the pedagogy of the oppressed, searching for a better social and political future beyond Marcos. The development economics he taught was informed by his learning of dependency

theory—how developing countries become dependent on industrialised countries. He remembers doing a critique of Robert McNamara and the World Bank.

Villanueva lectured at USLS and applied his development economics in his contact with local communities. At Balayan, among other things, he was running a self-development program for street kids and distributing Vietnamese rice, with aid from Australia, to people living in the Bacolod slums where women sell candied bananas to eke out a living that fails to provide school fees for their children. He organised street protests against unfair labour laws, new taxes, higher petrol prices and oppression of the poor, generally. And he ran workshops for activists to envision alternative futures.

## 7. Futures activism

I well remember Cesar at the beginning of 2001, dog tired but never giving in. Five bombings had left 22 dead and about 100 injured in Manila on New Year's Eve. There had been a bomb threat at his university. He was playing a lead role in a street campaign by academics and non-governmental organisations to force out corrupt president, Joseph Estrada. After having dinner together, he would go home for late-night meetings with local campaigners. They would organise by email and mobile-phone text-message, a technology that has taken the Philippines democracy by storm.

Villanueva's whole family, which has been central in connecting me to the Philippines, was immersed in the anti-Estrada campaign. Kalaylah, then aged two, my goddaughter and the youngest of Cesar and Jo's five children, was learning to talk. She would point to her campaign badge. Dark eyes shining with satisfaction, she would repeat the slogan: "Erap resign". Erap is the nick-name of the playboy movie star, turned president. It once adorned the licence plate of his black sports car. As a protector of former Marcos cronies, Estrada was forced from office soon afterwards. His vice-president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, replaced him on 20 January 2001.

At the time, Villanueva was still honorary secretary-general of the WFSF, administering the global network from Bacolod, and bringing futures thinking to his colleagues, students and local citizens. With his volunteer team he had run a world conference at Bacolod a year earlier, bringing together people of different cultures and faiths. At the time I was WFSF president, enjoying enthusiastic help and friendship from the secretariat's other volunteers, all dedicated to the futures of humanity: Jean Lee Manyon, Rogelin Conlu, George Aguilar, Jo Villanueva, George Pontino and Ed Gumboc.

Foresight thinking was eagerly taken up in their other outreach programs. Typically, it could be seen in the growth of the fisherfolk network, Kasama Ka, at Cauayan, more than two hours drive south of Bacolod on roads littered with spillage from sugar-cane trucks. The project has helped local people to turn poverty into new livelihood opportunities, to rehabilitate the environment and to instigate a voluntary coast-watch, granted provincial authority to arrest illegal fishing boats. Kasama Ka chair, Roy Santiago of Isio, paddles a pump boat as if it is an extension of his body. He wants local children live better futures than would be possible without change. USLS staff and student volunteers help train the fisherfolk in para-legal knowledge, leadership, values, gender issues, environmental care and repair, and project planning, implementation, management and evaluation. They write proposals for community development.

Kasama Ka landed an award for community development from the province of Negros Occidental and another made by the journal, *Futures*, with WFSF. Now, illegal fishing has

almost ceased with more than 100 cases taken to court. New mangroves are bringing back shellfish in the estuaries. And the women are exporting smocking from a community enterprise financed with microcredit managed by the network.

Until recently, Villanueva was also an international vice-president of Pax Christi, an ecumenical peace movement rooted in the Roman Catholic Church, and which helped establish the Niall O'Brien Centre. He has served or serves numerous civil-society organisations. Teresita (Terai) Barcoma has replaced Villanueva as director of Balayan. One of her new projects promotes the sustainable management of solid waste at *barangay* (village) level. Urban communities are encouraged to segregate waste at its source and reuse it by composting and recycling. Backyard gardening or urban agriculture leads to an appreciation of garbage as a useful resource.

## 8. Still erupting

This narrative wends its way towards the week of Valentine's Day 2005, when Filipinos who can afford it crowd their restaurants, aspiring to a middle-class lifestyle reflected in their media. It was in 2005 that Valentine's "roses" were sent to President Arroyo. They came in the form of three lethal bombings—on Luzon and on the big southern island of Mindanao—to remind Filipinos of the military's engagement with Mindanao's Muslim rebels.

