

Migrants to the Coasts: Livelihood, Resource Management, and Global Change in the Philippines. *James F. Eder.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. 192 pp.

Allison D. Harnish
University of Kentucky

In his approachable ethnography, James F. Eder provides a stimulating case study through which social scientists, especially those in-training, may come to consider and understand the causes, effects, challenges, and conflicting meanings of concepts like globalization, migration, development, poverty, and environmental change in the contemporary era. The research takes place in the San Vicente coastal zone of Palawan Island in the Philippines, where migrants from elsewhere in the Philippines have come seeking opportunity in the coastal logging and fishing industries. This influx, combined with shifting methods of cultivation and global appetites for coastal resources has placed excessive stress on this Southeast Asian coastal ecosystem, resulting in coral reef destruction, mangrove deforestation, rising economic marginality, and a situation where “too many people [are chasing] too few fish” (p. xvii).

Eder opens powerfully with an entertaining vignette describing his entry into the San Vicente fieldsite. In this short account, the author establishes himself as a seasoned fieldworker and an accessible ethnographic writer. Eder utilizes interviews with mayors and officials from the municipal development planning office, interactions with local residents, and analyses of roughly 80 household surveys to tackle four key research questions: First, he asks how local livelihoods and patterns of resource use vary within and between the research communities. Second, he investigates how global forces—namely the exploitation of coastal resources by large-scale commercial fishermen, international tour operators, and business people—play out on the local level. Third, Eder examines the effort of a seven-year USAID-funded Coastal Resource Management Project (CMRP) to relieve exploitative pressures on San Vicente’s natural resources and help local residents manage those resources on a more sustainable basis. Finally, Eder asks what anthropologists can contribute to the development of new ways of living that enhance human well-being while also alleviating the destructive pressures on San Vicente’s ecosystem.

In addressing the first two research questions, and elsewhere throughout the book, Eder employs the narratives of local people to convey how the diversity of opportunities, motivations, and constraints facing San Vicente residents “unfold in a world of global connectedness” (p. 40). These residents may live side-by-side, Eder explains, “but they exploit coastal zone resources and earn their livings in different ways, depending on [their] differences in origin and cultural background” (p. 40).

Fishing and farming constitute the primary occupation of San Vicente residents, but declining fish stocks and rising gasoline prices are ‘squeezing’ them into experimenting with socially varied alternative occupational strategies. While men may invest in new fishing or farming technologies or try their hand as tour operators, women may be encouraged to take up housekeeping at local beach resorts or market urban goods out of small curio shops. Some, like Remy, who began vending homemade snacks to schoolchildren, were doing well. Others, like Edna and Nicanor, who tried their hands at farming silkworms and selling monitor lizards, were less successful in their responses to economic and environmental pressures. One occupation Eder pays particular attention to is beach seining, a fishing tactic whereby massive fine-mesh nets are

set hundreds of meters out to sea by men on outriggers encircling schools of fish or shrimp. The u-shaped nets are then drug to shore by two teams of eight or more people, usually women and children. Seines are nondiscriminatory, ensnaring all things in their path, and seiners utilize all parts of the catch. Seining is a popular 'sideline' or secondary source of household income for women, poor people, and Cuyonon- and Agutaynen-descended farmers who grind the inedible portions of the catch into fish meal for their hogs. Thus, each of the sideline activities employed, and conservationists' attempts to curb this latter ecologically detrimental sideline, are imbued with considerable gender, class, and ethnic implications.

In his review of the CMRP and municipal government attempts to promote new livelihood opportunities for San Vicentans, Eder holds that aquaculture and community-based tourism, though susceptible to world price fluctuations, could potentially serve as remunerative and ecologically neutral activities for the residents of this area. In the future, Eder predicts microfinance programs could possibly assist farmers and fishermen with the initial financing of alternative economic enterprises. Presently, however, he is skeptical that the microfinanced endeavors in San Vicente are substantial enough to induce fishermen to reduce their fishing efforts or grant a sufficient income source to those who take out loans.

With regard to the CMRP, Eder proclaims its accomplishments were limited. Because the project "ran up against" local class-, gender-, and ethnicity-based differences, the "burdens of conservation" were unequally distributed amongst local residents (pp. 118-119). Furthermore, a lack of popular support for efforts to establish marine protected areas (MPAs) and to curtail environmentally harmful fishing practices prevented the project from being taken up and continued by local residents after its official completion. Drawing from other case studies, Eder makes a series of recommendations to those who would implement similar coastal resource management programs elsewhere in the Philippines.

