REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

The Socio-Cultural Milieu of Philippine Politics

KENNETH E. BAUZON *

A review essay of Remigio E. Agpalo, *The Political Elite and the People: A Study of Politics in Occidental Mindoro* (Manila: College of Public Administration, U.P., 1972), 414 pp.

I

ONE of the most recent materials published on Philippine politics is Professor Remigio E. Agpalo's *The Political Elite and the People.* This work attempts to discuss some underlying issues on Philippine politics, particularly its socio-cultural and theoretical foundations. It examines these issues as they interact in Occidental Mindoro, a province that "is still underdeveloped economically, socially and politically" (p. 25) and as such is offered by the author as a representative microcosm for the entire country (p. 17).

Since Professor Agpalo's interest throughout his book is centered on the "elite" and the "people," it is appropriate to start with these concepts. The concept of "elite" is understood throughout the book in Pareto's sense, namely, those ". . . who have the highest indices of success in their branch of activity . . . ."[1] This implies that within a given society are various branches of activities and that within each branch are some individuals who have attained the qualities of an elite. Hence, there are elites in business, in the legal profession, in arts, in politics, and in many others.

What the author failed to clarify, however, is the nature of relationships of these branches to each other: whether or not a superordinate-subordinate type of relationship exists, or whether or not these branches are equal in weight or status and that the elites in each branch enjoy equal treatment in relation to each other. A question may be raised: can it be said that the legal profession possesses more attributes than the arts profession and that the elites of the former enjoy more prestige and status than the elites of the latter? This problem crops up because of the presumption of Pareto's statement, which the author failed to clarify, that the various branches of activities are "equal branches" and that the elites in each of these are likewise considered equals.

* Lecturer in Political Science, University of the Philippines in Manila.

[1] Vilfredo Pareto, *Sociological Writings,* selected and introduced by S. E. Finer (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 248.

It is more appropriate to think of these branches as not equal in weight and in domain. They form a hierarchy the maintenance or alteration of which is subject only to the dynamism of their parts. The political branch, for instance, is more dominant as it penetrates into many other branches and may regulate, control or direct them. A case in point is when President Marcos, as an elite in politics, created by Presidential Decree the "International Artist Award," first recipient of which was pianist Van Cliburn. Another is the case of certain economic elites whose business interests suffered as a consequence of the declaration of Martial Law by the established political elite.

The concept of "people" is corollary to the concept of "elite." As reflected in the book, "people" is an abstraction which does not carry any definite reference (Does it refer to the majority or to its individual parts?). But it seems it is used to refer to those outside the circle of socio-politico-economic elite. This transforms the nature of the people — or the mass — from quantitative to qualitative because the majority belongs to the average or the ordinary as distinguished from those who have special qualifications. In distinguishing the mass-man from the elite, Ortega y Gasset wrote: "Society is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals . . . which are especially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not especially qualified. The mass is the average man. In this way, what was mere quantity — the multitude — is converted into a qualitative determination: it becomes the common social quality, man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type." [2]

It is obvious that the author's classification of the members of society into elites and masses is representative of an intellectual trend among bourgeois scholars to present an alternative to the Marxist fiction of a classless society.

II

The socio-economic attributes of the people and the political elite enumerated by the author are: age, sex, religion, mother tongue, education, house, radio, income, occupation, landholding, and others (e.g., the reading of publications and travelling which require the use of financial resources) (pp. 73-98). Although the author may have done well in identifying these attributes, doubts may be raised as to the propriety of some of these to be labeled "attributes". For instance, education as an attribute has not actually been effective in the three-fold task of integration, socialization and recruitment, contrary to Coleman[3] whom the author followed closely.

[2] Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 11.

[3] James S. Coleman, "Introduction: Education and Political Development," in James S. Coleman (ed.), *Education and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 17-18.

The table on p. 84 indicates that majority of the people have reached elementary education only (66.50 per cent) or even lower than elementary education (22.23 per cent). This is contrasted to the 8.55 per cent who reached high school and the 2.72 per cent who reached college.

