

## BELATED REFLECTIONS ON 30 YEARS OF THE *PHILIPPINE SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW*

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*One of the founding fathers of the Philippine Sociological Society looks back at the PSS after 30 years and finds points to praise and criticize. While impressed at the survival of the association and the journal over the years, the author remains skeptical of Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives which attract younger Filipino sociologists. He draws attention to more basic social problems like rapid population growth, and calls for more sociological research and mutual criticism among scholars.*

Since the July-December 1983 issue of the *Philippine Sociological Review* (PSR) contains an acknowledgement of its founding days, it may be appropriate for one of the founding fathers to look at what has happened to his creation.

The first observation is that the mere fact of survival is an indication of success. The effort to found a sociological society and a journal was greeted with general skepticism. There were not more than half dozen bona fide sociologists in the Philippines at the time (half of them American) and the notion that they, together with a slightly larger group of fellow travelers in other disciplines, could successfully launch a journal and an academic society seemed preposterous indeed. Further, we were warned that persistence in organizational activity was not a Filipino trait. Supposedly, the failure of similar previous attempts indicated a *ningas cogon* attitude in which early success would be followed by a loss of interest which would be the demise of the project.

As Hennig and others have pointed out, there is no evidence that an iron clad traditional value system blocks all efforts at innovation (even though such traditional values may be more pervasive and effective than their critics admit). At any rate, both the sociological society and its journal have survived and, today, the PSR is certainly in the front rank of Filipino academic periodicals. Such survival was neither preordained nor accidental and would not have occurred without the dedicated efforts of Filipino and American editors who persisted even when the odds against them seemed formidable. This is not the place to single out individuals

for special attention, but perhaps it should be mentioned that they were usually found in the sociology departments of either the Ateneo de Manila or the University of the Philippines, although support also came for sociologists in other settings.

Through the years, the PSR has printed both empirical studies and "think" pieces which sought to evaluate the merits of particular approaches and to delineate the kind of problems which should be addressed. Urban social organization and its opposite, the social-psychological dimensions of Filipino personality, the nature and function of the Filipino family, the modern and "folk" Catholicism, social class structure and the effect of contact between lowlanders and mountaineers have often been the focus of articles. Rural sociology has been a major concern, both for its intrinsic interest and as a response to governmental efforts. In the early years, conflict sociology was not generally seen as a separate school, but simply as one aspect of functionalism. As such, conflict might be regarded either as a warning signal which would stimulate needed adjustments or as "dysfunction" which impeded social organization. In more recent years, an increasing flow of articles has come from those who disdain anything similar to a functionalist approach and proclaim that conflict is the major social process. Such a development is not unique to the Philippines and may be seen in foreign journals as well.

The July-December 1983 issue does not contain all of the topics treated through the years, but may still be utilized in assessing points which PSR articles have covered and points

which appear to be either minimized or overlooked.

While focused primarily on the rural scene, this issue treats a variety of topics. Along with a lead article on the general nature of rural social change, the issue includes specific aspects of rural society, a critique of the value approach, an approach to the analysis of revolution "from below", a treatment of corruption as a violation of the public interest, a report of the impact of the sugar industry on Bukidnon and two book reviews which chastise (justly) social problems texts for a lack of analytical rigor. All of the articles are competently written and indicate a considerable familiarity with the relevant literature. All of them are important and are consistent with prevailing trends of academic inquiry. Likewise, all of the articles have a somewhat one-sided approach and fail to stress some important considerations. While only one of the articles is avowedly Marxian, none really challenges this orientation. Most of the articles have at least a quasi-utopian outlook, since they compare the *status quo* with a vague type of ideal society rather than with any probable alternatives.

#### *The Marxian Perspective*

My first comment is that the Marxian perspective is not new. Rather, it is a nineteenth century perspective which has often been tested and found wanting. The societies which have taken it as a model are characterized by tyranny and pervasive poverty. Perhaps the best evidence on the success of the capitalist and the Marxian models is that, when people "vote with their feet", they invariably flee from Communist or socialist countries to those in which capitalism reigns. The classic example, although not the only one, is the Berlin wall which the Communist erected to keep people from moving to the capitalist society of West Berlin.

