Modernity and the Underdevelopment of Sociological Theory in the Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Social settings fashion human consciousness. Intellectual disciplines emanate from their own social environment that provides the condition for their existence. It was the social setting that was set by the modern condition that produced, and sustained the growth of sociology. The discipline developed out of a crisis in late nineteenth century Western society which the then reigning paradigms in the historical and philosophical disciplines were unable to explain (Pertierra 1995). It came as a result of the interaction between the individual's awareness of his/her society and the social realities that existed during that period. In the West, sociology evolved as a natural product of social consciousness.

However, sociology came to the Philippines in a different way. Here, sociology did not emerge naturally as a product of enlightenment or any major change in the people's social consciousness. Rather, sociology, along with other disciplines in the social sciences, was imposed in the country in the early 1900s to facilitate the organization of a new government. The social sciences, notably sociology and anthropology, were not used as intellectual hardware for social transformation but as a practical prescription for living or as tools for colonial administration (Abad and Eviota 1982).

Since then, sociology in the Philippines largely remained as a practical instrument in social development than as a conceptual framework that unites the Filipino social consciousness.

In the historical context, the development of the Filipino nation was constantly hampered by various problems (natural disaster, poverty, insurgency, political instability, etc.) that greatly affected the nation's growth. The need to address these problems had a great impact on the development of sociology in the country. These problems started an era which emphasized a different perspective in sociological teaching and research, that of social planning as means of creating a better social order (Abad and Eviota 1982). The importance given to social planning and applied work by Filipino sociologists in the past years resulted in a very limited development of sociological theory in the country.

This paper seeks to explain the underdevelopment of sociological theory in the Philippines by looking at the interaction between Philippine society and the conditions set by modernity. Like other essays previously written on the development of sociology in the Philippines, it looks at the historical evolution of sociological consciousness in the country. However, this essay also tries to go beyond

the historical development of the discipline. It looks at the different social settings that shaped the Filipino sociological consciousness in the 20th century.

MODERNITY AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

The term *sociology* has two stems—the Latin *socius* (companion) and the Greek *logos* (study of) (Abercrombie et al. 1994). Thus, sociology literally means the study of the process of companionship. Taking this framework as a point of departure, this essay is a study on the companionship of modernity and sociological theory in the Philippines. It is a sociological study on the development of Philippine sociological consciousness, a sociology of sociological theory.

Sociological theory is not only shaped by the modern condition but also takes modernity as its subject matter. By shaping the development of sociological theory, modernity itself is also shaped by it. Borrowing from Habermas, it can be perceived that sociological theory and modernity are involved in a communicative action that makes their development basically parallel. It is a dialogue aimed towards a better understanding on the interaction between the world and how people make sense of it. And because the development of sociological theory and modernity largely relies on their interaction, the change of one would be directly proportional to the other. Therefore, the underdevelopment of sociological theory can be attributed to the limited growth of the modern condition in Philippine society. Likewise, the limited growth of the modern condition can also be due to the underdevelopment of sociological theory.

SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Just before the Philippines declared its independence from Spain, a course in "sociology" was already being offered at the University of Sto. Tomas (UST) in 1896 (Weightman 1975). However, because of the dominance of religious ideologies in the institution, the course only appears as a restatement of social philosophy that largely dealt with what a society should be rather than what it is. In his dissention against the claim of Weightman, Pertierra remarked that: "instead of resulting in the social science, this interest simply represented a new orientation in social philosophy without, however, challenging the traditional view of society as embedded in transcendental moral relationships" (1997, 5). The social sciences, particularly sociology, had not really established its roots in the country until the early period of the American colonial regime.

The first sociology course was taught at the University of the Philippines in 1911 under the American Protestant social reformers. It is, therefore, not too surprising that the early courses offered by these Protestant missionaries were on social ethics, social problems, and social pathology (Weightman 1975). Unfortunately, the courses could hardly be applied in the context of the local society that had largely remained primitive. Aside from the fact that the textbooks and reference works were Western in origin, the courses were deemed to be irrelevant to a pre-modern way of life that generally characterized Philippine society during that period, and perhaps, even today. The Philippines did not undergo any major social transformation like religious change, scientific

advancement, and massive urbanization that facilitated the development of sociological theory in the western countries during the early period of the 20th century. Thus, the American professors during that time must have appeared like prophets speaking of a foreign discipline to largely puzzled students who were having a hard time trying to relate their situation to the odd frameworks of a Western discipline. During this period, sociology generally dealt with what Philippine society would become (or how the West wanted the Philippines to be) rather than what Philippine society was and how this situation would determine its future.