With these figures, how can one claim that education can perform such tasks as enumerated above? Education is a monopoly of those who maintain such other resources as wealth and political influence. It seems that Coleman's idea on the role of education influenced much the direction of the book. Coleman writes: "If political socialization into the national polity has been and is effective, and if the processes of recruitment to bureaucratic and political roles have become regularized and legitimated, it is reasonable to assume that the society is effectively integrated" (p. 83). Even this assumption is deficient. Assuming without admitting that socialization is effective and that the processes of recruitment and political roles have been institutionalized, it does not necessarily follow that "the society is effectively integrated" if, by integration, we mean incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups. Hindrance to full national integration may be caused by certain institutional practices and mechanisms that tend to exclude a fairly large segment of the political community from meaningful political participation. For instance, since only the elite can afford an expensive education, education itself could be used to perpetuate the *status quo.*

On ownership of a radio set as another attribute, the author believes that the radio "can be a good source of useful information .... It can be a vehicle of political socialization and national integration .... In any case .... a household with a radio can be assumed to be more receptive and vulnerable to modernizing forces than a household without one" (pp. 86-87). While the radio may serve the purposes indicated above, the author failed to show whether or not the radio has really served these purposes and to what extent. The author could have identified the values discarded and/or accepted by the people as a consequence of their ownership of a radio set and the modernizing forces, if any, which used the radio as a convenient vehicle. It is apparent that the author himself is uncertain about his position, as reflected in his constant use of the verb "can" which implies indefiniteness of condition. This opens the possibility that the radio indeed "cannot" or "may not" perform the desired functions of socialization, integration and recruitment. Ironically, only 5 per cent of all households owned radio sets the other 95 per cent did not.

This reduces the significance of the radio as an attribute since only few would be affected by its modernizing effects, if any. Even granting that 95 per cent of the population owned radios, there is still no guarantee that modernization could be hastened be-

cause some radio programs tend to strengthen or re-inforce traditional or non-modernizing values.

The author also lists several political resources of the people, namely, numbers, suffrage, and the "bahala na" attitude (pp. 100-108). The author contends that the numerical superiority of the people over the elite few form part of their (people's) political resources. Later, however, he contradicts himself after realizing that ". . . numbers without organization . . . are illusory bases of power" (p. 103).

Suffrage, as another political resource, suffers the same fate as the first one. While suffrage enables the people to participate in the political process, it cannot in any significant manner serve as an instrument to dislodge the well-entrenched elites, whether governing or not, and install the people in their stead. While suffrage has been instrumental in removing from office certain elective officials, the successors themselves have always come from the ranks of the elites, or, in some cases, from the ranks of the masses who have been recruited into the ranks of the elite. As the author himself admits, Philippine political elites are a monolithic group and that the so-called political parties are mere factions of qualitatively the same party. At most, suffrage as a political resource is illusory.

The author further writes: "Because the person moved by *bahala na* is immune to threats, he (i.e., *tao*) usually can compel the powerful political elite during pre-election time to yield, thus making the powerful weak" (p. 107). In reality, however, this value cannot be used to make the strong weak and the weak strong as easily as it was portrayed. The author himself relied on generalizations that only tend to blur the entire presentation as in the above-quoted statement (i.e., ". . . he (*tao*) usually can compel the . . . elite" and ". . . thus making the powerful weak"). The author did not clarify: first, whether or not the concept of *tao* refers to the people in general, the individual as part of the collective people or some particular members of the *tao*; second, the particular instances wherein the *tao* is made strong and the elite made weak and whether or not these instances are representative of all; third, whether or not the *tao* actually utilizes this resource, i.e., *bahala na* value; and, fourth, whether or not the person possessing this value can easily use it to manipulate the elite despite the grossly unfair comparison made that the *taos* are like "dogs, idiots, small children, fanatics . . ." (p. 107).

The author failed to include the family, or family affiliation, as an important resource of political elites.* However, from the beginning of the book, the author had referred to the family as a significant factor in Philippine politics throughout the book.

* The five political resources of the political elites listed by the author are: authority, possessions, knowledge, access, and organization (pp. 108-114).

This is in agreement with other studies made on Philippine politics such as Benitez's on a small municipality, Laquian's on a big city, and Pal's on a big barrio.[4] However, despite the dominant role played by the family in politics, these studies agreed that the family's role has been characterized by the introduction of "a politics of factionalism, of patronage, of graft and corruption, of elitism, of slow economic growth and political development, of personality, of particularism, of social injustice" (p. 15). This observation explicitly points to the obstructionist role of the family in the Philippine political life. In asserting that the family could still be a modernizing agent, despite the negative effects seen, the author wrote: ". . . the families are the building units of political parties, whose functions include not only the manifest function of recruitment of political elite, . . . political mobilization, political socialization, . . . system legitimation and national integration" (p. 385). It is suggested that the author clarify what "the family" refers to because the phrase could mean "all families" or only a few elite families. Obviously, only a few elite families have dominated Philippine politics, but these families do not necessarily represent the totality of all Philippine families.

