

# In The Grotto of the Pink Sisters

By Anne Nelson

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## Cory Aquino's Test of Faith

ALACANANG, THE cavernous palace where the Marcoses lived, now serves as a museum for tourists and schoolchildren. There they see Imelda's shoes, lined up in neat rows, and her mother-of-pearl Ouija board poised in front of her elaborately carved bed. Down the hall they stand silently in the "bunker room," with Ferdinand Marcos's hospital bed and disposable diapers where he left them, and the mattresses on the floor where his family slept before they fled. The place gives off a terrible feeling of isolation.

When she came to power, Corazon Aquino declared that the palace was too redolent of the excesses of the Marcos years. She moved operations across the way, to the Guest House built by Imelda Marcos to put up Princess Margaret and other friends from the international jet set.

But the new presidential offices are isolated in their own way: down a long corridor and through a double door is a large, mostly empty room. To the left, across an expanse of

mahogany floor, is the big presidential desk. To the right is a small antique desk occupied by the only government employee with free access to the president's time and presence: her 33-year-old daughter. Ballsy, who serves as her personal secretary. Ballsy, her husband Eldon, and their baby live with her mother in the executive mansion down the road, as do three of the president's four other children; Kris, the youngest at 16, sings Whitney Houston songs at her mother's campaign rallies. In a world full of enemies, only the family can truly be trusted.

The president makes frequent weekend retreats to the Grotto of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, a community known locally as the Pink Sisters for the color of their habits. There, she meditates and prays. Before she was president, when her husband was in prison, she encountered nuns from various orders whose mission took them out into the world of social action, ministering to peasants and slum dwellers as well as political prisoners.

Aquino grew especially close to Sister Christine Tan, perhaps because they shared a similar, well-to-do Chinese mestizo background. They even look somewhat alike, with flat round faces, gentle eyes, and secret smiles. Of course, Sister Christine didn't indulge in the president's polite suburban vanities of high heels and lipstick. She remained an austere presence in her plain eyeglasses, her hair always covered with a scarf.

Although Sister Christine was



Photo by Robert Gumpert

*A six-year-old child on the island of Negros. Aquino inherited a country where people are hungry, landless, jobless, and restless. They expected her to change the system and, with it, change their lives.*

a vocal critic of the communist insurgency, she also understood the conditions from which it had sprung. She had worked for years in the worst slums in Manila, and made something of a vocation out of revealing their horrors to women from her own comfortable background. Her tranquil voice would take on a slightly chiding tone as she'd try to convince the perfumed ladies, taking the afternoon off from the mah-jongg circuit, that the breeding grounds for such misery in their country ultimately could threaten their own well-being, too.

In the early days of the new government, President Aquino remembered Sister Christine's friendship from the prison and her ongoing work in the slums, and brought her into the presidential offices. Sister Christine used her audiences to speak as ombudswoman for the poor. The president even appointed her to the commission charged with drafting the country's new constitution, as part of a small contingent from the "cause-oriented groups," a Philippine term applied to anyone promoting social concerns.

At first, the cause-oriented groups applauded Aquino's dramatic decisions to release political prisoners and start peace talks with the guerrillas. When they worried that economic reforms were not making similar progress, someone could always answer that at least the president would learn about the needs of the poor through her talks with Sister Christine.

But then the whispers started, in the corridors, behind office doors, after cabinet meetings at the palace, saying Sister Christine was a "leftist." Her influence began to wane. No one ever made an official statement, or suggested that there had been a policy shift in the presidential office; it was just that Sister Christine didn't get invited to the palace as often as before. The cause-oriented groups weren't consulted as often concerning what should be done about their causes, and the official emphasis shifted to what to do about the insurgency.

Then Sister Christine was invited to give a talk at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, just after the May congressional elections. It made headlines in the Manila papers: "Cory gov't elitist, nun says: no services have been rendered to the urban poor from the government in more than a year.... Only millionaires can get elected in the Philippines."

With that, Sister Christine was frozen out of the presidential office for disloyalty. Now when Sister Christine's slum dwellers want contact with the president, they go to mass rallies at Luneta Park. President Aquino comes down

to earth in a white helicopter, grants them a few words, and flies up again as they watch, their faces blasted by the rotors' gritty wind.

CORAZON COJUANGCO AQUINO GREW UP AS A MEMBER of one of the most powerful families in the country, and her family's role is usually understated in discussions of her political career. Power in the Philippines, as elsewhere, is defined in many arenas—money, politics, diplomacy, social status—and the Cojuangcos always had a hat in every ring. It is fair to say that if Corazon Cojuangco had not had

access to her family's wealth and political machine, Corazon Aquino the widow never would have been a serious candidate for president.

