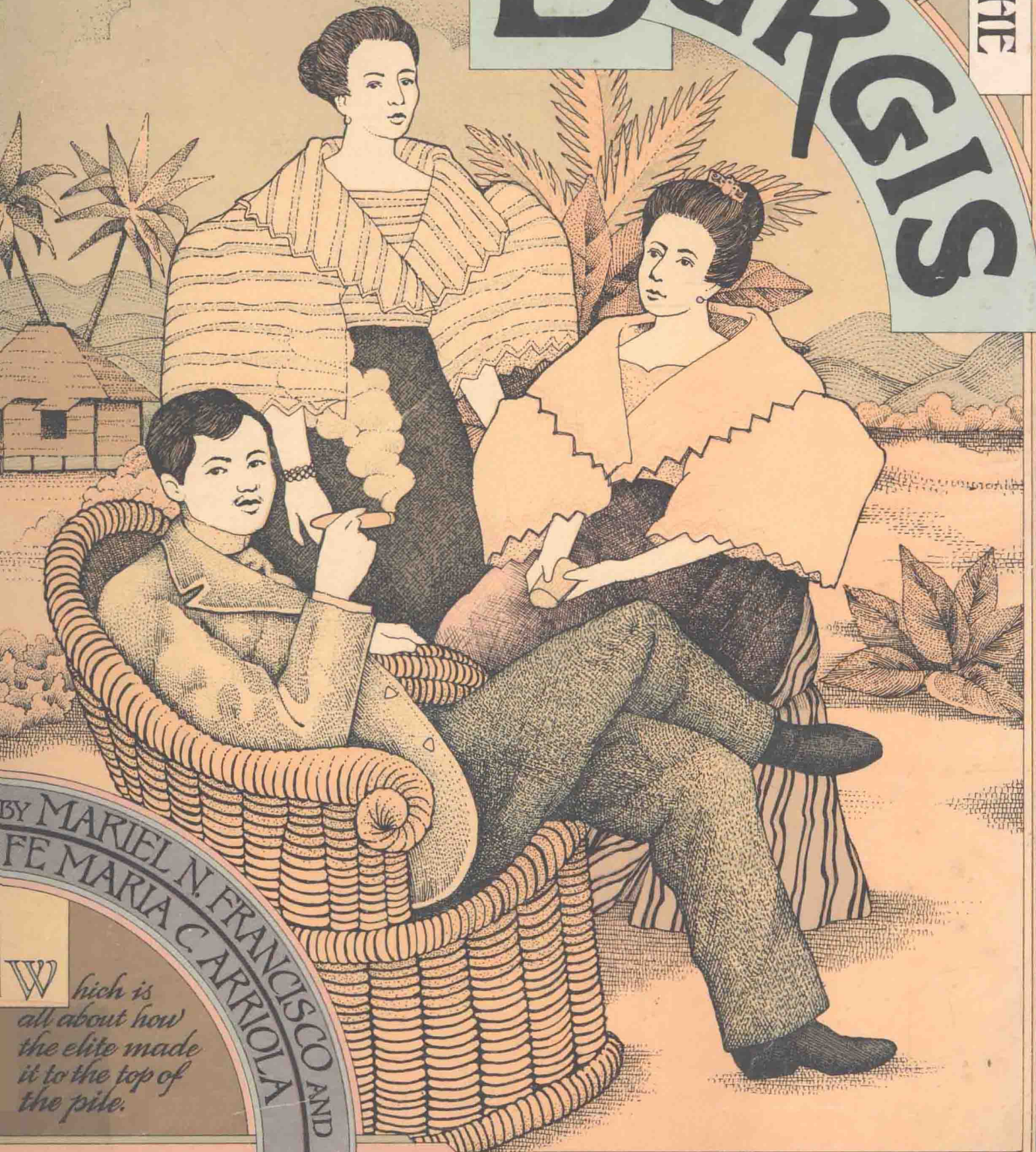


# THE HISTORY OF THE BURSIS



BY MARIEL N. FRANCISCO AND  
FE MARIA C. ARRIOLA

**W**hich is  
all about how  
the elite made  
it to the top of  
the pile.



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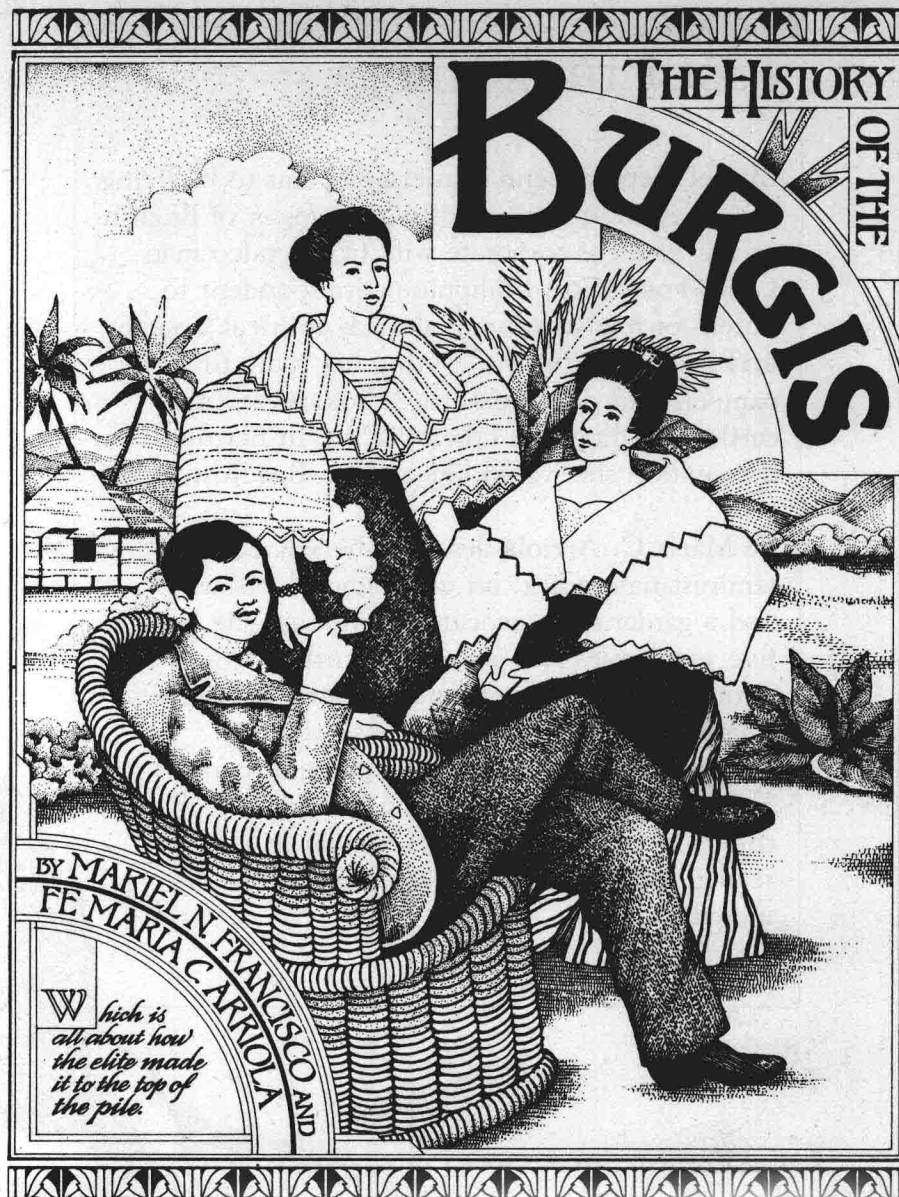


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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

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### INKERS AND DRAWERS

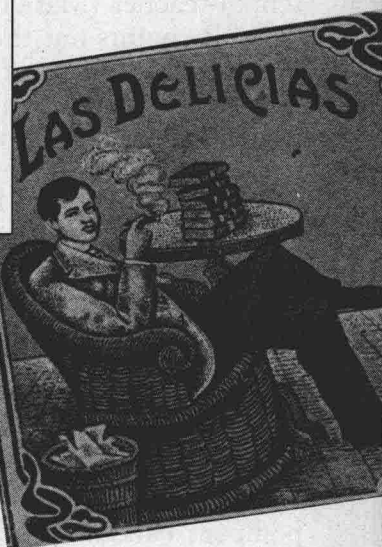
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The cover was designed and executed by Nik Ricio, who was under the influence of cigarette labels of the 1930s.



