The Cultural Dimension of Development

PETRONILO Bn. DAROY

When the topic was given to me to speak on the cultural dimension of development, I did not quite know what to do with it. My problem was with the term *culture.* The basis of my apprehension were two interpretations usually applied to the term:

(a) The first speaks of culture in terms of the arts — i.e., music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and the dance. It generally associates culture with refinement and civilization; with aristocratic discrimination and sophisticated taste, with a high sensitivity to the qualities of things.

(b) The second interpretation distinguishes culture from nature. It is derived from the Greek *agricultura,* meaning, the imposition of man's design on nature. It has to do with the shaping of things, through the application of skills and technology. Within this context, *culture* relates to two aspects, namely, the material aspect and the spiritual or ideational aspect. A sculpture, for instance, is a material entity; but what it stands for, the idea that the artist intends to suggest through it is nonmaterial. Within the sense of the second interpretation, the idea of culture becomes very inclusive. It relates to the production of things as well as to beliefs, attitudes, concepts, modes of behavior, etc.

The two interpretations are not really exclusive of each other, although, theoretically, they are different. Under the second interpretation, the first could be subsumed, but it is worthwhile to hold the distinction between the two specially in relation to the idea of development.

The idea of culture as implying aristocratic discrimination and a high responsiveness to the quality of things is central to the old

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Chairman of the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines.

classical education with its concern with the development of the whole of the human faculties. As a branch of study or discipline, it is supposed to be the object of the humanities — to inculcate in man a sensitivity to the best that has been said and done in the world as a means to individual perfection.

The best that has been said and done in the world, however, are usually identified with the achievements of Greco-Roman humanism. In the earlier phase of the educational system in the West, this identification of superior values with Greco-Roman achievement became a very conservative and restrictive force; it tended to favor a preference for the past, for the products of classicism and a disregard or denigration of the contemporary. In some instances, it expressed itself in a resistance to contemporary science and technology. Matthew Arnold, for instance, thought that the Industrial Revolution and the factory system that it spawned in Great Britain was killing the sensitivity of man to higher things — i.e., to the sense of beauty as it was expressed in classical times.

Some aspect of this concern with the high achievements of past civilization and the missionary interest in extending its spiritual benefits to people who, because of their own history and isolation from Greco-Roman humanism have remained unaware of them — some aspect of this passion for civilizing the rest of mankind has always attended the rationalization for colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, it is in the phenomena of colonialism and present-day imperialism that we see most vividly the implication of the arts — as of culture — in politics. It is also in this context that we begin to be aware that development, whether taking place under the context of imperialism— i.e., in terms of the relationship between a superpower and a small nation — or under the auspices of capitalist expansion within the internal order of a given society, is inseparable from culture. Development, as a matter of fact, takes place within the context of culture.

There has been a tendency to describe development apart from, or in total disregard of culture. Development has usually been articulated in terms of the acquisition of new skills, or the introduction of technology and machines into a "backward" society, or human resettlement, or a high rate of productivity, or in terms of increasing the GNP. The fact is that any changes in the status quo — whether in terms of the introduction of technology or orienting, let us say, the backward sector of the population towards their proletarianization of new employments — implies corresponding

changes in consciousness and, therefore, a reorientation into a new culture.

I said that the spread of civilization has always been made to rationalize colonialism. If, in terms of the economic mode of production this may mean the transfer of technology, in the arts it has meant the export of culture. Under Spanish colonialism, the spread of civilization meant the imposition of Catholicism in the country; under the American rule, it meant the organization of an educational system intended to Americanize the Filipinos. Within the context of this phenomenon, two things could be observed at least in so far as the arts are concerned:

1) in so far as the arts has a material existence, the export of culture may be perceived under the auspices of commerce. Literature actually means books; this also holds true for ideas which must inevitably be realized in print, i.e., in magazines, journals, brochures, or, again, between book covers. Music either means the export of discs or records, of phonographs and casettes, or of performers and troupes; in all the other arts we find an exportable material equivalence.
2) in so far as the material of art has a nonmaterial content — i.e., it embodies ideas, suggestions, values, attitudes, preferences, ideologies, etc. — the export of culture prepares the consciousness of the people in the recipient country for the consumption of the artistic export. Catholicism, as has been extravagantly shown from Burgos up to Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, enabled the friars to traffic in the sale of novenas and other sacred readings, and of scapulars; to demand exhorbitant fees on baptisms, weddings, masses for the dead and, of course, to establish the friar as an authority in the community. On the other hand, under American rule, the educational system not only enabled the dissemination of English as medium of communication but, as the Americans themselves declared, prepared the Filipinos for independence of American democracy and capitalism.

The images of Hollywood or American beauty, as derived from the movies and American popular literature, prepared us for the consumption of cosmetics, while the American style of ease, as advertised in magazines — the comfortable, relaxed, busy housewife in her tasteful clothes and her shining living room or well-equipped kitchen; the picture of the well-mowed garden with the dahlias or petunias blooming in the hedges; the happy

family around the dinner table healthfully feeding on American ham, cheeses, butter, or bread and biscuits baked from American flour — all these were to develop in us the compulsion for possession of refrigerators, kitchen sinks, lawn mowers, etc. — in short for the consumption of American products.