It was only after the WWII that the contribution of Filipinos in sociology became notable. The 1950s witnessed the beginning of systematic, cumulative work, dating from the return of the first substantial group of foreign-trained Filipino sociologists (Hollnsteiner, cited in Abad and Eviota 1982). Unfortunately, even the arrival of new batches of Filipino sociologists did not result in the development of Filipino sociological theory.

The growing need for sociologists to teach in academic institutions did not provide the opportunity for them to undergo studies on Philippine sociological theory. They cite the university's emphasis on teaching rather on research as the reason behind this. The problem was more intensified since sociologists with doctorates were quickly drafted into administrative positions (Weightman 1975). Likewise, sociologists were able to look for more lucrative career opportunities outside the academe. There were only a few sociologists in the country and the demand for trained social scientists in the government and business sectors offer much better salaries and even more prestige (Weightman 1975).

The 1960s saw the establishment of more departments of sociology, research centers and institutes in different colleges and universities throughout the country (Abad and Eviota 1982, Lamug 1998). Like the Philippine society that appeared to be so promising (second only to Japan in terms of economic development in Asia), sociology also showed much potential during this period. According to Abad and Eviota (1982):

> The formation of research organizations underscores two features in the development of Philippine sociology during this decade: first, the availability, by the late 1960s, of a core staff of trained Filipino sociologists who could handle research projects; second, the retreat of many foreign sociologists from active involvement in the sociological community.

The 1960s may be considered the adolescent period of Philippine sociology. Although the increase of Filipino sociologists made it appear that it was ready to separate from its origin, the reality was that Philippine sociology during that time largely remained dependent on Western structures and methods, as it is until today.

The technocratic nation-building that guided the Philippine government in the 1970s also made a major influence on the practice of sociology in the country. The greater interest in applied social research, particularly in socioeconomic development has, in turn, de-emphasized research efforts in other subspecifications of sociology,

particularly in sociological theory (Abad and Eviota 1982).

The declaration of Martial Law in 1972 did not stop the practice of sociology in the country. In fact, after a short period of suspension of all scholarly publications, there was an increase in teaching, publication, and research during the martial law period (Makil and Hunt 1981). However, fear of adverse governmental reaction may have provoked self-censorship inhibiting critical statements from sociologists (Cariño, cited in Abad and Eviota 1982). According to Makil and Hunt (1981):

> The apparently neutral standing of Filipino sociologists is due to these following factors: a functionalist orientation, a heavy reliance on empirical data, a compatible value position, an escape valve in anti-Americanism, an identification with technocrats, and the opportunities offered by an expanding bureaucracy.

It was apparent that sociologists even benefited from the opportunities to work in the bureaucracy and in the different government projects that were implemented during the Martial Law period. This advantage restrained most sociologists from being involved in active criticism against the Marcos Administration. Furthermore, Sociology did not possess the needed emancipation in order for it to possibly criticize the social system. It was difficult for the sociologists to criticize the system that provided them with many opportunities. As a mere "tool" in social development, many sociologists did not have the liberty to freely criticize the system that employed them. On the other hand, those who were not under the system chose to remain in neutral grounds after they realized that most of their comrades were on the other side.

Moreover, there was no chance for a Filipino sociological theory to grow in a social setting that was generally characterized by false modernity. During this period, modernity was generally equated with infrastructure building and scientific advancement. The Marcos Administration was always highlighted by various infrastructure achievements (San Juanico Bridge, LRT, CCP, Folk Arts Theater, etc.). Modern advancement was largely interpreted in terms of these external monuments while its true essence lies in the human person. Human rights, freedom, and the opportunity for self-determination that started the Age of Modernity in the West were even suppressed in an unguided quest for national prosperity.