To  
 Lorenzo M. Tañada  
 Jose W. Diokno  
 J. B. L. Reyes  
 and other burgis nationalists.

*Thanks for lighting up our lives.*



*Thank you . . .*

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## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Think of it as a bus tour through five hundred years of Philippines history.

Our tour guide is a dedicated and endearing school-teacher (Mariel N. Francisco) who helpfully points out the high and low points, the twists and turns of the Filipino nation's "continuing past" in her capsulized historical narrative. The reader must pay attention to this narrative — for our tour guide does not only set the pace, she also holds the itinerary. She sits out front (the upper half of the page) and her well modulated loudspeaker can be heard throughout the bus.

The back of the bus (the lower half of the page) is recommended for those whose attention span is short and/or who appreciate a bit more explanation. Here sits a wry observer (Fe C. Arriola) who provides short commentaries to the narrative. To prick her pompous balloon are three wiseacres (Onib Olmedo, Manny Arriola, Odette Alcantara) who make irrepressible comments on the comments. These sub-comments are for those who don't mind laughing until it hurts and who can see the point of being beside the point. Serious-minded, no-nonsense readers may ignore the sayings, wisecracks and asides.

Readers may even snub the disarming mascots provided for each period — the sassy lapulapu of the Spanish period, the high-flying eagle of the American period, the backward garden snail of the Japanese period, and the "trying hard" puppy of contemporary times. But they will do so at their own risk.

All over, various artists (Nik Ricio, Onib Olmedo, Tence Ruiz, Willie Aguino, Jess Abrera, Danny Dalena, Zny Laygo, Anna Fer, Frey Cabading, among others) seek to interpret that which words cannot express. Readers who are more intuitive than logical can take their cue from the drawings. Or from the old woman (*Who dat?* — Ed.) whose *bayong* full of old photographs, antique cigarette wrappers, clippings of forgotten cartoons and other material evidences of history spill all over the pages. To fellow ratpackers, these, by themselves, already make the tour.

No tour is complete without a conductor. The conductor here is an opinionated graduate student (Fe C. Arriola again) who insists on explaining at length (via the short, special boxed articles) why the road is bumpy, why there are delays in our goals, why some roads are well trodden and some overgrown with weeds, why there is sometimes a dilemma on which road to take. Readers who are politically inclined and seriously interested in mapping out a better country to tour should pay attention to the boxes. And so the reader has a choice of guides, seat to take, and seatmate.

While the book is written for the *burgis*, one does not have to be *burgis* to enjoy it. It is more important to know how to travel light, leaving behind the mental baggage that often weighs down both *burgis* and non-*burgis*. Take along instead an open mind, the grace to laugh at yourself, and the stubbornness to keep faith with fellow Filipinos.

Please start at the beginning. Have a nice trip.





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"Should the middle class, the center, the great washed, get involved in politics? Or should it simply get back to what it knows best—getting on with its own life, only asking not to be bothered?"

— A.R. Samson



"*Burgis ka ba?*" The answers we got to this straightforward question (except for one incorrigible subject) were all hot denials—proof that in today's popular usage *burgis* is decidedly a bad word. The *burgis*, many seem to feel, are to blame for the mess we find ourselves in today. Is their destiny really to be the villains of Philippine history?

We think not. This book was written by *burgis* for the *burgis*, in the conviction that, if the *burgis* were/are part of the problem, more of them are now trying to be part of the solution. And we need to cheer them on—and give them a push and a shove—in this daunting and thankless task.

To understand the role of the *burgis* in our society, we need to take a good look at our history. For our history is a pattern of recurring events, and only by situating ourselves in the pattern will we see where we were a help, where a hindrance, in achieving our aspirations as a people. The sooner we can discern where our strengths and limitations lie, the sooner we can respond to the extraordinary demands of these critical times.



A nation is made up of land and people—in technocrats' jargon, "natural and human resources". The working relation between nature and people is called technology. (Cooking, mind you, is a technology, and of the technological advances, it is not the computer, but the discovery of fire that is the greater.) The interplay of the three is what produces culture. It is the control of one, or two, or three, or all four (land, people, technology, and culture) that determines whether one is rich and powerful, or poor and powerless. In other words, whether one is *burgis* or not, and to what degree.