The rebels have connections to Indonesia, Malaysia and Afghanistan. The new US presence, training with Filipino forces, gives Washington a platform for prosecuting its military and economic agenda in Asia. But unarmed citizens, including civil-society workers, too, are among the lives lost in military excursions.

Far from all Muslims are extremists. One group already lives in a semi-autonomous zone on Mindanao. Others demand increased economic and political independence in Asia's single, mostly-Christian nation. Islam visited Southeast Asia, blown by the winds of commerce, in the 10th and 12th centuries, way before the European colonisers. Arab traders brought their religion with them: through the market, not military conquest. It was not forced; the new religion was voluntarily accepted as part of the thriving exchange bringing peoples together [9, p. 162].

The rebels continue to enforce their demands with explosives. During the week of Valentine's Day, 2005, unrest took other forms besides the bombings. There were protests against government proposals to lift the value-added tax, Moody's severely downgraded the Filipino economy and public space resonated with stories of conspiracies, coups and popular revolutions. Remarkable humility, resilience and ingenuity among the nation's sprawling tracts of poverty stood up against conspicuous egotism and wealth. Not long afterwards, rumours of a military coup forced a demand from political opponents that Arroyo be impeached. She survived, but is still under enormous pressure from the military and the opposition.

And she must deal effectively with corruption. Cronies of Marcos and Estrada remain at the feeding trough to this day. While her own futures are uncertain, at least her presidency is critical to Washington's neoliberal agenda for the Philippines and to its "war on terror". By early 2006, Arroyo had revived the idea of "charter change", altering the constitution. It is suspected as a ploy to remain in office, just as Marcos and Estrada had tried before her, unsuccessfully. And the US lobbies for charter change to open up foreign ownership in sectors that include public utilities, banking and the media.

## 9. What's ahead?

At best, prospects for the Philippines are uncertain. Still fighting injustice, political and corporate, Brian Gore, thinks the country has no future. Cesar Villanueva is less terse. He envisages three possible scenarios, with some hope that Filipino resilience may find alternatives amid continuing corruption and oppression.

A colleague of Villanueva, George Aguilar, a philosophy lecturer at USLS, is decidedly pessimistic—and angry. He experienced futures thinking through WFSF and foresees only some form of internal conflict. After the motion in Congress to impeach Arroyo was thrown out by her majority support in 2005, 58% of Filipinos still wanted her resignation. Aguilar claims junior officers in the armed forces have admitted knowing at first hand that Arroyo cheated to win her reelection in 2004. They will be forced to decide whether to remain alongside the government and military leadership wracked with corruption, or whether to fulfill their constitutional role as defenders of the people. The likelihood of a coup or mutiny could be increased by rumors that the US government has abandoned a hopeless Arroyo government and secretly endorses a popular opposition leader acceptable to the US military.

Another possibility is protracted war between rebels and a government-military alliance. Aguilar hears that recruitment to armed rebel fronts has surpassed the levels of the Marcos era. But the battle could remain within the parliament if the left continues to win seats as it has since 1992 and pressures increase to avoid armed struggle. Without structural reform before too long, some kind of violence, even civil war seems assured. Aguilar pleads: “God protect this country and its people from just wars or an unjust peace”.

## 10. Filipino scenarios

In constructing his scenarios, Cesar Villanueva has applied *futures studies* thinking gained mainly through his association with WFSF, in conjunction with wide travels on behalf of Pax Christi. In his first scenario he falls back on a metaphor familiar to Filipinos: the *typhoon*.

### 10.1. Long typhoon

In this, the most likely scenario, the Philippines is stuck in a political quagmire of never-ending mistrust in the highest office of the land, thanks to allegations of corruption, long unanswered, and cheating in the last presidential election. In this future, the political opposition still fails to unite in order to pursue the president and to convince the general public that its intention to impeach the president is purely a search of the truth. On the other hand, civil society is factionalised, debating whether changing the president is the best way forward. Thus, the country gets stuck in suspended animation where no fundamentally sustainable and liberating development happens until 2011 when a new leadership assumes government. But the “war on terror” has engulfed the land in fear. Rampaging oil-price increases have threatened basic survival especially for the poorest of the poor. In order to cope, the Filipino diaspora to the rest of the world has quadrupled in search of secure work and better income. The greatest toll is on the health sector where 2000 health centres close from the overseas exodus of nurses and doctors. Civilian government is militarised under a framework of national security. Meanwhile, it is a fiesta

for foreign mining companies, seen as the only saviour of the country, promising millions of dollars in taxes and employment opportunities. But this means half of the total land comes under mining exploration and development, especially the ancestral domains considered sacred to the life and culture of indigenous people. Despite the promise of the latest environmentally friendly technologies and the most sophisticated anti-pollution devices, under the premise of sustainable mining, there is natural disaster from neglect and deceitful promises. The country survives on borrowed time as it awaits the possibilities of an irreversible landslide that completely buries the country in ruins.