Like most Filipinas of her generation, Corazon Cojuangco's life as an adult was defined by the man she married, and after his death his past determined her political future. Her marriage to Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino—when they were both 21—was applauded by both families, as it represented an alliance between the Cojuangcos, a major banking family, and the Aquinos, of lesser economic importance but one of the

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Ninoy Aquino had grown up in the shadow of a boyhood trauma: his father, a nationalist who opposed American colonial rule, served under the Japanese occupation government during World War II and was imprisoned by the Americans for treason at the end of the war; he died shortly after he was freed. As a result, Ninoy grew up with a love-hate relationship with the United States and flung himself into international intrigues, perhaps to overcompensate for his father's history. At 17 he followed Korean troops into battle alongside the Americans, as a war correspondent. Shortly after his return, he was adopted as a political protégé by Vice President Ramon Magsaysay, the CIA's man in Manila.

Magsaysay was elected president in 1954, thanks in part to the active support of Edward Lansdale, the CIA's godfather of counterinsurgency strategy (immortalized in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*). Young Ninoy Aquino came to know Lansdale as well, and would later boast to his authorized biographer, Nick Joaquin, about his own CIA ties. In 1958, he was tapped to take part in a CIA-planned coup attempt against Sukarno in Indonesia, and set up a Bay of Pigs-like sanctuary, training camp, and communications base for the rebel colonels at the Cojuangco's sugar plantation. He slipped in and out of Indonesia himself on a smuggling vessel run by an ex-Nazi U-boat captain. Later, as governor of the province of Tarlac in the early 1960s, Aquino cultivated his relationship with the U.S. Agency for International Development, and set up programs for them to train Vietnamese personnel.

When Marcos declared martial law in 1972, he imprisoned scores of opposition leaders, but most of them were quickly released. Marcos's two most potent rivals remained behind bars: Ninoy Aquino and Pepe Diokno, another dynamic young politician who had once been a



Photo by Robert Gumpert



Photo by Robert Compton

*"Tadtad," a right-wing religious cult, is part of a growing vigilante movement. Some of its targets are guerrillas; others are merely unlucky. Left: Lt. Col. Franco Calida, of the Philippine Constabulary, doubles as a vigilante leader in Davao City.*

Marcos ally. Of the two, Aquino had it worse. He was in prison eight years: endured solitary confinement and was sentenced to be shot; went on a hunger strike almost to the point of death. In 1980 he was suddenly released on the condition that he leave the country and stay out. Then, after a three-year idyll with his family in Boston, he returned to the Philippines. He was shot dead as he stepped off the plane.

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, CORAZON AQUINO REMAINED DISCREETLY in the background during her husband's political career, running the household, taking up hobbies. Unlike some Philippine political wives, she didn't take an active interest in politics.

When she ran for president after her husband's death, she did so without any real ideology or party structure. Her platform was that she represented a continuation of what her husband stood for. She has sounded the same theme over and over again as president, and the sheer weight of Ninoy's afterlife—in statues, on T-shirts, as an icon of everything Marcos destroyed—is still enough to maintain its resonance.

But what did Ninoy stand for? His political profile is unusually difficult to capture, especially as its outline recedes into the increasingly dense vapors of martyrdom and

myth. Any Filipino will agree that he was an energetic, charismatic personality, a brilliant speaker, a man who beguiled his superiors with his charm and devastated his enemies with his wit.

There the consensus breaks down. His public record, like the Bible, will support any side of any argument: was he a nationalist or a sellout? Was he a social reformer or a defender of the landowners' interests? Did he oppose Marcos on principle, or simply because he wanted his job?

It is hard to judge from Aquino's intellectual legacy, which is embarrassingly slight: a volume of speeches, some letters, a few articles, all meaningless outside their immediate contexts; trifles next to the weighty output of figures like Claro Recto, the grand old man of Philippine nationalism, or Aquino's fellow prisoner Pepe Diokno, who went on to found and spearhead the country's human rights movement until his tragic death in 1987. Aquino's real legacy, to his widow as well as his country, was his persecution and martyrdom, and in an intensely Catholic country this is not to be underestimated.

Aquino's death occurred at a moment when the Philippines was ready to be galvanized, and the extraordinary events between his homecoming and his widow's election seemed to be a restatement of the Christian myth: that suffering is redemptive. This is the idea that Corazon



Photo by Robert Gumpert

*Armies of squatters comb the slopes of Smoky Mountain, Manila's largest garbage dump, and peddle what they salvage on the street.*

Aquino presents in her standard speech, which varies little, whether she's addressing the joint houses of Congress or campaigning in Cotabato: Ninoy suffered and died, but with his death he conquered Satan—Marcos—and redeemed the soul of Philippine democracy.

The only problem is that the movie doesn't end here. Ninoy dies, and Marcos swirls off angrily into the clouds, but the Filipinos have most inconveniently remained poor, hungry, landless, jobless, miserable, and restless.

FLYING SOUTH FROM MANILA, THE HELICOPTER'S SHADOW falls on a bumpy rhythm of sea, land, rice paddy, crater, shore, sea, atoll, sea, land, sea. Natives of the islands called the Visayas had a creation myth to explain this formation. In the beginning, the heavens covered the earth like a coconut shell. Inside the bowl, a rat was born, which grew and became the giant Angngalo, who carried the sky on his shoulders. One day he relieved himself, and his feces and urine became the islands and the sea.