In the Philippines, due to the pattern of colonialism, the majority of the population—those who actively produce the nation's wealth—have no power. Political, social, and economic power belongs to perhaps 10-15% of the population, composed of the middle and upper classes. These are the landowners and small, medium and large entrepreneurs (including the Catholic hierarchy), professionals and salary earners—usually college-educated and Roman Catholic. They form the Philippine privileged class, the *burgis*.

The word *burgis* comes from the French *bourgeois* (from the Latin *burgus* meaning town). Commercial and capitalist expansion in 17th and 18th century France gave rise to the bourgeoisie, a middle class of wealthy merchants, traders and shopkeepers. Together with the new class of industrial workers and the peasantry, they bore the economic burden of supporting the privileged class (the nobility and the clergy) while remaining socially and politically powerless. Through the French Revolution the monarchy and its feudal structures were abolished, and the bourgeoisie was established as the dominant power.

In mid-19th century, Karl Marx described modern capitalist society as splitting into two hostile camps: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie owned all the capital—the raw materials, machines and factories—for production, and made profits by exploiting the proletariat or working class—which owned only its labor. Thus it was inevitable that conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat should exist. But as human society progressed, Marx predicted, it would gradually reach a classless state.

These Marxist terms and concepts were indigenized by the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas to fit the concrete situation of Philippine society in the 1930's. The *uring burges* or *burgesyá* were "*mga asendero't kapitalista*" (landlords and capitalists) as opposed to the *uring anakpawis* who were the "*manggagawa't magbubukid*" (workers and peasants). In 1968, Jose Maria



Sison, founder of the new Communist Party of the Philippines, described Philippine society as being composed of four classes: landlords, bourgeoisie, peasantry, and proletariat. Student activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s referred to the first two simply as *burgies*, (with an "e"), adopting a revolutionary song popular in the 1930s: "*Tamad na burgies na ayaw gumawa, / Sa pawis ng iba nagpapasasa.*"

Today, the word *burgis* is used more loosely and dispassionately. While it still retains the negative connotations of class distinction, it has lost much of its radical content to become part of the *colegiala's* or street urchin's slang. It is sometimes used neutrally to refer to the privileged class, whether barely comfortable, well-to-do, rich, super-rich, old rich or new rich. But more often it is pejorative, referring to certain qualities and values ascribed to that class, such as an insensitive display of one's advantages in life, or an overconcern for niceties and externals. In this sense, it is possible for a rich person who is not hung-up on social status to be considered "*hindi burgis*," while a farmer's son from Bulacan or a struggling scholar from Tondo may be *burgis* in his heart of hearts. More and more the term is being used by the *burgis* themselves, whether as criticism of their failings or amused acceptance of the way they are. The only instance when *burgis* is used in a somewhat positive sense is when it means classy, fashionable, or sophisticated, as in "Wow, *burgis*!", but even then some irony may be intended.

*Burgis* is, therefore, both economic condition and sensibility. Being afraid or ashamed to take a jeepney implies resources which can support a lifetime of taking taxis or having one's own car. One needs to have surplus income to be *burgis*. A little of it, as with the middle class, or a whole lot of it, as with the upper class, for leisure, sports, holidays, books and newspapers, tobacco and beverages, hobbies, and gifts. *Burgis* can be as modest as spending a week in Baguio every summer, or as extravagant as taking the whole family (perhaps including the *yaya*) to Disneyland. It is the 10 percent or so of Filipino families (say 1,000,000 out of about ten million) who, according to 1984 figures from the National Census and Statistics Office, had an annual income of ₱40,000 and above. (If you earn ₱100,000 or more a year that puts you in the top two percent of the population.) ₱40,000!!! That seems impossibly low, (considering that by 1986 the cost of living for a family of six was ₱114.00 a day or about ₱3,400 a month), but it is much more than most Filipinos make in one year. Seventy percent or about seven million Filipino families live below the poverty line,



that is, they cannot even cover the minimum of physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