The next observation is that scholars who use Marxian terminology tend to confuse trends which appear in any kind of social order with those of a purely capitalist origin. It is certainly true that the decline of family-sized farms, the mechanization of agriculture, the increase in international migration, the growth of a landless proletariat and the shift from subsistence to an international commodity market, pose prob-

lems. Such changes, however, are the result of changing technology rather than of a plot by capitalists to maximize profits. They appear in Communist societies as well, as can be seen in the growth of large-scale collective farms. Moreover, it should be remembered, that agriculture has been a colossal failure in most Communist societies. Before Communism, Russia was a grain exporter; today, it is kept alive by massive food imports from the United States. Incidentally, a Communist society is no guarantee that international migration will be unattractive. The Communist nation of Yugoslavia is one of the leading exporters of workers to the capitalist nations of Western Europe. Workers in other Communist countries would no doubt follow the Yugoslavian example if their governments permitted migration.

In trying to ameliorate Filipino rural society, there is often a tendency to say that while Communism is rejected, the profit motive is bad and must be replaced by public entities wherever possible. The results of such an approach have been almost uniformly disastrous. The record of land resettlement colonies, compact farms, cooperatives and government commodity corporations is one of enormous cost and abysmal failure. Bankruptcy, inefficiency, corruption and an inability to perform desired functions have characterized most such efforts. The problems of these non-profit organizations do not seem to interest Filipino (or foreign) sociologists. The PSR has run a few articles indicating the shortcomings of government agencies established to provide farm credit, but otherwise, its pages are silent on the ills of public enterprises.

#### *What About Alternatives?*

Perhaps I should elucidate the point that the articles which describe defects of the *status quo* fail to consider the results if alternative measures are adopted. A few examples may suffice. Rivera has an interesting analysis of the relation of farmers and large scale agro-business corporations which indicates that such farmers have real problems. However, one wonders how the laborers employed by such corporations compare with other laborers and how small farmers linked to corporations compare with small farmers who lack such links.

Parenthetically, I might say that casual observation indicates families in communities impacted by corporations appear more prosperous than the average.

Bautista makes an eloquent plea for a public interest perspective even as she admits that such a perspective is often difficult to define. But would government action be improved if legislators and officials failed to consult businessmen affected by their action?

Madigan gives a report on the impact of sugar growing in Bukidnon which raises more questions than it answers. For instance, would it really serve the national interest to prevent Filipinos with a background in sugar labor from moving to areas where their labor is needed? Is it really true that the profits of sugar planters are too high or are such profits needed to attract capital to a very risky enterprise (consider the low price of sugar in 1984)? Finally, are small holders as able to be efficient producers as are the large-scale planters? I am not suggesting that the answers to such queries are obvious, but I do insist that they need to be asked.

#### *Nationalism and Internationalism*

One of the issues which every Filipino journal must consider is that of developing a vigorous Filipino nationalism. While Filipinos gained much from 400 years of rule by western powers, they also lost some of the sense of national pride and confidence which every country needs. This can be noticed even in the writings of those who profess a strong nationalistic spirit. For instance, it is odd that in this issue of the PSR on the rural Philippines, many foreign authorities are cited, but no reference is made to two Filipino scholars who have written voluminously and cogently on such topics. I am referring to the writings of Gelia Castillo and the dated, but still valuable, insights of Agaton Pal. It is also interesting that there is no mention of the successful rural development in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

While the ability to appreciate and utilize Filipino culture is one side of the coin, the other is the ability to be a world citizen and to participate in a world culture. Filipinos by heritage and geographical location are advantaged

in this respect. As a maritime nation on the rim of Asia with intimate exposure to both Malayan and European culture, the Philippines should be well equipped for world interaction. Added to this is a high level of education, facility in English which has become an international language, and connections with about a million Filipinos living overseas. The Filipino advantages are indeed impressive.