III

One of the fundamental points in the book is the alleged cooperation of the people with the political elite. This, in effect, would negate the existence of conflicts in elite-mass relationship. The concept of a "pillarized society" illustrates the structure of relationship between the elite and the people. But though this type of analysis may ignore existence of social classes, it cannot negate the prevalence of conflicts. Class conflicts may be absent, but conflicts arising from inconsistencies in the *desiderata* of the various parts of "pillars" offer proof that politics in the Philippines is not without conflicts. In fact, we can even attribute the existence of private armies and political warlords to this structure.

The author seeks further support for his thesis that the people and the political elite cooperate from the value some scholars choose to refer to as organic hierarchy (pp. 118-121). This value views society as organically structured, like a human being, complete with all component parts. Though one part may be different from the other in terms of shape, size and function, the parts nevertheless maintain an interdependent and harmonious relationship vis-a-vis the over-all functions and objectives of the organic body. Viewed in its social context, the

[4] See Teresita V. Benitez, *The Politics of Marawi* (Quezon City: The Asian Center U.P., 1969); F. Landa Jocano, *The Traditional World of Malitbog* (Quezon City: Community Development Research Center, U.P., 1969); Mary R. Hollnsteiner, *The Dynamics of Power in a Philippine Municipality* (Quezon City: Community Development Research Center, U.P., 1963); Aprodicio A. Laquian, *The City in Nation-Building: Politics and Administration in the City of Manila* (Manila: School of Public Administration, U.P., 1966); and Agaton P. Pal, "A Philippine Barrio: A Study of Social Organizations in Relation to Planned Social Change," *Journal of East Asiatic Studies*, Vol. V (October 1956).

inherent inequality of the various classes, parts or functions in the social system is regarded as a natural occurrence; and that if this social system must persist, it must have these various parts to perform complementary functions. Some lead while others must follow.

While this manner of viewing society may have its own merits, it also has its weaknesses. First, the value implies rigid relationships and pre-destination of the various parts of the social organ and of their functions and goals. Human beings, as components of the system, are denied a national role because the value presupposes that the social organization is also a natural phenomenon and that the leader (*pangulo*) and followers (*galamay*) are already in a superordinate-subordinate type of relationship. In reality, however, implied rigidity is negated by the possibility of social mobility. Partly because of liberal democratic ideas, the elites as well as the people circulate within the social system. A leader may move up and down the political hierarchy, and a mass-man may move up and down the social ladder. The circulation may be slow and rigid in certain areas, but it takes place.

Second, it must be borne in mind that this value, though with the veneer of indigenity, is based on a liberal democratic framework which is essentially foreign. The *pangulo* or head, both in the national and local levels, operates within the republican form of government similar to those maintained in other countries.

Third, the value of organic hierarchy negates in a very subtle manner the existence of classes in the society. This is so because of the alleged cooperation of the elite with the people and vice versa, out of which a reciprocal and complementary structure of relationship is established. The elite tends to think not in terms of the interest of the abstract "upper class" but in terms of his particular *desideratum* which may dictate alliance with the masses and hostility to his fellow elites. The mass-man, on the other hand, tends to think, not in terms of the interest of the abstract "lower class" but in terms of his own particular *desideratum* and, like his elite counterpart, may align with an elite and oppose his fellow mass-man. In other words, members of both the elite and the non-elite groups do not have what, Meisel calls, the "Three C's — consciousness, cohesion, and conspiracy."[5] To say that no social injustice exists because of the "organic" composition of the society would be tantamount to saying that the so-called reciprocal and complementary type of relationship of the elite and the people is working out well. No studies have yet been made, however, to show that this has been so. Although "justice" is a value-loaded concept, it is taken to refer to the ruling elite's own dominant values and the values of the people that tend to uphold the rule of the elites. The elites' own values become dominant because the "might" or the

[5] James H. Meisel, *The Myth of the Ruling Class* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 4.

organized violence under their own dispensation provides the instrument for legitimizing and insitutionalizing the elites' conception of "right."