Added to this, among the professionals and intelligentsia, was the inculcation of the taste for Beethoven or Bach; the development of the idea that intellectual advancement or the cultivation of consciousness could only proceed through the reading of the Great American novels and through an intimate acquaintance with the latest works of American artists, acculturating them to a life-style in which the continued availability of these things is necessary.

If my description of the effects of the export of culture tends to render the phenomenon in a smooth, hidden persuasion sort of thing, it must be corrected and balanced against the auspices of coercion and violence in which it took place.

The establishment of Catholicism in the country also meant the destruction of the indigenous beliefs of the natives; conversion was accomplished through the propagation of hellfire; the institutionalization of the friar as an object of feudal authority in those scattered communities also meant the institutionalization of his tyrannical rule over the Indios. On the other hand, the entry of American rule in the country was facilitated by military operations and massacres throughout the country, notably in the Ilocos, in Batangas, and in Balangiga, Samar.

In the education system, under the American rule, English was disseminated through a system of penalty in the school premises for those caught speaking the vernacular. In the realm of literature, Filipino writing in English became finally dominant after a period of suppression of the assertive nationalist literature — the incarceration of the Tagalog playwrights for sedition; the dismantling of nationalist newspapers such as *El Renacimiento,* the censorship of all writings in favor of Philippine independence. Both Spain and the United States understood that to achieve their desired ends, the entire matrix of the Filipino way of life had to be changed: from their beliefs which had to be reoriented to make them consumers of their own production and then, later, defenders of their own system of social organization to their own technology in order to make them more productive. It was not to be achieved by the mere introduction of limited technology, although this also had to be done; more

significantly, simultaneous with the changes in the sphere of economics, it was also necessary to change the Filipino consciousness.

In those cases where the people of a suppressed society keeps a continued commerce with its original culture and holds on to it as a last bastion of identity, instances occur when the original culture provides a framework for assertive or active opposition. Although, for instance, the Sumoroy rebellion was actually triggered off by the conscription of forced labor to man the shipbuilding activities in the dockyards of Cavite and Bohol, it soon took the form of revivalism. Sumoroy's father had been a *babaylan* who was killed by the friars; in the seige of the fort at Palapag, Sumoroy and his forces began more and more to appeal to the sense of a distinct identity and religion as a motive for continuing the rebellion.

Revivalism, however, is regressive in the sense that it desires to return to a culture and to a condition in society which has sustained that very culture but which has been superseded by new developments. It aspires to an impossible situation. The same spirit animates even contemporary revivalist movements; because of the obsolescense of the values or art forms or traditions it seeks to restore, it is readily ineffectual. That is why contemporary attempts at revivals have not only been tolerated, they have even been endorsed as providing a safe alternative to a more assertive resurgence of opposition.

In 1909 the Waray illustrados established the Sanghiran San Binisaya (Academy of the Bisayan Language of Leyte and Samar). Intended to be the equivalent of the Real Academia of Spain, it was dedicated to "cultivating, refining, and enriching the dialect as spoken in Samar and Oriental Leyte." Among its members were the elites of the two provinces: Norberto Romualdez, Sr., Generoso S. Quintero, Jaime de Veyra, Juan Ricacho, Iluminado Lucente, Eduardo Makabenta, Francisco Alvarado, etc. The organization did valuable work in establishing a continuity in Waray literature and in preserving the literary forms and traditions in Leyte-Samar Bisaya. The organization is still alive, although its membership is getting fewer and among them a few still are already writing in English. Lucente himself, perhaps one of the greatest of Waray writers, died in the United, States. Writing to his friend, Vicente I. de Veyra, he said:

. . . Diri na kita dama an naghihisalin nga mga "sundalo" han aton binisaya, ngan an daka nga makabibido kay an aton mga kabugtoan ha

ngatanan nga bagay, amo la ngahaw in karuyag magrun-og han higugmaon nga gintukod nga sulunda-non han aton mga kag-anak. (Not many of us "soldiers" of our Bisaya are left and the most regrettable part of it is that those who are our brothers in every respect should be the very ones who desire the destruction of the beloved legacy left to us by our ancestors.)

From the concern with the refinement of the language, some of the Sanghiran writers, however, also regressed in viewpoint, becoming overreactive and conservative to the new values that were emerging in our social life. Thus they failed to be a creative force in our culture. Aside from that, they also kept apart from the masses of the people where the most creative force and spirit was being daily evolved in their struggle for existence. From writing in isolated newspapers, they were soon writing just to each other and instead of confronting and judging the problems of the two provinces in their social and economic dimension, they began writing odes to the nightingale. Conceiving literature in such narrow terms, the Sanghiran failed to provide a guide in the development and enrichment of the Waray culture.