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"Plain Soldiers": Muro-Ami Fishing in Cebu

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In a controversial article on the state of Philippine society, published three years ago in *The Atlantic Monthly*, James Fallows, the magazine's widely travelled Asian correspondent, wrote that because of a failure of nationalism, "people treat each other worse in the Philippines than in any other Asian country I have seen" (Fallows 1987, 49-58). Whether this is a realistic assessment or not, we cannot verify. But certainly his statement is only one side of presumed normative interaction in the country. There are those who mete out ill treatment, and those who receive it. Were Fallows to be more rounded in his view, he would also have to write about how many ordinary Filipinos allow themselves to be mistreated without complaint, even without the consciousness that they are not getting what they deserve, throughout the course of an ordinary day. Muro-ami fishing has become firmly rooted in rural Visayan society over several decades through the training of children. When they are mature, these children provide an experienced work force at the lowest level of the so-called "plain soldier" social structure.¹ This may be a good example of what Fallows is saying as well as of our own qualifications of his statements. How else can we judge the pleadings of the mothers from Santander and Oslob, Cebu, mothers who apparently have no care for the safety of their children, to allow them to rejoin the banned muro-ami operations?² Or the fear of a priest in Oslob that if muro-ami expeditions cease, he would be driven to beg for food for his parishioners and that the law prohibiting child labor is unfair if applied in the case of muro-ami (one wonders also if he had his own welfare in mind)? (Basubas 1986) Or the apparent lies of twenty-one heads of fishing groups in a letter to the nation's president that those below fifteen years of age are not allowed to work in muro-ami, that the fishermen are given free medicine, and that they earn enough to send their children through college? (*The Freeman* 1986) Or the request of the Abines Brothers and Sisters Fish Trading Corporation to the Social Security Service that their employ-

ees be registered as self-employed workers, a complete denial of its own responsibility? (Gingoyon 1989) Or the hopeless sentiments of ten mayors of towns in southern Cebu that their fishermen cannot be trained in other skills and the banning of muro-ami would only drive them to join "bad elements" in the mountains? (Suaring 1989)

We divide this article into two sections. In the first section, we present a brief case study of a muro-ami fisherman to convey the flavor of his living experiences while at work.

Our key informant is a retired muro-ami fisherman (as legally all such fishermen are supposed to be now). We believe that because he worked as a child-swimmer and later as a young adult diver over a number of years, he is able to give a representative account. The observations of those who came after him would add only more details on hardships suffered on board and in the sea.³

To place our key informant's data in context, the reader should know that in the recent past muro-ami fishing in the Philippines has been the monopoly of two commercial fishing operators. The number of vessels used has not been exactly verified. There are figures of "over thirty" for the total and, for the largest operator, eighteen to twenty-four boats. Each boat employs a crew of about 350 fishermen. Fifteen percent of this crew may be under fifteen, and 75 percent from fifteen to twenty-four years of age. Approximately 8,400 individuals up to twenty-four years old were thought at one time to have been working on the vessels of the largest operator. One "cycle" of setting the nets, scaring the fish into them by pounding the sea bottom (often coral reef) with weights attached to scarelines (done by children while swimming), and retrieving the catch, takes about one and one-half hours. There may be several cycles a day. In each cycle, some laborers must check the net by diving to as much as eighty feet below the surface. This daily activity goes on for periods of up to ten continuous months at sea. From the catch, the Manila owner-operator of the vessel gets 70 percent, the labor recruiter/manager in southern Cebu 10 percent, and the master fishermen and laborers 20 percent to share among themselves (Report on the Conference 1986; Bureau of Women and Minors 1986).

In the second section of the article we offer some reflections on muro-ami fishing in its environmental, social and historical context. We will not discuss in detail its technology, its relation to the international labor standards, or policy options regarding the improvement of its operations, all of which have been adequately handled elsewhere (V. Corpuz et al. 1983a, 2-13; 14-19).

A "Plain Soldier"

In early 1990 an interview was held with a former muro-ami fisherman living in the municipality of San Jose, Negros Oriental. He shall remain nameless. In his barangay, the barangay of Ajong, there are about one hundred families who have members who worked for the Abines Corporation. They had to travel across the Tañon Strait to Santander in Cebu Province to take up their work. Our fisherman was not from a family of fishermen, but of farmers. He began as a swimmer or fish-scarer (Ceb. *tigalabag*) in 1958 at the age of thirteen, having been introduced to the work by his uncle. Fourteen years later in 1972, at the age of twenty-seven, he left muro-ami for good.