Not just money, but culture, too, separates the *burgis* from the *masa*. The principal ingredient of *burgis* culture is Westernization. The middle class, notably the intelligentsia composed of teachers, students, university professors, artists, writers, and lower-level technocrats, are considered part of the *burgis* even if they live barely above the poverty line because their education allows them to be in the mainstream of Westernized elite culture. The *burgis* lifestyle which takes for granted sports clubs, beach resorts, schools and universities, hospitals, restaurants, supermarkets, shopping malls, and cultural centers is more oriented towards the US and Europe than towards home and Asia. *Burgis* values, aspirations, concerns, ways and tastes are identical to those of a Washington, D.C., yuppie. Who but the *burgis* would be preoccupied with relationships, mid-life crises, health food, and the latest Jane Fonda video workout in a country where 75 percent of the population never see a doctor in their lifetime?

A *burgis* in 19th century literature is Jose Rizal's Doña Victorina who marries a lame and stuttering Peninsular (a Spaniard nonetheless!) and babbles in pidgin Spanish: "I and de Espadaña are going to the Peninsula. I don't like our son to be born here and be called a filibustero. I'll probably never return to this land of savages. I was not born to live here."

*Burgis* is, in fact, having a terribly outdated colonial mentality in the guise of internationalism. It is being able to quote Shakespeare but not caring to know who Amado Hernandez is. It is sitting through a local Broadway play without cringing at the sight and sound of Filipinos aping British and American accents, and justifying it by saying that Filipinos can't write plays worth staging. It is relying exclusively on *Time* and *Newsweek's* version of world events and Hollywood's definition of the meaning of life. It is boasting that the Filipino is one of the most talented and creative in the world, but believing that the masses are lazy, or cursed by a genetically low IQ.

As lifestyle, *burgis* is onion-skinned delicateness, and an attachment to creature comforts. The super-*burgis* in fairytales is the real princess in "The Princess and the Pea." *Burgis* is indulging one's *caprichos*, for "life is short." It is a matron stepping into a Mercedes Benz filled with plump pillows, half a dozen *paypays*, and her favorite Dr. Scholl's clogs. It is an executive checking into a hotel when there's a brownout on his street. The ultimate *burgis* horror story is losing one's



maids. Indeed, without the cooks, housegirls, *lavanderas*, drivers, gardeners, manicurists and *costureras* of this world, where would the *burgis* be? (Of course, as the *burgis* see it, "Paano naman ang mahirap kung wala nang mayaman?"')

Keeping to such an orderly, comfortable world makes the *burgis* a bit soft. He is a conformist par excellence, never wanting to go too far, afraid to break or question the rules, unwilling to take the risk. *Burgis* is using place cards at a dinner party, and always starting with soup and salad, ending with coffee and dessert. It is having things that match: plates, placemats and napkins, earrings and rings, shoes and bags, a whole set of luggage—when the average Filipino has to beg, borrow, steal, or inherit to keep his unmatched body and soul together.

*Burgis* is acquisitive, is fond of collecting things to fill a grossly multiplied range of needs. A typical *burgis* household will have any or all of the following: TV, Betamax, stereo/CD, refrigerator, freezer, Karaoke, hair dryer, washing machine, rice cooker, crockpot, pressure cooker, toaster oven, mixer, food processor, microwave oven, air-conditioner, mini-computer, etc. In pop culture, *burgis* is Jose Javier Reyes' Doña Buding, television's scandalous monument to conspicuous consumption. Half a dozen pairs of shoes will never do for the *burgis*. There must be shoes for jogging, for walking, for tennis, for bowling, for formal parties, for informal parties, for casual wear, for school or office, etc. Imelda Marcos embodied all the worst that is *burgis*, collecting not only shoes but estates, art (real and fake), *ternos*, furcoats, and jewelry. There is something mindless, pretentious, and tacky about *burgis*, such as inviting faded European royalty and ugly American socialites to luxuriate in a people's hospitality when the economy is buckling under.

There is nothing wrong with quietly spending hard-earned money on good things. Things that expand the mind, the soul, and the heart, that make one a better person and life more pleasant for oneself and for others. But to be possessed by things, to make accumulating them one's lifework, is to miss the point entirely.

