

## RURAL FOLKWAYS IN RELATION TO RURAL IMPROVEMENT

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### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Conflict Between Rural Folkways and Urban Proposals

That important changes have occurred in the Philippines especially since World War II is one of the conclusions reached by the McMillan-Rivera report on rural Philippines. It notes:

1. Population has increased approximately three and one half million which means not only more mouths to feed but more manpower.

2. The population of the cities is growing more rapidly than that of rural areas as a result of migration from the barrios to the poblaciones and major cities.

3. Basis for urban expansion lies in the broad post-war development of construction, manufacturing trade, transportation and service industries.

4. Technologically, the Philippines now has more automobiles, trucks, tractors and other machines, more elastic power, more mechanical know how than in the pre-war period.

5. By most criterion the social institutions of business, agriculture, government, and education are organized and operating more efficiently now than before the war.

The report at the same time reveals that the major rural problems center around underdeveloped human and physical resources among which are:

(1) Lag in farming methods; (2) small farms; (3) low income; (4) unemployment; (5) landlessness; (6) scarcity of credit; (7) malnutrition; (8) shortage of health facilities; (9) inadequate education; (10) decreasing soil fertility; (11) weak local government; (12) shortage of miscellaneous facilities (adequate roads, schools, markets, housing, water supply, electricity, reading centers, and recreation.)

It has been customary to suppose that if these underdevelopments exist the basic reason behind is the neglect that rural areas have suffered from governmental policies, which is not exactly true since primarily, these lags are the result of the inertia of rural folkways to any sign of change. To be sure, in this country, political inaction is to be partly blamed for some of these lags, but by and large, it is the group habits of the rural people many of which have become institutionalized that are the root of the trouble. Paul H. Landis observes that machine techniques change more rapidly than family codes, religious beliefs, and legal traditions that meanwhile scientific procedures spring up in the realm of mechanics, whereas in the nonmaterial realm, old ideologies, outworn assumptions, and customary habits of thought which fail to prepare the people for the implications of the new technology persists. "A people", he points out, "may be modern-minded with regards to machines, but in sentiments may still cling to an isolated primary group culture."

The improvements that are envisioned for rural people as they apply to the Philippines are for the most part inspired by the situation prevailing

among the rural masses themselves, but they are changes on the other hand, which are predicated on urban viewpoints, which is only to be expected since the scientific attitude upon which our rural amelioration is ultimately to be founded is an urban phenomenon itself. Hence, when these viewpoints are reflected in rural areas, the natural consequence is a tension in which the dynamics of science run counter against the inertia implicit in rural folkways.

The barrio people are generally passive in the face of change because of their long experience with traditional phenomena, and what they have learned of agriculture, for example, or of health for that matter, has come by way of father-to-son tradition, rather than by scientific training. Many of the barrio communities which the McMillan-Rivera report sampled were found to be loaded with folklore on agricultural process inimical to any suggestion for change. On health it is interesting that J. Ralston Hayden attributes what he calls fatalistic resignation as one of the deterrents to the achievement of physical health and energy upon which alone he believes can be based a natural development comparable with that of western states or Japan.

### II. CONDITIONING FACTORS

#### 1. NATIVE EXPERIENCE

It seems, therefore, of primary importance to understand the conditioning behind the development of these folkways if a redirection of them is to be made in favor of rural improvement. And the first point to stress is the fact that these rural folkways are identified with nature and with natural basic processes, which make for the tendency among rural people to regard nature as an active agent in their culture-building experience.

The carabao which is the Filipino farmer's best friend has influenced many of his behavior patterns. It is often said as a suggestion that the nature of the rural man is the result of the conditioning which the carabao has imposed on him. We all know that the animal is slow moving but a steady worker and helper, loves to wallow in the mud, and is a good friend so long as it is not overworked under the heat of the sun. "You are as slow as a carabao" generally reflects an aspersion cast by an urban man; but in the rural areas the admirable quality of the animal is appreciated in the common expression, "as patient as a carabao".

In his search for security in the face of capricious nature with which he has to deal day in and day out the rural man in the absence of scientific guidance, has set up techniques for dealing with what he thinks are supernatural powers. Thus the world of the rural man is cluttered with folkways in which *magic*, *propitiation*, and *taboo* are prevalent.

In a report that one of my classes in Rural Sociology has presented, they found that all sections of the Philippines have developed folkways of agriculture in which these techniques of dealing with supernatural powers are at hand. It is found, for example, that in the locality of Lucena, Quezon, some farmers decide the planting of their crops not only in terms of the seasons, but also by the sound of the lizard or "tuko". A student reports that if in the first sound of the "tuko" the

farmer says "good harvest" or "bad harvest" depending on his choice, and alternately thereafter, the last sound if identified with "bad harvest", the farmer no matter had promising the weather for planting will have to postpone his schedule to some other time that is favorable.