Our fisherman's experiences with his first two managers is instructive of the risks not yet mentioned in the literature. After four years with his first manager, the manager separated from his wife and began "playing around," as he put it. In the end, he ran away with the wages of all of the fishermen. In that year, only the owner of the boat (FRABAL in Manila) and the owner of the net (the Abines Corporation) made money. Our informant received nothing for the year.

When he transferred to a second manager in 1962, he was promoted to *tigsalom* or diver. This dangerous job involves making certain that the net (*bulsa*) is securely anchored, by diving to considerable depths, and keeping the net open and snag-free, so that the current plus the vibrations caused by the jiggled weights will move the fish into it without hindrance. In 1963, the captain of his mother-ship (which could have been a four-hundred-ton vessel) managed to get himself so drunk that he ran the ship onto a reef and sank it. Narrowly escaping with his life, our informant had to end his trip early that year, with little income.

Our informant described the *bale* (from the Spanish *vale*) or credit system which is used to attract fishermen. At the beginning of employment there is a cash advance of ₱300, which comes from the boat owner (FRABAL). Once a vessel is full of iced fish and taken to Manila, the *bale* is deducted from the fishermen's share of 25 percent. This first amount is usually left with the family, who will find that it cannot last until a second ₱300 advance which is given three months later. He said that the amount of the advance was acceptable only to unmarried men, and this was a major reason he gave for ultimately leaving muro-ami. If a new diver does not have goggles (*antipara*), or does not know how to make them, he has to

buy them, and at the same rate as the first cash advance, ₱300 a pair. This means either giving up the advance in order to buy goggles, or going further into debt. For the fish traders did not supply them. Our fisherman was able to pay for his goggles, prior to enlistment, by working as a sandpaperer for an *antipara*-maker.

A second source of credit is at the store owned by the Abines Corporation where the families of muro-ami fishermen buy rice and pig-feed on credit against their earnings. For our informant's family, a trip across the strait had to be made. If they did not have enough money to pay for the round trip, they would give part of what they had bought on credit in exchange for the fare.

Our fisherman's testimony reveals very difficult work and living conditions and a great deal of exploitation.

If the current on the fishing ground is strong, there may be as many as ten to fourteen fishing cycles a day. This means ten to fourteen settings of a net and fourteen dives. The fishermen are roused by flashlight at 4:00 A.M. from their bunks which are so close together they cannot even sit on them. They must wait four hours for breakfast because two or more cycles must first take place. If the current is strong, a single setting (*taktak*) of the net may take only a little over one hour. If the current is slow, the net must be left in place for two hours. Between breakfast at 8:00 A.M. and lunch at 12:30, three cycles will be completed. After a rest, three more cycles are usually accomplished before 6:00 or 7:00 P.M., which is supper time. Between 8:00 and 12:00 P.M., the crew is required to sew, repair, and dye nets, by whatever light is available. This extra labor is considered part of the job, but it is really performed by the fishermen for free, after they have already worked for fourteen hours. There is no recreation on board, for as our informant said, they are all "very tired with bowing their heads down" (*kapoy na kaayo sa pagdungo*). When the mother-boat is full of iced fish, they will be taken to a station ashore to wait for transfer to another ship, and given only one night's rest on shore, or, if the ship is delayed, two day's rest. In sum, our fisherman said "prison is better, for there one can really sleep."

Each ship has six teams of swimmers and divers (one boat per team) amounting to a total of about 180 individuals. The "plain soldiers" are allowed to take possession of the rejected fish, such as the *dorado*, clean them, and dry them to be sold as *bulad*, "dried fish." Some fishermen take the *bulad* home with them at the end of the season. But they also sell some of it to the manager, on board, for

₱2 per kilogram. The manager in turn would sell the bulad to the owner of the vessel for ₱14 per kilogram which is a big mark-up. The fishermen are not allowed to sell the *bulad* to anyone but the manager, and so are willing to clean no more than what will give them a little spending money each month to buy soap, for example.