It is surely because they have so much to lose that the *burgis* are quick to adapt to each new situation. They are known to be apolitical so that political changes never affect them. Traditionally, they are individualistic, unorganizable, uninvolved, and said to be incapable of sustained political action. *Burgis* happiness is not to be bothered. Most *burgis* are content to cast their ballots at election time, and leave the rest to the politicians. They know that these politicians will

protect their interests, being *burgis* themselves and part of the system of elite democracy which keeps political and economic power in the hands of a few.

In their political views, therefore, the *burgis* tend to be conservative. They stay close to the center, fearing the extremism of the Far Left (which is communist) and the Ultra Right (which is fascist). However, when it comes to the crunch, these so-called middle forces (including the institutional Church) are polarized. The upper levels veer Right, supporting the ruling class' decision to use force, if necessary, to maintain the status quo. The lower levels veer Left, identifying with the interests of the majority. So it remains to be seen how long the center can hold.

Of course the *burgis* want progress for the country as much as anyone else. But they can see this taking place only within the institutions of American-style liberal democracy (thus the nickname "libdem" or LD)—characterized by universal suffrage, political liberties, the rule of law, and political competition. Too progressive ideas scare them, especially structural changes that will redistribute land, share profits, and empower the masses. Under normal circumstances they will support change only if it is non-violent and parliamentary. Thus they can only be moderates or reformists (another nickname: BR or "bourgeois reformist"), not revolutionaries. During the Marcos years, however, they learned to use the more populist tactics of the Left—political organization and mass mobilization—with the unspoken possibility of bloodshed. And at EDSA, which they call a *burgis* revolution, they became born-again to people power, and, it is hoped, to pluralist politics towards a more popular democracy.

All Philippine presidents were *burgis*, in bias if not in class origin. All, beginning with Quezon, talked a great deal about social justice, but none made any basic, lasting changes in an economic system which ignored the needs of the impoverished many. Today, the Makati suburbanite goes about her day surrounded by the latest in fashion and technology, while the rice farmer's standard of living has not changed in the last 50 years! Yes, our economists, too, are *burgis*, schooled in free-market-and-private-enterprise economics at UP, AIM, Ateneo, Harvard, and Wharton, or trained by the IMF/WB. They like to look at GNP, and as long as it is growing at a respectable rate, they don't really worry that it doesn't have an impact on more than half of the population. It has taken "socialist" economists to point out that five percent of Filipino families have more total



income than the bottom 60 percent. Or that one percent of the population owns 70 percent of the nation's wealth, and its share is increasing while that of the rest is decreasing.

*Burgis* is being removed from the realities of a developing country. It is being trapped in a First World consciousness while living in the Third World. It is ignorance and disinterest in how a nation's bounty can be shared by all of its citizens.