### *10.2. Aikido dance*

The Philippines in this, the coping scenario, is able to float above the conflicts, to redirect its energies to transcendence and transformation. Specifically, governance gets a complete overhaul with a new system of federalism and a bicameral parliament. Local government units are more empowered, both fiscally and administratively, as there is a reversal of internal revenue allotment from 70:30 in favour of the national government to 60:40 in favour of the federal states. The economy is able to tap alternative renewable energy sources that make it less dependent on fossil fuel and other conventional sources. The country transforms into a haven as an alternative destination for foreign guests seeking organic food, holistic healing, community hospitality and spirituality tourism. It has become the centre for learning in active non-violence, sustainable community development, people empowerment, transformative governance and community-based environmental protection. The diaspora of health workers is compensated for by an electronic health system that is made available to the farthest community in the countryside by a pool of e-doctors and supported by foot doctors when a face-to-face and physical health intervention is needed. The major health system however is run by community health workers trained in preventive medicine and health practices able to use the combination of homeopathic, Vedic, Chinese, Oriental, Western and Indigenous medicine and health practices.

### *10.3. Loss of face and shame*

The Philippines here has become the most corrupt country in the world and a place all other people fear and avoid. Webster and all other dictionaries point to the word *philippines* to denote domestic workers, pay-offs, narco-politics, scavengers, and a dangerous place. In this scenario, the people who decide to stay are able to survive only on illegal activities such as gun running, drug pushing, extortion and prostitution. All the decent people have migrated to Mindanao, the newest tri-people country in the world where peaceful co-existence and co-development is pushing towards an authentic path of sustainable development.

The future looks much different from the Philippines than it does from the relative privilege of Australia. Futures activists such as Villanueva and colleagues at USLS, and in civil society, still need wider support to keep hope alive. Along the way they have enriched many lives and inspired acts of sustainability. They have planted seeds of change for successor generations.

Then, one February morning in 2006, a mountain on Leyte Island crumbled after an earth tremor and heavy rain. An avalanche of mud and rocks entombed a village,

including a school of 200 children. Above the 30-plus metres of rubble, rescue workers felt hopeless as a text message came through by mobile phone the next day: the landslide had relocated the school making it hard to detect. Altogether, at least 1,000 remain in a 40-hectare community crypt. Arguably, mining and deforestation from illegal logging may have contributed. “Calamity after calamity in the midst of poverty”, grieves Terai Barcoma. “Please pray for us.”

A week later, another coup was foiled. A state of emergency was declared invoking powers to control public-interest institutions, including the media. The challenge for social change continues, demanding courage, resilience—and ingenuity.

The epilog to this Filipino narrative is still to be written. Peace!

## References

- [1] R. Constantino, *The Philippines: A past revisited, Pre-Spanish—1941*, vol. 1, R. Constantino, Quezon City, 2002.
- [2] J. Hamilton-Paterson, *America’s Boy*, Granta, London, 1998.
- [3] IBON Foundation, e-mail, Manila, 15 March 2005.
- [4] Local onions, garlic, vegetables becoming rare under W.T.O., media release, IBON Foundation, Manila, 5 December 2005.
- [5] A.W. McCoy, *Priests on Trial*, Penguin, Ringwood, London, 1984.
- [6] N. O’Brien, *Seeds of Injustice: Reflections on the Murder Frame-up of the Negros Nine in the Philippines from the Prison Diary of Niall O’Brien*, The O’Brien Press, Dublin, 1985.
- [7] E.G. Parreño, *Boss Danding*, First Quarter Storm Foundation, Quezon City, 2003, p. 8.
- [8] J. Rocamora, *Corruption in the Philippines: a beginner’s guide*, in: S.S. Coronel (Ed.), *Pork and Other perks: Corruption and Governance in the Philippines*, Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City, 1998.
- [9] M.D. Vitug, G.M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*, Ateneo Centre for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Katipunan, Quezon City, 2000, p. 162.