The hardest challenge Aquino faces in governing her nation is remembering that it isn't a nation at all. Its people have none of the characteristics that usually define a nation: no predominant race, no common language, no shared religion, no single landmass. Instead, it is a fractured composition of over 7,000 islands populated by over

70 language groups. The only reason they constitute a country now is because a Spanish navigator drew a circle around his map four centuries ago and claimed everything inside it for Philip, king of Spain. And the residents of different islands can communicate with each other now only because the United States, the colonizing power from 1898 until 1946, set up a public school system and taught English. Pilipino, the so-called national language, is based on Tagalog, spoken by less than 30 percent of the people.

The geographic dislocation of the Philippines has always been apparent, but it has taken the age of the helicopter to show the Filipinos that they don't even share the same century. The majority of the 200,000 Mangyans of the island of Mindoro, for example, are still nomads without fixed housing, much less access to education, electricity, clean water supplies, or modern medicine. The men wear loincloths that expose their buttocks, with basketball shoes and Rambo T-shirts. The women wear woven wrap skirts and go barefoot. Every spring hundreds of children die from measles epidemics, and tuberculosis is rampant.

Place the Mangyans next to the millionaires of Forbes Park, a Manila suburb named after an early American governor. Driving past its wide, velvety lawns, sprawling modern houses, and discreet malls of boutiques, you can almost convince yourself you're among the quiet money of

northern California. The Mercedes is the automobile of choice; children go to college in the United States. But in Forbes Park the quiet money buys the uniformed services of two drivers on rotation, a gardener, a cook, a few maids, and one nanny, or *yaya*, per child. It is a strange balance, reproducing the American dream with the advantage of a Philippine wage scale of about \$30 a month.

Between the misery of the Mangyans and the non-chalance of Forbes Park lie the rest of the Filipinos. There are sprawling neighborhoods in Manila that are recognizably middle-income, with televisions and refrigerators and a car in the drive. They provided the core of Aquino's support in the February revolution, and helped turn it into a street fair of T-shirts and trinkets. But the high visibility of the middle class is deceptive.

Sixty percent of the population struggles for survival in the countryside, where landless peasants pick up seasonal work on the sugar and coconut plantations. But even this meager living is threatened: sugar and coconut, the bases of both the nation's export earnings and the poor's subsistence wages, have steadily dropped in price. The various strains of poverty and land hunger have prepared the way for insurgencies, region by region: the communist New People's Army in areas torn by peasant-landlord conflicts; the two Muslim nationalist fronts on the southern island of Mindanao.

In Manila, Cebu, and Davao City, the shantytowns are bursting with country people who have been pushed into the city in search of work. In one Manila slum, slammed up against a ceramics factory, 100 families live in a multi-storied honeycomb of cement and metal, cut off from light and air, with no running water. A few miles down the road, a neighborhood called V. Mapa is built over a swamp; children go from house to house on boards stuck down in the mud made of swamp water and sewage. Amid the piles of soggy garbage are leafy green stalks of *kangkong*, or swamp spinach, which often appears on the family dinner table. On the corner a man labors with a soldering iron, trying to make his antiquated taxi's engine turn over one more time.

Corazon Aquino is officially president of all of these Filipinos: the unassimilated tribes, the economic elite, and the poor who are at least marginally attached to the plantation or urban economies. The tribes expect little of Aquino, since they never had much connection to Manila in the first place. The middle-income Aquino boosters, with their "I love Cory" visors and yellow bumper stickers, still back her. The elite continues to support her on the same basis it reluctantly came to her camp, as its best chance to preserve the status quo and ward off the coming civil war.

But the poor heard Aquino promise them, among other things, land reform, respect for human rights, and a "new politics" that would bring an end to official corruption. They identified with her status as widow and victim. They expected her to change the system and, with it, change their lives.

FOR JOE CASTRO, HOPE FOR A "NEW POLITICS" DIED IN a slum called Kwonset in May 1987. That was when Castro, a candidate for Congress, had his own precinct bought out from under him. Joe Castro was born in a slum himself, one of 13 children—though it would be hard to guess from looking at his dark, handsome face, his Lacoste shirt, and stone-washed blue jeans. He worked his way through college, then got a good job as a sales agent for a multinational. He wasn't really politicized until the death of Ninoy Aquino; then he got involved with a mass organization called BAYAN and spent much of the next few years on the streets, initially in anti-Marcos rallies, then marching for Aquino.

In the first year of the Aquino government, BAYAN (whose name means "People" or "country") spawned Partido ng Bayan, the only legal, left-of-center party in the May congressional campaign. Castro was one of its candidates. Although the party includes former guerrillas, Joe describes himself as a "Catholic nationalist." He shares certain social ideals with the communists—support for land reform and decreasing the country's dependence on foreign capital—but he says that the communist ide-

ology doesn't have much to offer the Philippines. He has long distrusted the policy of armed struggle and argued in favor of the electoral process.