The fishermen purchase soap, liquor and cigarettes from the wife of the manager. The muro-ami children buy twisted doughnuts (*siyakoy*) from her at ₱20 for ten pieces. One can guess that the manager's wife takes this opportunity to make a considerable profit also.

The management does not believe that it should bear the burden of accepting the cost of floats and weights that are lost as a part of the hazards of the work. Instead, it insists that the "plain soldiers" should be held responsible, and fines them ₱350 for each loss. This is a problem for a child who is just learning to handle the weight at the end of a scare-line. He finds at first that the combined weight of the stone or chain and the meters of nylon rope attached to it cause him to sink when he lifts them, which he must do to prevent the weight from catching on the reef, and in order to let it strike against the bottom repeatedly to make noise. Our informant said that it takes about one month to learn how to swim with a heavy weight. The risk of losing of floats and weights in such a situation is very great with consequent economic loss to the "plain soldier."

The informant also pointed out that, with experience, making deep dives becomes safer than making shallow ones. When one has to make sure that the net is touching the sea floor and must dive deeply, he becomes very conscious of the lapsed time. But in shallow water, one can become over-confident and stay under longer than he should.

The fishermen suffer from what are called "sea sores." These appear around the eyes, in the armpits and in the groin, and are a result of constant exposure to salt water. The usual treatment is baby oil, which they must purchase themselves. In fact, our informant maintained that the medicines required in case of any illness must be paid for by the fishermen themselves, and placed on their list of debts. Godofredo Roperos (1986), in his muro-ami exposé, verified this. One of his informants said, "There was only one doctor for the whole fleet, and we had to pay him for every consultation, as well as for the medicines we received from the manager." In fact, if one is unable to go down for just one dive, he is marked absent for the day and ₱20 is deducted from his share.

In 1972, our fisherman informant left muro-ami fishing. Basically,

he cited three reasons. One was the coldness of the water in June, July and August; he couldn't stand it anymore. Secondly, his cash advances, which he gave to his family, were not enough to help them, especially given the fact that wages came only after several months. And thirdly, in his day, the fishermen were getting a 25 percent share of the catch, which he thought was not fair, given all of the dangerous work they did in the sea and the labor expended in repairing and dyeing nets. Later, the share of the fishermen appears to have been lowered to 20 percent (Oosterhout 1988, 109-12), just as their first wage delivery has been delayed from five months to ten months after employment (Roperos 1986).

A Poverty-Generating Technology

The two major criticisms of muro-ami most frequently mentioned are, first, its employment of child labor, the inhumane exploitation of the fishing laborers in general (see also Tangbuwan 1989; Hall 1986), and its destruction of the coral reefs. Even with the adoption of the so-called "truncated two-eye-two-chain weights" and "spindle lead weights with brass rings," damage to the coral cover, which is at the base of the food chain in many municipal waters, is only reduced by approximately 50 percent (Corpus 1983, 14-18). This is certainly not enough. There is a third major criticism which we have not seen discussed in the literature and which makes muro-ami quite the reverse of a source of livelihood for rural Filipinos. Rather, it categorizes muro-ami as a method for creating further poverty in the countryside. This is the adverse affect on municipal fisheries as a result of the setting and resetting of the muro-ami nets in their waters. The only hint of this that we have seen in publications so far is a passage in the story by Tangbuwan in the *Malaya* of 13 November, 1989: "A fisherman and former barangay captain in Busuanga said fishermen have first-hand experience of the destruction caused by muro-ami. They found that the fish seemed to disappear after a muro-ami vessel had passed their way." The following data were observed on reefs in the South China Sea by Corpus et al (1983, 7 and 9). One vessel averaged 41.3 tubs per cycle (that is per one setting of the net, which is over 36 meters in length, at 344.2 tubs per day. This is not yet ten cycles a day. One tub is about 45 kilograms, and so all tubs yielded 15, 489 kilograms per day.

While we have been unable to find comparable figures for catches from trawlers of any size,⁴ I suspect that his catch is in the range of that of the large commercial trawler type of vessel found in Philippine waters. One study found that when large trawlers surreptitiously and illegally cast their nets in shallow San Miguel Bay as they move between their port at Naga City and their legal fishing grounds outside the bay, they become responsible for 10 percent of the total catch in San Miguel Bay (Vakily 1982).

