

SOME THOUGHTS ON APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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About a year ago, Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao (UGAT) held its 1st National Conference at Los Baños focusing on the theme Philippine Anthropology Today. Represented in the Conference were institutions engaged in various anthropological activities — teaching, research, as well as social application. All told, some 16 papers were presented covering specific and broad topics in physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, ethnography, and applied anthropology.

As a state-of-the-art activity, it became a collective affirmation of what were, until then, individual suspicions about the discipline. We did cover a lot of ground; still we felt that much remains to be done. In the area of teaching and curricular development, the student representatives clamored for more courses relevant not only for cultivating a broad anthropological perspective but also for a more profound understanding of Philippine society and culture. In research, not only did we discover the gaps, we also discovered the unequal distribution of research opportunities — non-Filipino anthropologists have had the lion's share. It was in applied anthropology, however, where discussions were at once glandular and cerebral, reflecting partly the nature of the topic and partly the experiences of participants who have had opportunities to test anthropological theories in the raw realities of people's lives.

Chemistry, of course, works wonders. The glandular-cerebral interaction has precipitated into this 2nd Conference appropriately titled, "The Power of Anthropology in Development: Dialogue Among Developers."

Now it can be said: Anthropologists are also into development! But lest anthropologists, by this act of gathering together in the name of anthropology be accused of manifesting bandwagon mentality, let us remind ourselves that long before development became a national preoccupation, if not a transnational industry, and long before it became fashionable among academic entrepreneurs, anthropology was already into development albeit under different labels.

We are in it today as a response to the very nature of culture change itself and its particular forms in the Philippines.

That we collectively address ourselves to development processes and issues reflects, therefore, the creative capacity of anthropology to emerge from particular sociocultural settings with new and more knowledge affirmative of its claim to being the science of man.

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Very briefly then, within the limits of this introductory remarks, let me examine with you the contours, as it were, of applied anthropology in the Philippines. One may wish to begin with the use of the ethnographic accounts of Pigafetta, Loarca, Plasencia and the rest by the colonial administration under Spain. Having thus started, one may continue with the American experience where accounts by Worcester and others helped shape American policy in the Philippines. But I wish to start with the experiences of Filipino workers and others in more contemporary times.

Following the need for the country to build upon the ruins of World War II, and in the context of the acculturation situation between victor- and victim-nations, social scientists engaged themselves in various activities ostensibly supportive of national reconstruction. Then, as now, topics to be researched and modes of social action were primarily determined by the funding source. Small wonder then that the more significant development-related anthropological researches were funded by the then Presidential Assistant for Community Development (PACD), which was about the only source of local fund for social science research. At least four published monographs that came out of the outfit offer traditional ethnographic accounts of the social unit, usually a village community, being investigated, followed by some remarks about culture change. The idea seems to be that once the study has been made, planners and change agents would seriously consider the results in planning and action.

Influenced by the structural and functional approach of their Western antecedents, these studies remain community-bound. Despite the recognition of the link between the little communities and the larger ones, these studies tend to freeze the communities in an assumed eternal isolation. The decisive character of the interrelationships between little communities remain largely ignored and vaguely understood.

The applied aspect of these studies, therefore, is derived, not from their actual use in community development but merely inferred from the statement of justification of the studies and the recommendations for actions that embellish ethnographic accounts.

We now turn our attention to another feature of applied anthropology in the Philippines — its emerging national character and application.

The social ferment in the country in the late 60's and in the early 70's affected almost all aspects of our social life including the social sciences. Cries for drastic sociocultural changes, for social revolution, necessitated the expansion of the unit of investigation, if not of action, from little communities to the national community.