He campaigned hard for nine months, focusing on local issues like running water and electricity. "I'd hold three-hour meetings, real dialogues, in the barrio," he recalled, "and if they had questions, I'd stay even later. The other candidates"—endorsed by Aquino or by her arch-rival Juan Ponce Enrile—"would come in and give a speech from a truck and leave." Castro thought he had a good shot at winning a seat.

Two days after the elections, he moved through the slums, still shaking hands, still friendly, but with a wounded look in his eyes as he assessed the damage and tried to figure out how he had lost so overwhelmingly.

He introduced himself to a few men standing outside a rickety house with a plastic curtain in the window frame. "Lots of people here liked what you said," answered a man named Valenzuela. "But what can you do? The other ones came in and bought votes. Fifty to 100 pesos a vote. Who's going to turn that down?" (The current exchange rate is about 20 pesos to the dollar.)

In the next neighborhood, called Pandacan, we sat in a living room with a group of Castro's supporters. "It looked so good the last time I was here," Castro said. The men smiled sadly. There had been three proadministration candidates for Congress in the district. In this precinct, one of the men reported, the candidate from Vice President Salvador Laurel's camp only paid 30 to 40 pesos a vote; the candidate from the campaign run by the president's brother, Peping Cojuangco, paid 50 to 100. He won. "You have to remember," one of the men said, "that these are people who sell a pint of blood for 60 pesos. Sometimes they have to go to different blood banks because the same one won't buy more than one pint a month."

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We went to six different neighborhoods. I chose people at random, and everywhere it was the same: both the Aquino and the Enrile forces had bought votes. In 1986, Cardinal Sin had told the Filipinos to "accept the money [from Marcos people] but vote your conscience." This time, we were told, that tactic was thwarted by collecting carbon paper from the write-in ballots already cast. In other areas, witnesses described Aquino organizers buying off entire tables of teachers assigned to count the votes for thousands of pesos per table, achieving an economy of scale. At the end of the day, Joe Castro gave a bitter laugh. "I guess I was foolish for running," he said. "We didn't have any money to buy votes—even if we'd wanted to."

A friend of mine, who has known Aquino for years and had been a key supporter of hers, was dubious when I told of the vote buying. To prove the point, this friend, who owns a small factory, took a straw poll of its two dozen workers. All but one of them admitted to taking money for their votes, from either the Aquino or the Enrile camps.

After the elections, conservative newspaper columnists wrote triumphant editorials saying the elections proved that Aquino's popularity was unshaken, and that the leftist forces made a lot of noise but had no real support. This claim may or may not have been true, but the issue of vote buying was never addressed.

Among the old Philippine hands in the capital, the journalists and diplomats about town, reports of the vote buying produced one of two reactions. The first was that even with the vote buying, the elections were cleaner than Marcos's, since the polling stations had not been routinely roughed up by goons, and "only" 64 people had died in campaign violence (more than half of them from Partido ng Bayan). The second response was that vote buying was to be expected from Enrile's people; it was unfortunate that it had occurred on Aquino's side, but it probably happened without the president's knowledge. This is a striking conclusion, since her own brother, Peping Cojuangco, was one of the three campaign managers for her slate of candidates (another was her brother-in-law Paul Aquino).

But even without the vote-buying factor, the May elections were bound to produce a lopsided Congress. The Senate slates, for example, had nothing to do with regional representation. The Aquino organization and the Enrile organization each handpicked its own list of 24 candidates to fill the 24 seats. (Partido ng Bayan only had the resources to field seven candidates for the Senate and House combined.) When voters entered the polling station, they received a write-in ballot. Obviously they couldn't be expected to remember 24 names, so each organization handed out its list of candidates to copy.

Aquino campaigned extensively for her list, which included, besides her brother-in-law Butz Aquino, a number of her cabinet ministers. Even Cardinal Sin got into the act; apparently exempt from the pope's strictures against clergy in politics, he endorsed his own list of "top ten" Senate candidates, all of them from Aquino's slate.

The congressional election, like the campaign for the constitution, was a plebiscite on Aquino's personal popularity. The parallel would be for Reagan to draw up a list of

his 100 closest friends and advisors and present them as the senatorial candidates for 50 states at large, calling on people to vote a straight ticket based on his likability rating.

Aquino got her straight ticket; of the 24 senators elected, 22 were her candidates. The House of Representatives showed similar results. But Aquino also got a Congress where over 90 percent of its members are landowners, virulently opposed to any land reform measure that affects private land. Since she delayed any final action on land reform until Congress convened, the issue is now in the hands of those with a strong vested interest in seeing that no action is ever taken. It is also a Congress in which the left and the right-wing Enrile forces have such negligible representation that they are bound to take their political statements into the streets.