This is also a matter of labor equity. After exploring thoroughly all relevant factors, including the lack of viable alternatives for small-scale fishermen who have been exploiting the San Miguel Bay fishing grounds for many generations, Conner Bailey wrote: "In the wisdom and fairness of encouraging increased concentration of fishing, it well may be that increasing incomes for small-scale fishermen can best be accomplished by reducing or eliminating competition from the more capital-intensive trawlers (Bailey 1982, 8).

The muro-ami catch is very large indeed, and yet it occurs not in deep seas as does commercial trawling, but on the reefs of the municipal fisheries. The affected fishermen are not only the "plain soldiers," but also those standing on the shore or sitting in their *barotos* (small unmotorized outriggers) nearby, watching the mother-boat and her crew at work. One might object that the muro-ami is not capital-intensive because it requires so many divers, but the effect on the locality is the same as if it were.

Bailey's frank recommendation has yet to be taken seriously. Because of the effect on the nearshore aquatic resources that must be used by poor small-scale fishermen, the operation of trawlers and muro-ami should not be allowed simply as a result of "technological coercion." In coining this term, we refer specifically to the pressure to retain or introduce any technology simply because it is available, simply because it is there. A good example of this in the last decade has been the mechanical reaper designed by engineers at the International Rice Research Institute. When, in a talk delivered to IRRI, the anthropologist Brian Fegan warned the institute that if it released the machine it would be responsible for taking away from many landless laborers their last job on the rice farm, and that the "grim reaper," as he called it, would lead to further peasant unrest, the then Director General of IRRI's immediate response was, "But it sure is a beautiful machine!" Of course, it is now in use on Philippine rice farms. By "technological coercion" we refer to the way

in which technology becomes our master when in many cases it should be rejected for the good of labor. From this perspective, the mayors of southern Cebu stand a good chance of being faced with the opposite of what they fear. The banning of muro-ami will not make rebels out of the fishermen, but further exploitation of the muro-ami kind will be the irritant leading to political resistance.

We strongly suspect that muro-ami has been, along with many other less impressive economic activities in the sea, responsible for what we call "the exportation of environmental degradation." By this we mean the tendency of fishermen, once they have mined the resources of their own island without putting anything back into the environment, will go in search of these same resources around islands further afield, returning to their homes with what they have harvested, and eventually depleting those distant resources as well. The result will be the movement of environmental degradation outward from heavily populated islands in a ripple-like effect to more peripheral islands. We see this as part of the need to survive or improve one's standing in a capitalistic, money economy. In a study of Olango Island in Cebu Province, for example, it was learned that the islanders now import mangrove for firewood from Bohol, when they used to have a model mangrove swamp. They go to the Danajon Banks to collect aquarium fish and decorative starfish, having over-fished these species from their own waters. They buy shells for shellcraft which they have over-collected from their own shores and which have been harvested on Negros and other islands. They go on fishing expeditions to the Sulu Sea, purchase fish from a trader who visits them from Pasil market in Cebu City, and over-harvest and sell their eel-grass, edible seaweed, sea cucumbers and sea urchins (Alburo and Olofson 1988).

Would a history of muro-ami fishing show the movement of its focus of operations from one group of reef islands to another as a result of its over-exploitation of local resources? In his 1970 research, Alexander Spoehr learned that muro-ami was a specialization in western Samar, but he witnessed operations of western Samar crews in the islands of the Danajon banks and in northern Negros (Spoehr 1980, 72). Today, crews from southern Cebu are known to focus on the Calamianes group of islands and northern Palawan (Roperos 1986 and Hall 1986). Our fisherman informant mentioned that he had spent seasons near Borneo. Was southern Cebu at one time a muro-ami fishing ground?

Credit Bondage

The second issue we would like to address is how the fishermen are paid. This was very well described by van Oosterhout (1988):

Fishermen are paid after completion of a ten-month contract. This form of payment creates economic problems for the family, since household budgets are organized on a daily basis. It compels families to take credit in kind, under a system called *vale*. Households in Oslob and Santander take a monthly *vale* of one bag each of rice and corn and a sack of pig food in the Abines' stores. The system facilitates overpricing, since employment and credit are inextricably linked: *vales* are given only when a fisherman guarantees that he will be joining the Muro-Ami operation. The *vale* is deducted from the income of the fishermen. Deductions normally range from 30 to 40 percent, but there are cases where they amount to over 100 percent, forcing the fishermen to join the next Muro-Ami trip in order to repay the debt.