IV

To determine which particular stratum a person belongs to, the author looked into the person's dwelling unit. The author writes, "If the people live in houses made of strong materials (tile roof, galvanized iron roofing or similar materials, concrete, or wood, or hollow blocks, or similar materials for floors, walls, and posts), then they are categorized as rich. If, on the other hand, they live in houses of light materials (nipa or cogon roof, bamboo floor, bamboo or nipa walls), then they are classified as *tao.* If their houses are made of partly strong and partly light materials, then they are classified as middle stratum (p. 44). At this point, some questions may be raised. How reliable and adequate is the dwelling unit as *the* index of socio-economic strata in the province? Can the dwelling unit be reflective of the nature of political participation of the people in general in the same manner that, according to the author, it reflects the particular socio-economic stratum where one belongs? There is no doubt that the dwelling unit can be one among several other alternative indices that the author could choose from. The choice made is weak on several counts. First, a person may have a small hut made of light materials but it does not necessarily mean that he may not have any property, such as a piece of land or a business concern, elsewhere. The author failed to make a systematic inquiry either by approaching the heads of families or, if this proves too taxing, by examining the records other than the 1960 Census such as those found in the local BIR Office, Mayor's Office, Governor's Office, or offices of other agencies or institutions. Second, a person may have a big house made of strong materials but he may not have any real possession other than this house. It may even be possible that the occupant of this house may just be as poor as anyone in a small hut and that the house simply serves as an empty status symbol. Third, to claim that the 25 per cent of the population who own mixed-material dwelling unit, and who apparently belong to the province's middle class, is representative of the country's middle class is simply unfortunate. The representativeness of the province has been asserted right at the beginning of the study, and, if the reviewer is correct, the figure given (i.e., 25 per cent) is also taken to represent the country's middle class. This is not so, however, for obvious reasons. The middle class in the country is almost non-existent due to the sharp disparity between the rich and the poor.

If the dwelling unit could be considered an index of socio-economic strata, then the amount of power a person has could be considered just as much an index. The author presents an interesting definition of power which runs, ". . . the ability of *Ego* to make *Alter* accede to *Ego's* demands or wishes through the exploitation or activation

of *Alter's* desiderata and *Ego's* political resources (p. 127).[6] This definition, it must be noted, makes reference to a person-to-person relationship, i.e., to *Ego* and *Alter's* relationship. It does not make reference to a person — thing relationship. This definition presumes that all the parties involved in the act of power have the capacity to exercise the mental, psychological, and physical faculties which may not necessarily be the case if one has to exercise his power over a thing, for a thing, unlike a person, does not have these faculties and cannot exercise them, in turn, over a person in the same fashion that a person exercises them over it (i.e., the thing). The fact that the definition explicitly refers to demands, wishes, and desiderata closes the possibility for a two-way relationship between a person and a thing for only a person is capable of making demands, wishes, or desiderata, not only vis-a-vis a thing but also vis-a-vis another person.

The definition, to carry the dichotomy further, gives undue importance to *Alter's* desiderata as a requisite in the exercise of power by *Ego,* as if without *Alter's* desiderata *Ego* cannot exercise his power over *Alter.* The definition runs, in part: ". . . *through* the exploitation or activation of *Alter's desiderata* . . ." (italicizing mine). It is clear here that the author recognizes it as a *must,* for *Ego* to exercise his power over *Alter,* to exploit or activate *Alter's* desiderata. This weakness shows its effect when the use of force by *Ego* against *Alter* is negated simply because *Ego* is helpless, despite his political resources, without *Alter's* desiderata. In other words, the definition does not say that whether or not *Ego* uses coercion or persuasion *Alter* will accede as a matter of course. To the reviewer's opinion, *A has power over B if A is successful in making B take a course of action with or without A's use of coercion and/or persuasion, and with or without B's desiderata.* As used here, B may not only represent a person but also a thing.

It makes one wonder as to how the act of power can take place if the supposed object of power is willing to do

[6] For comparative purposes, the author cited the notions of various scholars on the subject of power. Dahl explains, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B do something that B would not otherwise do." (see his "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science,* Vol. II (July 1957), pp. 202-203); Gross puts it as ". . . the ability to influence people through persuasion, compulsion, or both." (see his *The Legislative Struggle* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1963), p. 142); Deutsch thinks it is ". . . the ability to prevail in conflict and overcome obstacles." (see his *The Analysis of International Relations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 22); Lasswell and Kaplan think of it in terms of ". . . participation in the making of decisions." (see their work, *Power and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 74-75.

As can be observed, Dahl and Gross specify an interpersonal relationship, while Deutsch, Lasswell and Kaplan give leeway for a person-thing relationship, an element which is missing in Agpalo's definition. Furthermore, any treatment of Agpalo's definition may take into consideration Parsons' view. He comments, "I conceive power to be a generalized symbolic medium which circulates much like money, the possession of which enables the responsibilities of an office with an authority in a collectivity to be more effectively discharged. . . . Power may be regarded as a medium for controlling action which, under certain conditions, is exchangeable for such other media operating in contexts from which power is excluded." (see his *Politics and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 325.

something not because a more endowed person has asked him to do but because of other reasons. It is perhaps more fitting to say that when A is able to make B accede to his (i.e., A's) wishes or demands, it is only incidental because B is going to do it anyway out of his own volition. This reveals another weakness of the definition because, though the existence of the desiderata of B is recognized, the author failed to notice that, after all, the entire act in the exercise of power may depend on the initiative of B and not of A. To think that A is powerful over B, despite the knowledge that B acted voluntarily, would be inappropriate.