This was not, I might add, a denial of the little communities as locus of empirical studies and as setting for social action. Microstudies became incorporated in the macroanalysis of the national society. Discernible in this expansion of unit of analysis and field of action are at least two types. The first

type involves anthropologists as researchers, consultants and lecturers in agencies, both private and government, purporting to be developmental in their objectives. Thus, we have anthropologists with the Development Academy of the Philippines doing studies not only of minority groups but of the rural situation to be utilized as inputs in national plans. There are anthropologists with PANAMIN, the government agency in charge of non-Muslim minority affairs, who help in advancing PANAMIN's own view of culture change, a view that has had disastrous consequences for minority groups and social scientists.

There are anthropologists in academic communities, the University of the Philippines included, who lecture and act as consultants to policy-makers, including the military variety. Not to be left out are non-stock, non-profit, sometimes religious organizations which are trying to deal directly with a number of minority groups. Their applied activities include community organization, self-help and income-generating projects, as well as conscientization.

It can be said that these are attempts to break away from the territorial and conceptual boundaries of little communities. The setting of activities are still little communities but linkages with the large community are consciously recognized. But while confronting the national society, the attempts seek not to restructure it but to redefine it as consciousness and as an expanded locus of politico-economic allegiance. Such goals entail a technique of dredging out past cultural traits that are non-Western and by implication, truly Filipino. The slogan seems to be: Native is beautiful! Thus Filipinos are exhorted to speak a national language, to revive folk traditions, arts and technology, to affirm their indigenous religiosity – in brief, to discover and assert their being *tunay na Pinoy*. Implicit in this is that with the retrieval of what is native and material and non-material culture, Filipinos would finally acquire a national identity and consciousness thus making them worthy members of the international community. Anthropology is in this moment of our national history applied in the formation of a national nativist ideology, or if you wish, an ideology of cultural nationalism.

The second approach, represented by individuals and organizations associated with the left, traces its inspiration, unknowingly perhaps, partly to anthropology and partly to political economy which, if one has been following the trends in Third World scholarship has already been incorporated into anthropology. One article of faith of this type is that theory and practice are inseparable. It insists on a truly holistic approach and adheres to an interdisciplinary perspective. It therefore denies the fragmenting perspective of the social sciences as is the practice in the universities.

Confronting sociocultural change as structural and systemic, this approach grapples with societies not as wholes of dismembered parts and which are treated separately but as organic wholes with interacting parts. The ap-

proach proceeds from an ethnographic investigation of societies within the framework of the national society, informed still by theories derived cross-culturally. In any case, it locates the agency of change not in any particular government or private institution, social class, or instrumentality external to the national society but in the masses of oppressed citizens including tribal groups, peasants and farmers, fishermen, urban workers, professionals, bureaucrats and others who already subjectively perceive their historical roles in structural transformation. Theoretically, and especially in one sub-type of this approach, these sectors are to work in concert towards a new stage of sociocultural integration under the leadership of a revolutionary organization which derives its moral strength from its identification of its interests with those it leads.

As such, it reechoes, however faintly, the grand evolutionary theories of classical anthropology even as it benefits from the idiographic character of ethnography and, in spite of Marvin Harris, the nomothetic power of dialectical and historical materialism.

In a way, therefore, we seem to have come full circle in the growth of applied anthropology. Where Morgan and Malinowski and others theorized and practiced according to the condition of their times, Filipino anthropologists now elicit, in various ways, the substance of their science as well as its power in effecting change and development from the conditions of Philippine society and culture. Ideas derived from cross-cultural studies acquire validity for Filipinos when these are tested against the theory and practice of Philippine anthropology. Unrelentingly, the dialectics between theory and practice, between theoreticians and action men proceeds.

To conclude, we now ask: Do these contours form the totality of Philippine applied anthropology? Our answers to this question cannot be easy and simplistic. Still, our answers will be the measure of whether anthropology as the science of man shall, in the Philippines, become a science for man and by man. From the perspective of anthropology, therefore, as a "trans-disciplinary" discipline, let us, in earnest, act and interact in the discovery of answers to questions about culture change in general and to their particular expressions in the Philippines. Let us hope that in these processes will emerge the power of anthropology to free man from shackles he himself has forged.