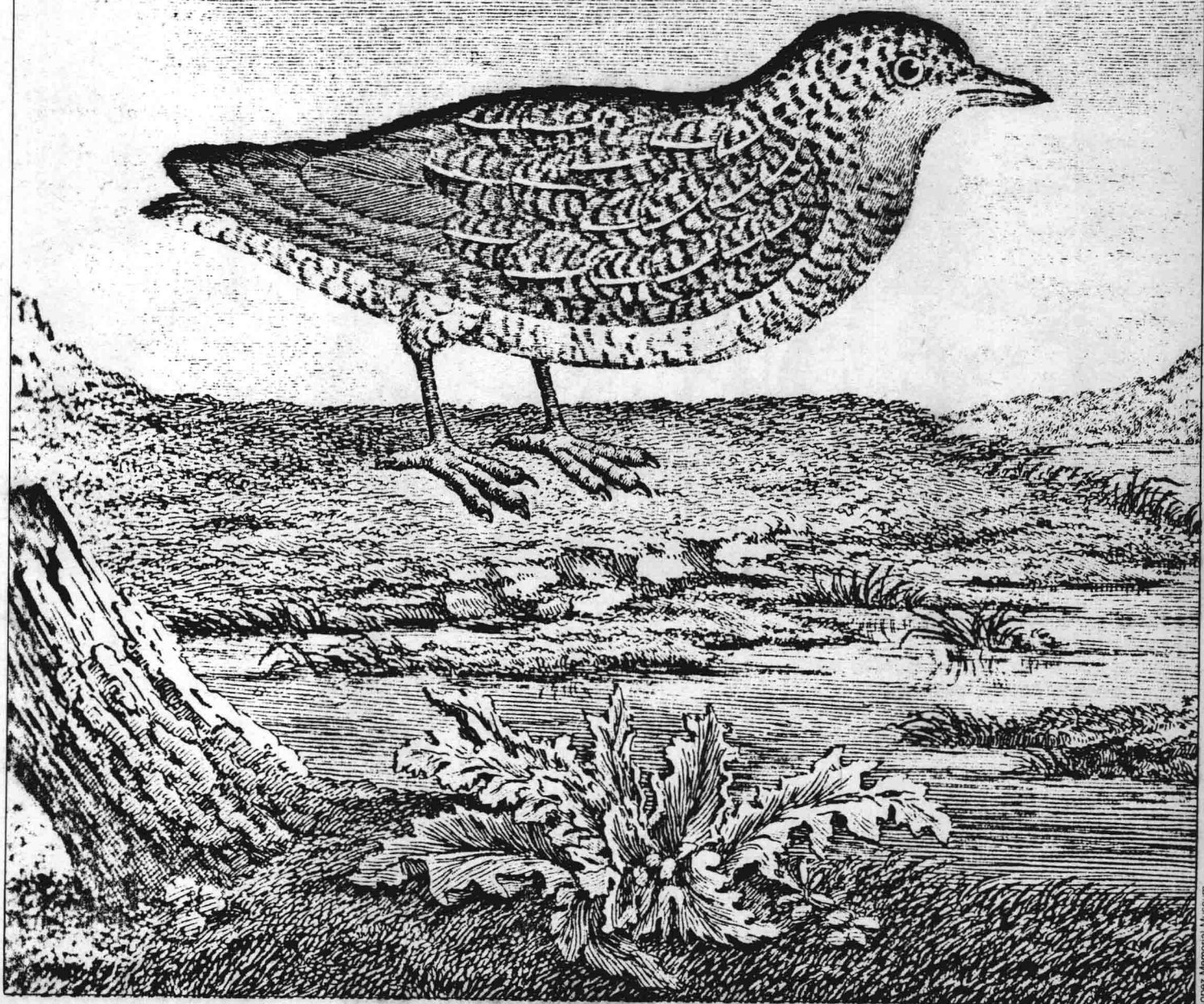
Yes, *burgis* is you and me. It is not all that bad. We know we are men and women of good will, decent, reasonable, hardworking, and God-fearing. *Burgis*, however, is not all that nice, either. We need to work more at caring, caring passionately, about where we want this country to go and what we can do to help it along. After all, it's the only one we've got.

There are signs that we're getting there. We know that in 1987 we are not and will not again be the way we were in 1972. These 15 years, more and more *burgis* have used their power to set the balance right. Many have cast their lot with the exploited, the oppressed, and the dispossessed. More and more young people are cultivating alternatives to the "*sosyal*" lifestyle that leads to Ayala Avenue, and discovering the incomparable fulfillment of a life not dedicated to getting ahead—in teaching, community development, human rights advocacy, labor organizing, media and cultural work, health care, and in the new politics. True heroes of our time, they light the way for those of us who strive to transcend the limitations of *burgis* consciousness.

This, then, is the story of the Filipino privileged class—and more. It is an expression of faith in the *burgis*—that liberated minds and courage to change will make beautiful people more beautiful still.

# THE SPANISH CONQUISTADOR

Pico, pico gorgorrito  
Cierra la puerta  
Perrequito!  
— play rhyme





When Magellan came upon the Visayan islands in 1521, he found flourishing communities of Malays who lived mainly by fishing, farming and trading. He must have been impressed by the friendly but dignified natives. They had laws and customs, notions of justice, a form of writing, and a system of weights and measures. They made bark cloth, pottery, outrigger canoes, and finely crafted ornaments of gold.

The Spanish friars, though, were distressed to see the natives' cheerful animism and guilt-free polygamy. It was quickly decided that, after a brief catechism on Christ's Redemption the natives should be baptized into the Catholic faith.



Obviously the colored beads and glass and little bells would not work for a peaceful take-over. So, on to step no. 2 in the conquistador's manual. . . .



Claim the Islands in the name of God.