In the months following the elections, that is precisely what they have done, and the street rallies and demonstrations have been met with increasing violence. In August, BAYAN, along with other mass organizations and unions, launched a series of protests against rising fuel prices. A few weeks later Joe Castro and another BAYAN leader, Lean Alejandro, gave a press conference criticizing Aquino policies. After the session, a group of armed men tailed Alejandro to his home and shot him in the face. He died instantly. So far Castro has not been attacked, but other BAYAN leaders are starting to flee the country.

Alejandro's death is one illustration of how quickly the political situation has begun to unravel. A few months after the February revolution, Alejandro recalled his own participation: "In a very immediate sense, I was frightened for all those people who were out there braving the armor and the troops loyal to then-President Marcos. I was shouting through a bullhorn for the military not to fire. Fortunately, no one did. All those years of struggle against Marcos, especially those four historic days in February, everyone found out that in the Philippines the line of fire is the place of honor." Alejandro had no way of knowing that the very victory he was celebrating would move him closer into the line of fire.

NO ONE HAS BEEN ARRESTED FOR THE MURDER OF Lean Alejandro, but his death fits into a pattern of violence against people who argue that Philippine society requires peaceful but sweeping change. The killers, "unknown, heavily armed men in civilian clothes," may be off-duty military, factory owners' hit men, or members of the new vigilante movement sweeping the countryside.

They claim to be fighting the communist insurgency, but they often strike against members of peasant organizations who have never held a gun, trade unionists like Rolando Olalia, Jr., killed in late 1986, liberal Catholic clergy, and activist lay leaders. In a society that is desperate for change, it is the popular, nonviolent organizer who poses the greatest threat to the status quo—and who provides the easiest target.

The vigilantes' origins vary from region to region; in some cases they grow out of the Civilian Home Defense Forces organized under Marcos to combat the leftist insurgency. They can be traced also to the private armies assembled by landlords (including *Continued on page 49*)

our imagination.

The recent spate of Vietnam films then is not so much an honest and critical exercise in memory as it is a complicated instance of mythologizing. We need not have waited until now to see the mythical potential of the war, as both *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deer Hunter* demonstrated some years ago. But perhaps we did have to wait until painful memories had been blunted by the sheer passage of time, to welcome the Vietnam veteran back into our midst as something of an exemplary and sentimental figure, the bearer, in spite of all the bad news and anger, of distinctly American virtues.

When *Platoon* was first released, a number of people asked me, "Was the war really like that?" I never found an answer, in part because, no matter how graphic and realistic, a movie is after all a movie, and war is only like itself. But I also failed to find an answer because what "really" happened is now so thoroughly mixed up in my mind with what has been said about what happened that the pure experience is no longer there. This is odd, even painful, in some ways. But it is also testimony to the way our memories work. The Vietnam War is no longer a definite event so much as it is a collective and mobile script in which we continue to scrawl, erase, rewrite our conflicting and changing views of ourselves.

For the moment, at least, the view is complex and slightly paradoxical. The Vietnam War of our movies is the event that robbed us of our old, and always false, self-conception as a nation of gentle missionaries. But that unnerving message, and all the bewitching and particular excesses locked within it, is hardly ever delivered straight up. It comes to us, perhaps not so surprisingly after all, in more familiar cultural garb: through antiheroes and romance, spiritual journeys and rebirths.

Things could be worse. If one of the unconscious desires of the films of Vietnam is to domesticate the war, to deliver up its horror in palatable and digestible form, we can now be sure that the matter will not go down easily. There is just too much worry in these stories for that, too many indigestible lumps. Whatever its future transformations, the legacy of the Vietnam War—at least the war inscribed in our movies—will probably always be alarming, and our compensations always nervous, partial, incomplete.

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## CORY AQUINO

(Continued from page 24) Aquino's family, the Cojuangcos) to protect their interests against bandits and peasant organizers. Several have roots in fanatical religious cults, such as Our Lord of the Sacred Heart, or Tadtad, which means "chop-chop." The name refers both to the initiation rites of slitting members' flesh with bolo knives, and punishing infidels by beheading them with the same instruments.

The most recent generation of vigilantes dates back to 1984. Guerrillas from the New People's Army around Davao City, in Mindanao, learned that the government had infiltrated their ranks with "deep penetration agents," or DPAs. Over time the guerrillas responded with a frenzy of killing, massacring anyone they remotely suspected. Townspeople responded by forming *Alsa Masa* ("Masses Arise") which proposed to protect the community from guerrilla abuse.

The vigilantes quickly extended their mandate from striking armed guerrillas to those they judged to be sympathizers, and soon anyone who disagreed with a vigilante—whether on religious, political, or personal grounds—was fair game. There are now more than 40 vigilante groups scattered over the archipelago. Human rights groups say a pattern has begun to emerge: guerrilla assassinations of officials provoke vigilante attacks on defenseless civilians; the guerrillas retaliate by striking at officials or known vigilantes.