The fishing families spend most of their income on food and have difficulty covering additional, and sometimes unexpected, expenditures such as school fees and hospital bills. Credit therefore also plays a very important role during exceptional circumstances. Again, the Abines group is active in the provision of credit for special occasions, and they may give food and money for weddings or may cover medical expenses which a local family is unable to bear. The fishing families this may not always redeem debts incurred in way in cash, but rather by giving the Abines (sic) political loyalty.

But it seems that the fishermen themselves are often in the dark as to how their shares are arrived at, as revealed in the interviews done by Roperos (1986):

When asked how the sharing was determined, Batoctoy, like the rest of the other boys we interviewed, shook his head. It appears that they were never told how their shares were arrived at. The only accounting given them reflects just the amount they had advanced, the amount they were supposed to have earned, and the balance which is what they get, after deducting their absences and their *utang* (debt) while with the fleet, such as the medicine they take when they were sick, and for the doctor's fee of ₱30 per consultation.

One informant said:

I was given an advance of ₱300 when I signed up . . . The biggest share I got was ₱4,600 for the 10 months I worked. But that was because I had become a *busero* ("netman" or diver). But my deduc-

tions also went up to about ₱3,000. I don't know how they compute our share. All that I noticed was that my share seemed to grow smaller as the years went by.

And a woman talking about her father:

It is true that as manager he received a considerable share, but that just went back to the Abineses because they induced the managers to gamble in their cockpit, betting thousands on cocks which were not as good as theirs, or in mahjong sessions that they organized during the weeks they were home after a *balansi* [payment of what remains of a wage]. When the managers and other fishermen ran out of money, they were given advances of varying amounts, even ₱5 or ₱10 thousand, against their future shares. So, a fisherman is continuously indebted to them. They cannot refuse [accepting advances] under threat of being laid off.

Philippine society is literally riddled with this form of injustice. It is well known that sugar cane labor contractors or *contratistas* hold out a cash advance to migrant sugar workers of only ₱100 or ₱150, depending on whether or not the recruit has a family, and this is deducted from their wages at the end of the season. This is known in Negros Occidental as the *anticipo*. As discussed by Violeta Lopez-Gonzaga (1985, 48–50, 59, 72–74) in her research on the *sacada* or migrant sugar worker, a new *sacada* may need an old-timer, usually a close relative, as a guarantor for his advance. In the rainy months from June through the first half of September, when fishing cannot go forward, the corn is still growing, and food prices are going up, many people in places like Bantayan Island in Cebu Province find the *anticipo* a welcome fall-back. The use of the *anticipo* to tempt *sacadas* out of their villages may explain the origin of the term *sacada* from the Spanish *sacar*, “take out” or “draw out.” As Lopez-Gonzaga writes, “The earnings to be had from cane-cutting are so little that the *contratistas* may offer an additional cash advance which goes into ceremonial expenditures.” Just as in *muro-ami*, then, the laborers are sealed off from the ultimate bosses by agents. The initial *anticipo* requires the workers to stay on for the entire milling season, but there are always some who run away earlier, something a *muro-ami* fisherman cannot easily do. But that can be blamed on the contractors, who allow the workers to buy on credit staples, sugar, coffee, cigarettes, and alcohol from the hacienda stores, but at a cost higher than the market price: “. . . the *contratista* in the

field observation site was using an illegal wooden rice measuring device." With the *contratista* as reference, a *sacada* can also turn to other private storekeepers and vendors living in the hacienda. These individuals may be left with unpaid accounts for several hundred pesos by absconding workers who are "caught in the mire of low pay and high indebtedness." Such vendors make high profits, but in doing so, take risks such as this and have only themselves to blame.

