



BOOK REVIEWS

*Explorations in Social Theory and Philippine
Ethnography*

Raul Pertierra

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There are very few scholars who have devoted themselves passionately to the study of Philippine culture, and whose studies may be said to have contributed significantly to the study of Filipino culture. Raul Pertierra belongs to this roster of rare scholars of Filipino culture. His most recent book, a collection of essays on Philippine culture and social theory, represents his continuing efforts to rethink Philippine culture and situate it within the most recent developments in social theory.

I think that the best way to appreciate the book is to look at its organizing theme which weaves together diverse and highly suggestive essays. The leitmotif of the book is the articulation of the local within the global. Pertierra masterfully navigates around this theme by using history and social theory in order to explore the problematic relationship between time and space. He presents an interesting discussion on the coupling of time and space using the ethnographic materials derived from his fieldwork in Zamora.

The problem of articulating the relationship between the global and local has been noted earlier by Roland Robertson. Consequently, Robertson's discussion of this problem led to the development of the concept of glocalization. Yet the empirical substantiation of this abstract concept has so far been minimal. Pertierra's *Explorations in Social Theory and Philippine Ethnography* is an attempt to rescue this concept from empirical vacuity. This is illustrated in his essays on "Religion and the Moral Expression of Everyday Life (Chapter 2), "Uses and Locations of Culture: The Transformation of the Ilocano Komedya" (Chapter 3), and "Trust and Time in a Philippine Village" (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 2, Pertierra illustrates this process of glocalization by pointing out the fact that Zamora is also a part of a larger world whose salience intrudes into local society with increasing force, and how national and cultural factors also intrude significantly into local society determining its constitution (p. 173). Then,

in Chapter 3, Pertierra further theorizes the relationship between the local and the global by deconstructing the binary opposition between national culture and local culture. He argues that ... just as the village is shaped by forces outside its boundaries, a national culture is also constituted by the routines of life in its rural villages. *Such routines exercise a powerful but often unacknowledged presence in national affairs* (p. 190) (emphasis supplied). Building on Renan's classic discussion of nationalism and Anderson's definition of nations as "imagined communities," Pertierra embarks on a deconstructive quest to expose the fact that ... the use of [national] culture as a basis of social order is a recent phenomenon, associated with the standardization of space-time throughout the 19th century (p. 210). Then he illustrates this by showing how the *Ilocano Komedia* is transformed into a field of contestation between the forces of localization and globalization, two processes linked through space-time distanciation. The interplay between these forces are enacted on the political stage.

The author pursues the dialectic between the local and global in terms of trust operating within the structure of local Zamoran time. Following Durkheim and Mauss, Pertierra points out that our experience of temporality and duration is socially constituted (p. 257). What distinguishes Zamoran concepts of time from other societies is that the Zamorans perceive standard time as an instance of the micro-politics of power rather than as a convention

enabling greater structures of coordination (p. 259). Here Pertierra delivers his punch line: Anthropology enables us to understand how the global condition manifests itself in the local such that what is purportedly local can be seen to lie beyond it. *What anthropology is less able to do is to explain how localities enter into the constitution of the global* (p. 259). This last remark succinctly states the theme that runs throughout the book. And therefore his focus on spatio-temporal dimension of the routines of everyday serves very well in articulating the complex relationship between the local and the global.

Based on this thematic discussion the entire book is a major contribution in the growing interest of scholars on globalization and for those grappling with the problems of identity in postcolonial societies. Nevertheless, despite my admiration for the gallant efforts of the author to conceptualize in an original way the link between the local and global, I have several reservations about some of his assertions.

His deconstruction of the national and local culture seems to trap him in another form of logocentrism. This time, by privileging the Other, the exotic, the local, it appears that the author falls prey to excessive over-generalization. For instance, he observes that Philippine society is based on a form of personal and collective prowess ensuring protections for allies, friends or kin and marked by a predatory orientation

towards others. Strangers are fair prey until they are converted into con-sociates, often through a mechanism of obligatory hospitality (p. 25). I wonder how he arrived at this generalization. But it is evident that he derived it mainly from personal observations and from his fieldwork in Zamora. The author therefore owes his readers an account of why and how this trait applies to Filipinos. He must show this without resorting to abstract universalism that he rejects. In this regard, Pertierra's un-disguised reflexivity set forth in his Introduction — "A major aspect of this framework is its self-conscious characteristic. It presumes that all knowledge depends on context and interest, the awareness of which determines claims of reliability" (p.1) — falls short of its promise. It appears that his self-reflexivity falls short of being fully conscious of his own power in representing the voice of the Zamorans, and Filipinos in general.

His discussion of indigenization is very insightful and convincingly points out the pitfalls for such a project. I heartily agree that indigenization can be another slogan of the state, in its quest to legitimize itself. But I suggest that we should distinguish state-sponsored indigenization (like the Bagong Lipunan during the Martial Law of Marcos, and the Pamathalaan during the Ramos regime) from anticolonial/post-colonial indigenization. Whether the

latter can recover the authentic voice of the native, the Other, is another matter, which I cannot pursue at this time.

Pertierra's discussion of religion and popular culture are implicitly phrased in functionalist language, but with some social constructionist terms. Much of his discussion lacks the dimensions of ideology and power (except for some unsubstantiated remarks on local politics). I would have wished that Pertierra addressed the role of religion in the struggle for establishing hegemony in the local scene. Admittedly, this is my main interest in the study of religion.

Finally, the dimension of gender in the constitution of local culture is muted. This seems to reflect the gender-bias in mainstream anthropology. Pertierra owes not only anthropology but the women of Zamora, an account of their un-articulated but present voices.

Yet, these reservations do not invalidate the invaluable and rich insights raised in the book. It deserves to be read by Filipino scholars who are seriously rethinking their identity in the age of global change. Pertierra also brings time and space into social theory, two concepts that determine social action but which have been absent in much contemporary social theory. Indeed, Pertierra is boldly setting forth new research paradigms in Philippine studies.