Although some of the vigilantes' targets may have been guerrillas, many, such as Norberto Gallines, were merely unlucky. Gallines, a 28-year-old husband and father of three, was a devout Catholic and a member of a Christian Base Community. In the words of his parish priest, he was "not a leader, just a nice guy—a nobody."

On June 28, 1987, Gallines was hoeing a plot of land outside his home on Negros when a band from *Alsa Masa* passed by. The vigilantes beat Gallines, then beheaded and disemboweled him with their bolo knives. They wrapped the head in a jacket and took it to the local garrison, claiming it belonged to an NPA guerrilla. The commander told them they had made a mistake. He or-

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dered his men to throw the head into a ditch, where it lay until Gallines's widow located it for burial. When the commander was asked why no action was taken against Gallines's killers, the response was nonchalant: just because there's a head, there's no reason to suspect a crime.

Not all of the vigilantes' targets are as humble as Norberto Gallines: last March a town mayor from Cotobato was hacked to death for refusing to support Elsa Masa. A few weeks later, another group hurled a grenade into the residence of Negros's Bishop Fortich, an outspoken proponent of land reform and human rights, who narrowly escaped with his life. Vigilante threats and harassment against church people have been on the rise in recent months.

The vigilante movement is the greatest single paradox of the Aquino government. Much of Aquino's popular appeal was based on her own status as a victim, and her campaign included a promise to disband the Civilian Home Defense Forces and the landlords' private armies. But the new government put out mixed signals. Despite Aquino's initial antivigilante statements, her powerful minister of local government, Jaime Ferrer, sent a message of active support for the groups, and even threatened to fire mayors and governors who refused to join the vigilante effort. (Ferrer's role in promoting the vigilantes may have been a factor in his assassination in Manila last August.)

In April, General Fidel Ramos issued a directive that put the vigilantes under military supervision. At an October rally in a slum district of Davao, Aquino herself praised Elsa Masa in no uncertain terms: "We look up to you as the example in our fight against communism," she told cheering vigilantes. Some government officials have qualified their support for the vigilantes by restricting it to groups that are "unarmed," but the restriction seems to apply only to licensed firearms, when bolo knives are the weapon of choice. To date there has not been a single conviction for vigilante terror.

In Mindanao, the vigilantes get open military support. Elsa Masa receives a budget of nearly \$9,000 from the public coffers of Davao City, and Lt. Col. Franco Calida of the Philippine Constabulary serves as a spokesman and

leader. Calida holds a kind of open house in his Davao office where bolo-wielding vigilantes and foreign dignitaries can meet. Elsa Masa and Tadtad members are seen coming and going on a regular basis; Calida claims he has hosted U.S. counterinsurgency expert retired Gen. John Singlaub, and has received the local director of the U.S. Information Service as well.

Many Filipinos believe that the United States is actively promoting the vigilante movement through military and intelligence ties. So far the evidence is inconclusive, but on a visit to the Philippines last June, Secretary of State George Shultz went on the record with his moral support—referring to the vigilantes as "citizens' groups." "As I understand it," he said, "they are being organized within the framework of government authority. They are not sort of free-floating vigilante groups. And President Aquino has supported that approach and we support what she is standing for."

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE A SCENARIO for the Philippines that doesn't include an escalation in violence. It is even harder to imagine the United States standing idly by. Large-scale investments, long-standing political ties, and two major U.S. bases bind the two countries together.

Guerrilla forces in the New People's Army are approaching 30,000, compared to 155,000 soldiers in the armed forces. As the insurgency gains momentum, there are sounds of panic from Washington. Officials from the Reagan administration—like leftists in Manila—are talking a lot about Low Intensity Conflict. George Shultz has advised Aquino to look toward the "Salvador success story." Military observers say there has been heavy traffic on the part of U.S. counterinsurgency experts from the Southern Command in Panama to the Philippines.

As in El Salvador, the Philippine armed forces are beleaguered by the label *unprofessional*. The United States humiliates them by withholding helicopters on the claim that the Filipinos can't keep them in the air; international human rights groups point to their massacres of civilians and accuse them of being too cowardly to engage armed guerrillas; young officers accuse the

older officers of graft.

Unlike El Salvador, the Philippines already has upwards of 16,000 U.S. servicemen in residence; there will be no congressional debates over whether there are 54 "military trainers" in the country or 55. The murder of three U.S. servicemen in October underlines the dangers ahead.

THE UNITED STATES WOULD HAVE found it unseemly to get involved in a major counterinsurgency effort headed by Marcos. Now that the U.S. has a head of state it can live with in Corazon Aquino, the question is whether she can coexist with the Philippine military.

Last spring President Aquino was scheduled to make a speech at the Philippine Military Academy. The "West Point of the Philippines" is situated in the fragrantly wooded town of Baguio, where Manila's wealthy build weekend houses, the Americans maintain an old military outpost, and the Boy Scouts hold their jamboree. Sometime before the president arrived, someone within the heavily guarded academy installed a bomb in her podium.