Eder concludes that anthropologists are "uniquely positioned... to help local people to better voice their concerns and to formulate more effective plans to deal with local problems" (p. 153). Based on his observations, Eder asserts that new livelihoods for fishing households must (1) be integrated both vertically *and* laterally with the global and local economies and (2) be the activities of entire households, not just individuals.

Eder is careful not to follow the steps of anthropologists who "excuse environmental misbehavior [on the part of poor people]...by calling attention to extenuating circumstances" (p. 59); While large scale commercial fishing operations are mostly to blame for the declining biodiversity, Eder also examines small scale 'plunder' fishing tactics (i.e. cyanide fishing, live fish trade, and blast fishing) as venues through which local actors contribute to the degradation of the coastal environment. Still, his account—and readers' appreciation for the complexity and precariousness of quantifying human-environment relations—might have been enhanced by a reference to the efforts of social scientists to overturn the received wisdom of colonial agents, demonstrate the reactivity and malleability of local ecological practices, and build alternative histories of landscape change in which local peoples play key roles in environmental stewardship (e.g. Moore and Vaughan 1994; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Leach and Mearns 1996; Bassett and Zuéli 2000; West and Vasquez-Leon 2008).

While he is to be commended for his wide-reaching investigation of human and coastal ecology in San Vicente, it is possible that—in describing (1) the ecological crisis affecting Southeast Asian coastal environments, (2) the ecological makeup and history of the locale, (3) the nature of development in the Philippines, (4) the varied and changing economic strategies of San Vicente residents, (5) the introduction and reception of a coastal resource management

project in the community, (6) the new prospects for microfinancing, overseas employment, and the role of Evangelicalism while also making recommendations for biodiversity conservation—Eder spreads himself too thinly across a work of less than 200 pages. These topics and themes, moreover, appear confined to the chapters in which they are discussed, rather than being laced reflexively throughout the book. Structured as such, the text reads as choppy in places and the ‘take home points’ become apparent only in the introductory and concluding chapters. On the other hand, perhaps this style of writing—skimming the surface of multiple issues, each of which could have easily been the sole topic of this book—is most effective for retaining the attention of lay readers or introductory anthropology students. The advantage of utilizing such a short, jam-packed case study in an introductory course is that it might offer segues for an instructor to bring in supplementary readings and lectures on a wide range of topics. Woven throughout Eder’s work is another feature making it valuable as a lay-piece and a teaching tool: The personal stories of research participants help to draw the reader back and forth between highly theoretical, large-scale processes (like globalization) and the small-scale, localized meanings such processes bear for real people with whom the audience can readily identify.

Eder is to be applauded for bringing to light a “particularly debilitating kind of development” and “plunder economy” that enriches an elite few at the expense of environmental and social wellbeing, leaving peoples and places with too “little to show” for the sale of their natural resources (pp. 41, 45, 46). The powerful notion (which, unfortunately, is expressed only in the preface) that fanciers of shrimp and tropical fish who never leave home may be just as implicated in the consumption of Southeast Asian resources as loggers, seiners, beachgoers, and scuba-diving ecotourists, helps to bring the salience of this matter to press upon readers who might be struggling to understand why such issues, transpiring on the other side of the world, should be of any importance to them. Thus, *Migrants to the Coasts* bears broad implications for the future of the world’s coastal ecosystems, as well as the millions of individuals who consume their natural resources from afar or depend on them locally for their livelihoods. Overall, this book speaks to everyday discourses on securing a living in an interconnected global community with increasing economic competition and diminishing natural resources.

REFERENCES

- Bassett, Thomas J. and Koli Bi Zuéli
2000 Environmental Discourses and the Ivorian Savanna. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1): 67-95.
- Fairhead, James and Melissa Leach
1996 *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savannah Mosaic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, Melissa and Robin Mearns, eds.
1996 *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Moore, Henrietta L. and Megan Vaughan
1994 *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia 1890-1990*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

West, Colin Thor and Marcela Vásquez-León

2008 Misreading the Arizona Landscape: Reframing Analyses of Environmental Degradation in Southeastern Arizona. *Human Organization* 67(4):373-383.