Credit has also been a means whereby lowlanders can bind forest-dwelling minorities to them in order to obtain their services in one form or another. The Batak Negritos of Palawan, as studied by James Eder (1978, 55-69; 1987, 86), are a case in point. These traditional hunter-gatherers and half-hearted farmers have in recent decades acquired a taste for rice, and try to grow it themselves, not entirely successfully. Eder writes that lowland traders and store owners make rice and other desired goods available, and extend credit. He writes ". . . as their own . . . rice runs out and as the new agricultural season gets under way, most Batak periodically obtain advances of milled rice from lowland creditors which are to be paid back threefold at harvest time." On other occasions, Batak may themselves exchange rice with lowlanders in return for other items at unfavorable rates, for example, a measure of rice worth ₱15 for a four-peso bottle of gin. One way they can repay a storeowner for credit is by going on time-consuming expeditions into the mountains to collect manila copal (*almaciga* resin) or honey. The storekeeper then makes a tremendous profit on this when he in turn sells it to a Manila entrepreneur. The Batak hunger for rice has kept them continuously in the position of creditors, and ensures the lowlander that a supply of forest products is continually forthcoming.

It is interesting to note that one of the southern Cebu mayors who fears that curtailment of muro-ami will drive the fishermen "to the mountains" is the owner of a relatively large beach resort where payment to the employees is also in the form of cash advance. Some of the employees were interviewed in a study that was done for NEDA on the economic benefits to locals of two types of beach resort tourism (Olofson and Crisostomo 1989). The employees claimed that they had never been informed what their salaries were supposed to be. They only learned about it from older workers. This may be due to the fact that salary is often given as a monthly "advance," especially in slack seasons. This is usually no more than ₱200 or ₱300 a month. In addition, they may take goods from the firm's store on credit against an assumed salary. They do get free meals, water, and

a place to sleep. But to augment a meager income, they canvass tourist visitors for diving in nearby beach firms, for a remuneration of ₱100 per tourist who wants diving instruction, and ₱25 if he only wants to dive. And of course they get personalized tips and a share of the centralized tips, which are sizeable only in the three months' peak season. In the peak season, employees must work long hours. At the same time, they are expected to put on ethnic dances nightly for the customers. There is no work nor are there benefits. They are told that they can leave at any time, as long as they don't have debts. They feel shame or fear the anger of the employer and this prevents them from complaining.

The parallels between this last example and the muro-ami reveal a striking pattern: the use of the cash advance, the uncertainty regarding what the wage is or how it is determined, the advance of goods in kind, the free (probably inadequate and in peak season long-delayed) meals, the requirement to do other work without further compensation (in this case, performing ethnic dances), looking for an additional sideline source of income no matter how meager, the long hours of work without benefits and lack of sleep, and the belief that the worker who cannot pay off his advances is bonded to the employer. One employee wondered how he had gone into debt for close to ₱10,000 with this particular employer.

We coin here the term *credit bondage* to describe this economic relationship. It appears to have originated in the debt slavery of Spanish times. Of its three major characteristics the first is the fictional wage, in a situation where the so-called employer is able to take advantage of the inability of his less educated employee to keep track of his accounts. This wage is low and may be irregular, there is uncertainty as to how it is computed, credit is owed against it, and it is eaten up by credit. There is a *spurious ethic* in which the employee is made to believe that he owes a debt to his employer and must repay it, when in fact by human rights, the employer ought to owe the employee the amount which the employer calls a debt, in addition to the presumed wage. Many workers feel obliged to try to pay their debts and so they stay on for another season—a form of forced labor. With credit bondage, what should be a formal firm attempts to pass itself off as a small, *informal "family" firm*, as one which treats its employees as family members. The provision of food and sleeping spaces is patronizing behavior which robs the employee of the opportunity to learn to manage his own life. In addition, it may occur that what ought to be a capital-intensive

operation, like muro-ami, claims to be good for labor simply because and for no other reason than that it is a labor-intensive one.

Thus one recommendation arises from this positioning of muro-ami within the category of informal business, using credit bondage rather than the labor standards which are followed by formal firms. Muro-ami operators obviously see this attack against a traditional Filipino way of doing things as unjust. Nevertheless, an all-out effort needs to be made on the informal sector generally to eliminate credit bondage. It is the descendant of debt slavery, and leads to the treatment of employees as household children, as "plain soldiers."⁵

Development Alternatives to Muro-Ami

Above we asked the question whether the waters of southern Cebu had ever been subjected to capital-intensive fishing technology or to muro-ami. Various researches lead us to believe that this may have been the case, because they show that if fishing was ever of any historical importance there, it is now no longer. This realization has implications for development alternatives to muro-ami in southern Cebu.