To illustrate the matter more clearly, let us take the case of Veronica Yuyitung (as Ego) and President Marcos (as Alter).[7] The author contended that Yuyitung had power over the President when she was able to get her release from the detention cell after the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*. The only significant political resource of Yuyitung was her pregnancy, which allegedly appealed to the sense of humanitarianism of the President. The political resources of the President need no enumeration for it is evident that the President, being the occupant of the highest civilian office in the Government, possesses the highest indices of power. Comparatively speaking, therefore, Yuyitung's resource was just a drop while the President's resources could fill the entire bucket. In terms of wishes, demands, or desiderata of each, Yuyitung wished that she be allowed to go on account of her pregnancy, while the President desired the enhancement of his humanitarian image as a legitimizing vehicle for his further actions. But in the so-called exercise of power by Yuyitung, she merely wished, knowing that she can do no more. The President ordered her release, but not because she wished but because it was his desideratum to enhance his humanitarian image. In other words, the President could have chosen to satisfy his desideratum in some other ways. He could have chosen to ignore her wish or plea that she be allowed to go; or, perhaps, he could have simply ordered her transfer to a prison hospital if pregnancy (and subsequent delivery of the child) was her problem. She was definitely not powerful over the President in that particular power situation, because things could have turned out differently had the President decided otherwise. In this example, we can see that the source of power is actually the person who had the desideratum, i.e., *Alter,* and the object of power is the person who can do no more than wish, i.e., *Ego.* If Yuyitung had power over the President, then she could have achieved her release with or without the President's desideratum. Obviously, however, this was not the case.

Furthermore, the use of the word "and" to link the phrase "*Alter's* desiderata" with another phrase, ". . . *Ego's* political resources" implies that the elements of desideratum and political resource must be present at the

[7] See Philippine dailies from May to June 1970.

same time. In other words, the conditions or requisites for the exercise of power must depend on the existence of *Alter's* desiderata and *Ego's* political resources *at the same time* inasmuch as the definition, as worded, does not allow for the exercise of power in the absence of either one of those conditions. To use the example cited above, if *Ego* is really so powerful, he can make *Alter* accede to his (*Ego's*) wishes or demands with or without *Alter's* desiderata with the use of his (*Ego's*) resources. Because of the rigid structure of the definition, no possible accommodation can be made as when *Alter* does not have a desideratum or when *Alter* is a thing or a non-human being incapable of making, much more imposing, its wishes, demands or desiderata over *Ego.* The least that the author could have done was to include the word "or" to "and" to make it "and/or." This way, the definition becomes more flexible.

Another point worth mentioning is the limitation of *Ego's* resources to "political." This makes the definition appear like a definition of political power. It must be noted that what the author was trying to define is the broad concept of power and not the narrower concept of political power. Even if we assume, to give the author the benefit of the doubt, that there is always a political element involved in the exercise of power, it would be too presumptuous for anyone to think that everything is political and that power *per se,* just because it is assumed to possess a political element, is always political. Not all power situations are political situations and not all resources are political resources. The book does not show how a strictly non-political resource becomes a political resource. The most that could probably be said is that the political element is simply a vehicle to make the exercise of power during certain occasions effective. But one need not always rely on political resources for resources vary in much the same way as branches of power vary, such as political power, economic power, military power, manpower, and even electric power, among others.

It is significant to note that the author's definition, despite certain weaknesses, possesses a quality that points to its indigenity and reflects the unique Philippine political culture. The author was trying to reflect, consciously or unconsciously, the structure of relationship between the elite and the mass-man which is characterized by patronage as when *Alter* satisfies his desideratum by working for *Ego* who promises to reward him, i.e., *Alter,* with certain goods. But if we are to analyze this more closely, what we will see is the *palakasan* value among Filipinos in the exercise of power. When a mass-man is able to convince an elite to help him get a job, say, in the Bureau of Public Highways despite his lack of qualification, he, i.e., *Ego,* is *malakas.*

V

These are but some of the many significant issues which the author interestingly dealt with. Despite the few

weaknesses which the reviewer tried to show, the book, in its totality, deserves a significant amount of praise for its contribution to the study of Philippine politics. The book itself reveals what other studies consciously or unconsciously conceal — the reality of the dynamics of the Philippine political process; and it is able to strike a happy balance between the Marxist and the non-Marxist approaches by dealing with the "is," thereby, commanding the necessary neutrality.

The reviewer is certain that the book will find its way not only among those who have developed their sophistication but also to those who are not, and who would like to be, sophisticated.

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