In the barrio of Naga City where the main source of income is from the ownership of coconut trees, the fear of the tree growing very tall is constantly in the mind of the farmer so much so that to mitigate the situation, a turtle shell is used to scoop the soil from the hole where the planting is to be done. The idea behind is that since the turtle is a creature that constantly hugs the ground, the coconut tree inserted in the hole where the shell was used as an implement will partake of the nature of the turtle.

The planting of rice in some barrios of Bataan demands no bathing for the planters before planting and that their heads should at all cost be kept dry while the planting goes on and that stepping over the plants is a bad omen. Moreover, the palay seeds under all circumstances should not be touched by sick persons.

These practices are easily duplicated in different parts of the country even where rural isolation has long been removed.

Whoever works with land and water, accordingly, becomes a partner with nature and, is therefore, subject to the influence of processes which operate throughout the natural world. Since personality patterns are the products of habits growing out of long established relationships with environmental factors, it stands to reason that the psychological traits, social outlook, and philosophical values of the farmers or the fishermen for that matter are the result of the conditioning which nature has imposed upon them. The belief in some quarters that so long as agriculture remains on the elemental level with the farmers or the fishermen for that matter are the result of the conditioning which nature has imposed upon them. The belief in some quarters that so long as agriculture remains on the elemental level with the farmer and his family winning its food supply from the soil, there will be little change in rural culture, is not a far fetched generalization, to say the least.

O. E. Baker suggests this possible effect of closeness to nature on attitudes, habits and basic philosophies. In his "Farming as an Occupation" he points out:

"Deeper in my opinion than the differences between individualistic or laissez faire economics and socialism, deeper even than the differences between capitalism and communism, are those between rural and urban attitudes towards life. The farmer tends to think in terms of plants and animals, of birth and growth and death. The city man on the other hand tends to think in terms of wheels and levers and machine, or of buying and selling. Whereas agriculture is founded on life processes, particularly as influenced by soil and weather and laws of inheritance, urban occupations are founded on manufacturing and commerce, and these activities are mostly carried indoors. To the city child milk is associated with a bottle, not with a cow; an apple comes from a box not from a tree; and these early impressions influence, I believe, the ideas of later life.

"As a consequence, the farmer's philosophy of life is primarily organic, whereas the city man's philosophy is usually mechanistic. The farmer lives in a natural world, the city man in an artificial world. Because of his occupation the farmer's thoughts are largely biological, whereas the city man's thoughts are largely physical or economic.

"Perhaps because of the open air and contact with nature, perhaps because the farmer sees stars at night and observes the progress of the seasons, perhaps also because of stronger family ties, farmers and farm women tend to think in terms of the past and the future; city people, it seems, tend to think more about the present."

It might be added that to the farmer, agriculture, or let us say, to the fisherman, fishing, are not only occupations, but ways of life, and to change their enterprise radically is to alter their personality and their particular type of enterprise in their world. Any modification is to make necessary a major personal adjustment in which the entire household is included. In the Philippines, despite the material changes which have occurred in the country during the last fifty years, there still survive codes and ideologies which are strictly native in their conditioning and definitely inspired by rural isolation prevalent in the past. The observation of Sorokin, Zimmerman and Calpin in their *Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology* has, it seems, relevance to the Philippine situation in that "with the developments of money economy and urbanization, the familistic traits of the peasant farm enterprise have tended to fade, though familism still survives to a greater extent on the economic organization of the typical farm than in the non-agricultural industrial enterprise or in the capitalistic nonfamily farm enterprise."

## 2. THE ROLE OF PRIMARY GROUP RELATIONSHIP

These rural folkways have *secondly* developed in the atmosphere of primary group relationship, and since the forces that are making their impact on them for a change are the outgrowth of secondary group relationship, it is only to be expected that the barrio people should maintain wait-and-see attitude. Whoever lives in the "damay" (a Tagalog word indicating a primary group relationship) type of culture cannot escape being conscious of the reactions to his behaviour, and for that matter, it is easier for him to conform to existing patterns than seek new ones.

This is adequately illustrated in the failures that have accompanied the succession of rural credit institutions which the Philippine government has tried to get up in the past and is still setting up at present. The case of the Rural Credit Association which was organized more than twenty-five years ago is an illuminating example of this failure. The motives behind its organization was laudable to say the least, and if the ideas behind were successfully implemented they could have minimized usury and excessive landlordism and possible have alleviated the agrarian conflict that is now raging in the country today.