The results, however, are less impressive than might be expected. In spite of widespread attention to education, the Philippines is hardly an educational mecca attracting thousands of students and scholars from other countries. Similarly, Filipino labor has been utilized in many capacities in many lands, but Filipino business is seldom in evidence abroad. Nor has foreign business been the catalyst in Filipino economic development which it has been in Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea.

By and large, sociologists and other social scientists have been so concerned about the possible evil effects of foreign penetration that they have neglected consideration of the much greater evil resulting from a lack of foreign involvement in economic and social life. Low wages in multinational corporations may be harmful but they are hardly as hurtful as no wages at all. Foreign participation in agrobusiness and manufacturing may be less desirable than Filipino enterprise, but it is certainly preferable to lagging development.

There has been much discussion on how foreign participation may be restricted or controlled, but little attention has been paid to the question of how Filipino-foreign collaboration can be stimulated. In fact, some of the policies often favored by Filipino social scientists would appear to have the opposite effect. Does it increase the employability of Filipino workers and professionals to restrict the use of English in the schools? Is foreign (or, for that matter, domestic) business encouraged by a host of regulations and restrictions? Is enterprise encouraged by a wage policy which prices Filipino labor out of the market? Does the limitation of profits and restriction of foreign remittances encourage foreign investment? Again, the answers to such questions may not be obvious, but they are topics which need to be considered.

*Population Growth: A Basic Problem*

It is a confusing world and one of the attractions of Marxism is that it offers a formula which, supposedly, explains all of the problems of social maladjustment. Although I do not believe that Marxism or any other social philosophy can completely explain human society, I would like to suggest one factor which, though often unrecognized, affects nearly every aspect of Filipino social life. In doing this, I should acknowledge my debt to Antonio La Viña for calling attention to the work of Reynaldo Iletto, especially his insistence that, regardless of subjective meanings, there are objective factors which affect us all.

In the Philippines, that objective factor is population growth. It is population growth which is responsible for a landless proletariat. It is population growth which leads to urban congestion. It is population growth which stimulates the reckless use of natural resources and it is population growth which forces the country to spend much of its energy on mere survival. In the 50 years since the inauguration of the Commonwealth, the population of the Philippines has more than tripled. If current trends continue, the Philippines will have nearly 100 million people by the year 2000 thirty years later, will have 200 million. In view of the rapid population growth since 1945, it is surprising that the Philippines has made any economic advance at all. Population control alone will not produce a prosperous country, but continued population growth will defeat even the best of all possible social planning, regardless of whether it is on a capitalist or communist basis.

The PSR has carried several articles on population attitudes and the work of family planning agencies. This is all to the good, but much more needs to be done. In spite of valiant efforts, the national family planning program falls far short of what is required. We do not need mere patchwork, but a major alteration of the whole enterprise. This will not be done

unless we realize how effective population control has been achieved in other countries and the type of change which might make the Philippine effort more successful.

There is currently little demand for an effective population control program and there will continue to be little demand until at least the educated populace becomes aware of how rapid population growth complicates every social problem. We need, in the PSR and in other publications as well, a series of articles which will bring this out in graphic terms. China has decided that, to obtain population stabilization, it must popularize the one child family. The Philippine crisis is just as severe as the Chinese and the remedy will be no easier. If the sociologists do not publicize this unwelcome fact, who will?

*Conclusion*

During the last thirty years, the Philippine Sociological Society has been a much stronger organization than even its founders thought possible and the *Philippine Sociological Review* has published much of the best social thought and research in the country. The next three decades will bring new schools of thought, new challenges and new insights. Those of us rooted in the past may feel that much remains to be done, but we have confidence that the work of sociological research and reflection will be maintained.

In spite of a good deal of social inquiry, the world still suffers from fragmentary, biased and incomplete social understanding. The best remedy we have for this is the vigorous pursuit of sociological research, the testing of hypotheses and the mutual criticism of concerned scholars. It has been a real joy to have been a small part of such an enterprise and I commend it wholeheartedly to the younger scholars who now have this responsibility. I am confident that, in the next thirty years, the Philippine Sociological Review will be even more successful than in the last.