In a 1988 socioeconomic survey of a sample of Oslob, Boljoon, and Alcoy households in southern Cebu, it was found that in 42 percent of Oslob households there is at least one member who fishes. Even 30 percent of upland households in the sample from Oslob had a fisherman. But fishing was almost always a part-time, secondary occupation and usually only for home consumption. Only 3 percent of the households in the sample earned money from fishing. More households actually received income through remittances coming in from the outside. Fishermen were also usually farmers (Zosa and Zosa 1988a). In another survey of the coastal barangays of Badian and Alegria (Zosa and Zosa 1988b), the seemingly large figure of 42 percent of households with a fisherman for Oslob takes on its proper meaning, for in these barangays, while a similar percentage of households had a fisherman, fishing actually provided employment for only 14 percent of the work force and contributed only 14 percent of the total income. It is also done mainly for subsistence consumption in Badian and Alegria.

Muro-ami fishing did not show up noticeably in the Oslob sample, and its importance in the local economy may be over-rated by the critics of the muro-ami ban. In Badian and Alegria, the labor activ-

ity of fishermen per annum is estimated as worth ₱4,500. This is likely to be a similar number in Oslob and Santander. Note that it is much more than muro-ami fishermen are known to bring home after the subtraction of their overall debts.

In both study sites, southeastern and southwestern Cebu, fishing is undertaken by men approaching middle age, with the median ages at thirty-three and thirty-four years. The conclusion was made that young men who should be fishing have migrated elsewhere (these would not have included our "plain soldiers" for they would most certainly still be included as family members by those interviewed, albeit temporarily absent).

In a third study of just one coastal barangay, Matutinao in Badian (Remedio et al. 1988), 42 percent of all households had a fisherman, but nearshore fishing was a primary occupation for only 9 percent of the working-aged population, including fishing laborers on trawlers, and a secondary occupation for only 14 percent more. Only half of these ever sold any fish. In adjacent barangay Balha-an (Remedio et al. 1989), fishermen were found in only about 25 percent of households, which had only one fisherman each. The majority of these worked as fishing laborers on a deep-sea trawler. In all of these studies, fishing was usually combined with farming by the households.

In summary, there is a decreased emphasis on fishing as a means of earning a livelihood in southern Cebu. There is a relative scarcity of full-time fishermen, and there has been an out-migration of would-be fishermen. All of these suggest that there has been resource degradation in the fishery. There are implications here for alternative development projects in southern Cebu that propose to replace muro-ami fishing by emphases on other types of fishing. Moreover, most of the people in this microregion, including the fishermen, are farmers, a finding which contradicts the view of the local mayors that their fishermen are locked-in to fishing. Since fishing is a mere reflection, perhaps, of its former self, we recommend that further development here of small-scale fisheries be postponed. The fish populations need time to recuperate, and will not bear a further population of fishermen even in the form of those using less expensive types of technology.

What efforts then should be made? In looking over the reports of the Bureau of Women and Young Workers kindly lent us by the Department of Labor and Employment in Cebu, we find that projects in mind for displaced muro-ami fishermen, including the

children and their families, are soap-making, loom-weaving, basket-making, shampoo- and toothpaste-making, poultry, goat and pig-raising, a cooperative store, a communal farm, and fishing-related projects. While all of these (except the last) are worthy and ought to be tried, they do not strike one as part of a necessary unified approach. We have also been informed that about \$7000 to \$8000 have been offered by two foreign countries to help out in this endeavor, an amount we find to be niggardly for such a morally important project.

Stemming from the observations made above, we have two further suggestions to make. First of all, the vast majority of families here are farm families. All studies show, however, that not much income is possible from the degraded hillsides of southern Cebu using traditional methods and crops. This means that more attention needs to be given to the farm itself, and this needs to be a healthy combination of imagination and experimentation. There are crops and integrated crop combinations that could both protect the soil and turn these farms into money earners, such as citronella and mulberry, possibly the jojoba bean, the hanging potato (actually an aerial yam), and a combination of chocolate-producing velvet beans and *limoncito*.

