

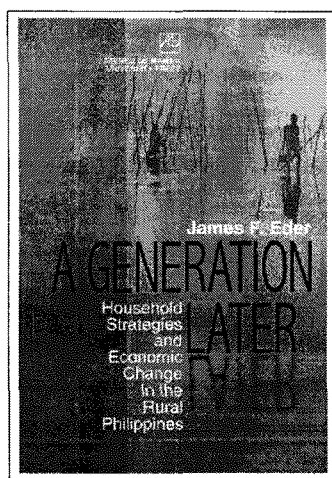
# Book Review

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James Eder. 2000. *A Generation Later: Household Strategies and Economic Change in the Rural Philippines*.

Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City

(originally published by the University of Hawaii Press, 1999).



*A Generation Later* is about change — about ‘economic development’ and about ‘becoming modern’, in the most positive and optimistic senses, as experienced by the households of San Jose, a ‘postfrontier’ community in Palawan. James Eder set out to figure: why is San Jose, characterized as a typical ‘rural upland’ section of the Philippines located in close proximity to a city, a ‘success case’? And the kinds of answers he found are significant for thinking issues of change and sustainability, social differentiation and gender roles.

As the title of the book conveys, the research period for *A Generation Later* spanned more than 25 years (fieldwork and restudy in the area in 1970-2, 1998, 1995). San Jose, a coastal area suited mainly for rainfed agriculture and located 8 kilometers north of Puerto Princesa City, was settled by migrants from the small island of Cuyo who were pushed out by the limited resources/opportunities in their place of origin. In the early part of the century, many Cuyonon initiated a seasonal process of sojournment to clear forests and grow upland rice on the mainland. Full-scale migration to San Jose began in the 1930’s; arriving Cuyonon displaced or assimilated the handful of indigenous people in the area. By the 1970s, all of San Jose had been taken up as homesteads by them. Continuous in-migration to Palawan (continuing up to the present day) further changed the composition of the population such that by 1988, the ‘core’ Cuyonon households and their offspring comprised barely half of the population, the rest being arrivals from all over the Philippines. Eder gathered a mass of empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative,

focusing on the original Cuyo migrants (10 core households) and the next generation (59 'offspring households').

Much of the introductory material in Chapters 1 and 2 and the discussion on household strategies in San Jose in Chapter 5 can also be found in Eder's co-edited book *Palawan at the Crossroads: development and the environment on a Philippine Frontier* (ADMU Press 1996, in sections co-written with J. Fernandez), so I merely skim over those here. In sum, among the important changes that transpired were intensification of agriculture, i.e. from one based on short fallow shifting cycles to more intensive permanent systems, as the population of San Jose increased and land became limited. Here (in Chapters 3 and 4) Eder pushes an ecological concern; i.e. with agricultural intensification came deforestation, but tree crops (coconuts, bananas, fruit-bearing trees) were discovered to be remunerative so that among those that owned the land they tilled, the 'post swidden systems' were seen as sustainable' (i.e. not conducive to soil erosion and other common environmental problems). 'Fine tuning' of the labor investments and economic activities of households resulted in a shift from a subsistence to market orientation, and further diversification into economic activities off the farm (especially to take up employment opportunities in the city close by). As time passed, the generally egalitarian community became differentiated — but not polarized, as a significant proportion comprise the 'middle' social strata — based on education and material prosperity. (Of methodological interest for many in the social sciences would be how Eder asked several locals to rank the other households according to their standards of 'level of living' (*pagcabetang*).)

A generation later, Eder discovered that the economic activities have changed, as have the households. Offspring have continued or modified the strategies of their parents or have struck out in new directions. Wives especially, have taken on more active roles in planning and procuring income for the household. In fact, Eder draws the insight that "women are the primary transactors of economic and social change".

The book has some fine reflections on change and 'the household' as a concept. Eder asks: if households are seen as 'adaptive' and flexible social units, "just where does that flexibility inhere?" Age and gender of household members, at which

point in the domestic cycle a household is, the continuing influence of others outside the household, are some of the factors seen to have a bearing on the economic strategies embarked on by the households. Relations between husband and wife were also seen to have changed with the times, as both must act in sync. Some wives emphasized that the economic flexibility of the household depends on good communication between husband and wife.

An interesting section (ethnographically) of the book is the discussion of the consciously articulated 'household economic strategy' i.e. '*plano*'. Households seen as not successful may have been so in part because of 'lack of planning'. Investment in education, contraception, savings, entrepreneurial activities, recycling, diversification of economic interests, may all be part of successful strategies. Eder provides a good definition of the "*sideline*": "an additional source of income to supplement the household's principal one" (p.110) common throughout the Philippines. "The sideline relates with the notion that 'you have to have more than one thing going for you', whether for prudence or for economic necessity, is widely heard. Another cultural value operating here is caution; while today's sideline may become tomorrow's full time occupation, prudence also calls for a low-cost trial run" (p.111).

Eder is apologetic throughout the book for constituting the original Cuyo migrants and their offspring as his 'community' (or subject of research). It is not the people of San Jose as a geographically bounded entity who are relevant for the study so much as the larger picture of the process of settlement in this bit of the ('last') Philippine frontier. From a larger perspective, Eder is right to note how we must take account of how the populations of the Philippine 'uplands' everywhere are dominated by 'lowlanders' and migrants, and to explore how these may be constituted as subjects of study. The strategies and successes of the original San Joseans can now be contrasted with those in other Philippine 'postfrontier' settings.