The timing was off and she escaped injury, although there were other casualties. Civilian officials learned that the explosives were from an old shipment sent to Victor Corpus, an officer who joined the guerrilla forces in the 1970s. The explosives had been captured years ago and had remained in military custody ever since. This, as well as all other available evidence, led to the conclusion that the bomb was placed by the military.

Here was a major assassination attempt against the president, yet there were no arrests, no trials, no convictions. At the time, General Villareal, the head of the national investigatory agency, was off in Spain in his capacity as head of the local World Anti-Communist League chapter, investigating the inroads of Spanish communism.

The Philippine military doesn't like Corazon Aquino, and the feeling is mutual. The army believes that she is soft on communism and stingy with government funds; Aquino, for her part, has never forgiven the military for imprisoning her husband and humiliating her every time she went to visit him. But the problem lies deeper than that.

The army, more than any other Phil-



ippine institution, was recreated by Marcos in his own image. To insure their loyalty, he recruited officers from his native province of Ilocos, a rough-and-tumble territory dominated by blood loyalties and warlords. He filled military positions the way other presidents appoint ambassadors to Caribbean microstates. Ilocanos loyal to Marcos—not the institution of the military—took over the hierarchy. Marcos made his chauffeur, Fabian Ver, a top-ranking general.

This provincial favoritism offended the career men's sense of professionalism. Proud young graduates of the academy were sent off to fight guerrillas without functioning equipment, materiel, and a coherent command structure. Marcos's strategy backfired when young officers, among them Gregorio Honasan and Rex Robles, banded together to form the Reform the Army Movement, or RAM, which led the mutiny against Marcos at a key moment in the February 1986 campaign.

Now it appears that the military is incapable of functioning as a unified force. RAM has been instrumental in

several of the last few coup attempts, lashing out against the military high command as well as Aquino. Fraternal organizations such as the Masons function as armies within the army. When another such group called the Guardians mounted a coup attempt last January, they even planned to assassinate Brig. Gen. Antonio Sotelo, an Aquino supporter; he unknowingly saved his own life by changing his usual route to the office. Sotelo was later incensed when General Ramos tried to placate the rebels by talking about the "brotherhood of the military."

CORAZON AQUINO AND HER SUPPORTERS are fond of quoting a statement made by her husband, Ninoy, some years ago. "Whoever succeeds Marcos will have his hands full with the problems Marcos leaves behind," he said. "I wouldn't take it on a silver platter." This fatalism is a now-familiar theme—the belief that any failures on the part of the government can't be hung on the Aquino administration. But Ninoy had another, acutely pragmatic side that is quoted less frequently. Unlike the cur-

rent administration, he understood the political implications of poverty in his country, and knew that profound economic reform was not merely an idea to be trotted out for visiting foreign journalists, but was absolutely necessary for any future government's survival.

That side came to the fore in an interview Ninoy gave to *Look* magazine in its big 1967 spread on U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia:

"Everybody has a goddam angle around here," says wealthy 34-year-old Governor Benigno Aquino, who fights the Huks [rebels] with social reform in Tarlac Province. "What this country needs is a man on a white horse. He must forget re-election and be a first-class ingrate, a first-class SOB. That man must be a son of the masses, and unfortunately, I'm not."

His wife may have appeared on a white horse at the right moment in history, but she is even less a child of the masses than her husband was. More importantly, while Ninoy's overwhelmingly extroverted personality was always impelling him to sample others' experiences and realities, her

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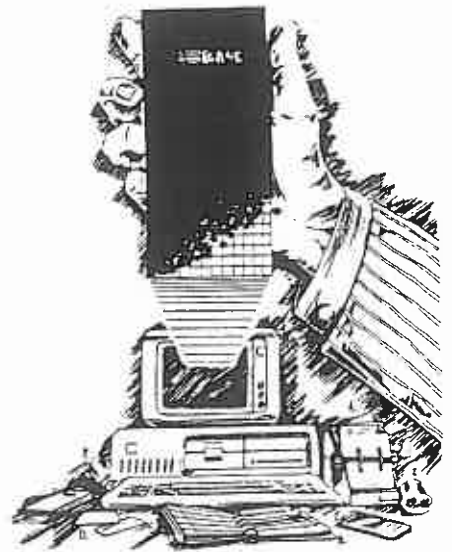
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impulse has been to pull back into the comfort of the familiar, to protect her privacy and her ladylike reserve. Her answer to conflict and challenge is to withdraw, not to engage.

In many respects, this is her tragedy, not her fault. Her background taught her that the world was justly divided into those who produced the riches of the earth by hard work, and those who administered them through their wisdom. Her family, and her husband's family, had always been major players in a political system based on certain gentlemen's agreements; Marcos broke them, and Cory set out to restore order to this universe, not to reshape it. She subscribes to a traditional current of Catholicism that guides the believer to seek God in reflection and self-examination, not in the sores of the lepers or the faces of the poor.