Secondly, community organizing will be difficult in these towns for two major reasons. The first is that in Philippine society one needs a more focused technological and environmental problem around which to build cooperative efforts than simply a generalized need to generate some kind of income to replace fishing. Where such foci can be found that could unite people together, self-help associations and cooperatives could be successful but can be formed only slowly, with great patience, and with the peoples' input from the start. The second is that we seriously doubt, for historical reasons perhaps, that there are "communities" to speak of in the area of concern, in the traditional sociological sense of the tightly knit, well-bounded, highly cooperative corporate village. These are not in fact usually found in Philippine society. We do have barangay and municipalities, but these may not be much more than communities in a symbolic sense. People of the same barangay are divided by loyalties to different patrons. They may even have loyalties to different saints and chapels. At the same time, people from far-flung barangays may have in common a political and economic tie to the same patron (for example, to the Abines family as a result of muro-ami), but this does not make them a community. Thus, in view of

the looseness of community structures in the target settlements, we recommend that in such an important project as the abolition of muro-ami, the government and more generous foreign donors should put some teeth into it by providing the economic means and rationale for building a series of optimally profitable small factories in the countryside of southern Cebu. These could absorb an equivalent number of jobs for the muro-ami fishermen who no longer need be employed in sea-laboring. These factories would follow international labor standards. Workers would be drawn from a number of settlements. Rather than try to generate projects that would be dependent on the cooperation of people who come from loosely structured, traditionally non-intracooperative settlements, these factories, if imaginatively run and economically successful, could instead foster the development of communities around them.

Conclusion

We have moved from a case study of a muro-ami fisherman, focusing on the risks faced by him in his career and his living conditions at sea, to reflections on three main areas of concern: muro-ami as a poverty-generating technology, the role of credit bondage in muro-ami and in Philippine society generally, and development alternatives for southern Cebu.

The focus, though, has really been on the muro-ami children, who, with their more mature swimming and diving colleagues, are referred to in the occupation as "plain soldiers." This term—"plain soldiers"—we see as a metaphor which pretends to give dignity to the lowly fisherman's calling but which on another level quite clearly classifies him as analogous to the plain soldier in warfare, otherwise known as "cannon fodder."

The "plain soldier" at sea, however, has not been enlisted into ordinary warfare, but into an extraordinary warfare being waged against the environment and against other poor Filipino fishermen residing along nearby shores. In this way, the epithet "plain soldier" might help confirm James Fallows' view of the Philippines as a "damaged culture." To help fight this picture which has been put before the world, we suggest that any muro-ami vessel that defies a ban against it be dealt with rapidly and severely through appropriate legal processes. Furthermore, if Fallows' view of the Philippines is not to

be embraced—and we feel uneasy from what we know of the existence of several social problems like muro-ami fishing in the country that threaten to give credence to it—social scientists should participate in openly examining them one-by-one and offering recommendations for their practical and humanitarian solutions.

Notes

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1. Bureau of Women and Minors and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Child labor in the Muruami Fishing Sector: "Update on the Alleged Child Exploitation in the Muruami Fishing Sector and Related Concerns," six pages (no date but after 14 November 1986). On the first page of this document, the term "plain soldiers" is used synonymously with "swimmers" and differentiated from "divers," "master fishermen," and "ship captain." Swimmers and divers are needed in muro-ami fishing and they have often been children. The term "plain soldiers" is apparently in use by those at the top in the fishing vessel to refer to the industry's lowest occupational stratum. We think it might be used as a metaphor for all fishing laborers. As employed at sea, the metaphor has patronizing, military connotations which place the humble fishing laborer on the "front line" of resource exploitation.

2. As reported in a document of the Bureau of Women and Young Workers on "Highlights of the Cebu Visit," p. 4, par. 2 (no date).

3. For more information, see the excellent article of H. van Oosterhout (1988). This paper is also available in *Philippine Journal of Industrial Relations* 8 (1986): 75-93.

4. E. Navaluna and E. Tulay (1982) write: "The weight of the catch per trip was not available because these data were not recorded in the owners' logbooks."

5. This should not be misconstrued as an attack against the informal sector of the economy, or as advocating its elimination. Quite the contrary, the informal sector may very well be what enables the ordinary Filipino to survive through periods of economic crisis, and deserves further social science attention in its own right. We are simply saying that many employers in this sector should be made to treat their workers more honestly and ethically and less as dependent children.

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