Many explanations had been made for these failures but one that should not be overlooked is the lag that stands between urban techniques

involved in the operation of a modern credit system and the credit experience of the rural people which has "damay" contents in it. For credit among the rural people is personal. No promisory notes are written, no accounting or auditing are required. So when the principle of money economy is imposed the chances of failure are great since the rural background operating on familistic traits does not have sufficient orientation to the entanglements involved in even a simple banking system of the urban fashion.

On the other hand, I have a doctor friend who found it more successful from a financial standpoint to operate in a community where he comes as an outsider. The reason for it he said is that if he practised in the place where he was born and had grown up the elements of personal relationship or "damay type" of culture will impose upon the situation so that he will likely have more patients, but, inversely, less income. This situation is reflected in the practice of other professions in this country.

The development of the *compadre* system in Philippine politics is to a great extent the attempt to win votes by playing on the psychology of "damay" relationship. The rural people in the Philippines do not vote mainly on issues involved but on the "personal" rapport that a politician can establish between himself and the voters. The *compadre* idea to him seals the vote, at least, until its "damay" energies are spent. It might be said here that President Magsaysay's popularity among the rural people in the last election is to be partly explained in his capacity to establish a "damay" relationship between himself and those who had the votes to give, all things being equal.

We have an accurate description of this phenomenon in the observation made by the writers of *Elementary Sociology* in the University of the Philippines. In the chapter on rural communities they report:

"In the Philippines... the pattern of behaviour revolves about common interests and purposes which redound to the general welfare of the group. Within this group no individual can hope to live apart from the knowledge of his neighbors. Social contacts are carried to a point where a high degree of intimacy and informality characterize the relationships. The rural barrio is a prime example of the *damay* type of interaction."

Before the outbreak of World War II, the writer was lecturing to a group of rural people on the necessity of the young men moving to Mindanao where they could own a farm of their own and the capital for development provided by government credit through the Land Settlement Administration. These people were living in a barrio and had been tenants all their lives. The reply of the matriarch who was apparently the mouthpiece of family opinion was something to remember. She said: "To be together on a diet of camote tops is better than to be dispersed with all the rice of the landlords onhand."

It is interesting to note in this connection that the McMillan-Rivera report found 88 against moving to new settlements as over against 12 in favor, in the poll sampled among the people of barrios studied. To be sure, mobility of population both geographically and socially has been characteristic of the post war period in this country and has contributed

in no small measure to the weakening of attachments to family and neighborhood groups as such, but the fact stands that despite these developments the barrio folkways are rooted in primary sentiments which strongly provide resistance against any sign of their substitution by a secondary group interaction.

### 3. PRESSURE OF THE CONSCIOUS PAST

The rural people in the *third place* have a very conscious past. Their families having lived in the same place for two generations or more have accumulated a wealth of background concerning local traditions. They, therefore, act as jealous guardians of local standards, conserving the status as it were, and have a powerful influence in determining whether the community should respond favorably or unfavorably to progressive movements and constructive changes.

This "past" we know can be both an asset and liability to rural improvement. It is a stabilizing influence but it also makes for rural stagnation. It tends to conserve the finer traditions, but also keeps the community tethered to ancient landmarks. Many barrio people are quite willing to conform to it, because under it life can be easy, rhythmic and safe although to those who have experienced a more stimulating life, it can be monotonous and repressive.

This adherence to the status quo is reflected in the greetings that rural people in the Philippines are wont to say to each other. In western practice the common response to a question: "How are you?" would be: "Fine", "better than ever", "wonderful", which in more ways than once includes an expression of improvement or progress.

In the Tagalog barrios the response would be: "*Mabuti po naman, katulad ng dati,*" or "Good sir, as usual."

In the western Visayas the reply would be: "*Salamat, sa guihapon,*" meaning, "Thank you, as usual" or "as always".

The Ilocano would probably answer: "*Nasayaat, caasi ni Apo Dios,*" or "Good, by the help of God". But the term good here connotes as always has been, that is, nothing adverse has really happened.

The sum of it all is that the conditioning brought about by contact with natural processes, by the influence of primary group relationships, by loyalty to a "conscious" past, make the rural man accustomed to restricted patterns which makes him less tolerant than the urban person to patterns that differ from his own. To be sure he is condescending within the sphere of his mores, but these mores are so restrictive that they tend to exclude radically different out-group values, even if designed for his improvement.

If progressive movements are to be instituted among them, it would seem that to succeed they must capitalize on values indigenous to his culture and not radically alien to his way of life.

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