In sum, this outlook means that Aquino has addressed the question of economic development in terms of the Gross National Product, not the base wages of the poor. Her cabinet ministers say land reform should be designed to enhance export earnings, rather than answer the sharecroppers' demands. Faced with an already overcrowded country whose population is due to double in 30 years, she followed the strictures of the pope and Cardinal Sin and pressed for a right-to-life clause in the new constitution; her government is now dismantling the few birth control clinics that were set up under Marcos. The judicial system still attends to the rights of property rather than to the basic human rights abused by the military and the vigilantes.

Aquino, to her credit, has shown compassion for those who have suffered as she suffered: political prisoners, widows, property owners robbed by Marcos. But she seems immune to the kinds of suffering—starvation, land hunger, infant mortality—that threaten the order of her universe. As the poor and the disenfranchised begin to register that immunity, their frustration grows. That frustration could be the crucible of the second Philippine revolution.

*Anne Nelson is a journalist who has worked for many years in Central America and recently spent three months in the Philippines.*

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

*The Biological Clock: Reconciling Careers and Motherhood in the 1980s*, by Molly McKaughan. Doubleday, 342 pages, \$18.95.

*Women and Home-Based Work: The Unspoken Contract*, by Kathleen Christensen Henry Holt, 196 pages, \$17.95

Combining paid work and motherhood is surely one of the world's toughest and cruelest balancing acts. Using scores of vivid, intimate narratives, these books reveal the anxieties of working mothers: relentless time pressures, guilt, endless frustrations, wrenching conflicts, ultimate exhaustion. The joys of parenthood are not slighted, but the strongest note is, "I wish I could be two people." The first book also deals with women's agonized indecision about child-bearing and the many ramifications of the single-mother option.

McKaughan, a former *New York* magazine editor, and Christensen, of City University of New York Graduate School, each conducted over 100 in-depth interviews and reviewed thousands of questionnaire responses from readers of *Working Woman* and *Family Circle*, respectively. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees are white middle- and upper-class women, pursuing careers. For example, in McKaughan's sample, 60 percent have family incomes over \$50,000 a year.

Most employed women, of course, don't have "careers." They wait on tables, type and file, enter data, clean houses, work in child-care centers or hospitals; in other words, they remain permanently concentrated in low-paying "female" occupations, often with no fringe benefits or opportunities for advancement. They don't have to worry about whether to work after the baby is born; they *have* to. Their daily hardships are magnified many times over by fragile resources and the crunch of poverty. Those are the stories missing here—the stories we rarely hear, but most need to if we are serious about understanding and changing women's multiple burdens.

That so many women feel torn and often desperate even when money is not an issue makes one wonder if the problems are insurmountable, short of a true sex-role revolution. But they're not. There are public solutions, as World War II's child-care experience showed. It's the public will that's missing: genuine concern for women and children. The time is overdue for the Capitol steps to be overrun with strollers, squalling babes, and angry, demanding mothers. —Marge Frantz

*Wildlife in America*, by Peter Matthiessen. Drawings by Bob Hines. Viking, 332 pages, \$29.95.

First published in 1959, *Wildlife in America* is a book about extinction. Animal by animal, Matthiessen details how white civilization has reduced the range of life that shares its soil, air, and water.

Matthiessen's memorializing of these creatures seems an effort to track down what he yearningly imagines as "a wild, legendary America." He quotes extensively from explorers, naturalists, artists, and historians, and augments the prose with color plates, photographs, and Bob Hines's beautiful line drawings. Matthiessen has produced a vivid, compelling account of what once was that serves as a warning of what could be, should we continue to ignore what he calls the mysterious, "shimmering web of life that is starting to unravel all around us."

—Paul Skenazy

*Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right*, by James Coates. Hill and Wang, 294 pages, \$17.95.

In 1983 Gordon Kahl, a leader of the Posse Comitatus tax resisters, was blown to bits in a police attack on a fortified bunker in Arkansas. As a result, the underground links between that organization and other right-wing groups—from the neo-Nazi Aryan Nations to the command training camp of The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord—were discovered. Now *Chicago Tribune* reporter James Coates has compiled all the players in one comprehensive source. Linked nationwide by computer bulletin boards and telephone hot lines, sufferers of survivalist sickness are stockpiling weapons and maintaining safe houses in preparation for the ultimate race war.

Coates recounts the last four years' reign of terror, including the machine gun murder of Denver radio personality Alan Berg by members of The Order, who prayed to "deliver our people from the Jew," and the ultimate madness of a Nebraska commune whose members donned yellow dishwashing gloves before skinning one of their own followers alive.

With the movement's top leaders about to go on trial in Arkansas, *Armed and Dangerous* could not be more timely. While many of its members are behind bars, Coates warns that the Survivalist Right remains a close-knit underground willing to kill and be killed for its beliefs.

—Katherine Bishop