The 1980s witnessed the "coming of age" of Philippine sociology (David 1984, Pertierra 1997). It was a period when the indigenization of the discipline became more prominent. However, this indigenization was implied more on the effective application of sociology in the Philippine context rather than the development of a Filipino sociological theory. Likewise, new theories had put an end to the dominance of functionalist and positivist paradigms. Sociology moved towards participatory development theories as well as the methods developed in the course of doing participatory research (Bautista 1998).

In the political context, the EDSA Revolution served as the climax of the civil society's attempts to resolve the social problems that plagued the country. However, the effect of the EDSA Revolution was more than political; it brought a number of changes in the personal life of many Filipinos. It served as an inspiration that ushered in the birth of a new sense of freedom and nationalism.

Unlike the generally uncoordinated 1896 Revolution that was largely experienced only by the people in Central and Southern Luzon, the 1986 EDSA Revolution was an experience shared by most Filipinos. In one of the most important periods of the country's history, almost every Filipino was moved by a sense of patriotism as events were timely broadcasted on radio and television. Modernity through the advance mass communication technology played an important role during the EDSA Revolution. By going beyond the geographical boundary that separated Filipinos, modernity made the Filipinos one.

Unfortunately, the EDSA Revolution did not result in significant changes in the development of sociological theory in the Philippines. Just like in the 1950s when social planning was the emphasis, Philippine social science during this period stressed social development work as means of creating a better society. The popularity of community-based approaches in different areas like forestry and fisheries increased the demand for sociologists in applied work (Lamug 1998).

However, unlike in the 1960s and 1970s when the government solely orchestrated and implemented the various development projects in the country, the post-EDSA Revolution administrations started to involve the different sectors of society in social development.

The 1990s saw the flourishing of many nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) that were actively involved in social development. Participatory and people-centered paradigms and approaches became the new trend in social development. People empowerment and resource sustainability became the new parameters in evaluating development programs.

During this decade, a movement towards multidisciplinarity and pluralism was also evident (Bautista 1998). Sociologists crossed intellectual disciplines in explaining different social realities. In demonstrating the sociologists' propensity for multidisciplinary work, Bautista said that, "sociologists venture into the study of the most diverse phenomena, focusing on various aspects including the economic, political and social psychological" (1998, 71).

Nevertheless, the 1990s did not reflect any monumental change in the development of sociological theory in the Philippines. Sociological practice remains as a tool in social development, and modernity is still far from being a reality in the Philippine society.

PHILIPPINE SOCIETY AND MODERNITY

While many things have been said about modernity and globalization in the Philippine context, Philippine society has largely remained parochial. Until 1990, 51.5 percent of Filipinos still lived in the rural areas. Moreover, rural consciousness

still dominates urban dwellers that are mostly recent migrants from the village. Although there are efforts to impose modern standards in the society, these failed to create any significant effect at the individual level. This lack of rootedness made any attempt to modernize the Philippine society ungrounded and futile.

One important feature of modernity is the crucial role of the middle class in providing society not only with its professional skills but also for instilling the value of paid work and the rewards of achievement (Pertierra 1997). Middle class culture brought the value of efficiency in functional interaction. Since most of the middle class live in an urban society, their social activities largely consist of inter-action with strangers that enable them to learn to relate with people in terms of their functions in society.

However, since majority of the Filipinos are still at the poverty level, people usually depend on relatives and other networks to ensure a source of support in times of difficulty. On the other hand, only a few of the elites control the economic and political system. This results in a personalistic nature of interaction in Philippine society. Personal networks rather than professional dealings often rule social interaction, particularly in the government and the business sector. Thus, impersonal structures and objective norms which typify modern society are weakly developed in the Philippines and strongly resisted by Filipinos (Pertierra 1997).

Urban Philippine society is a transplant of the village to the city. A personal orientation to the world is still the most common way of interacting with subjects whose identities are similarly personalized (Pertierra 1997). Modern structures which operate on objective norms to facilitate interactions cannot work in a social setting that is largely characterized by premodern consciousness.

Even modern economic organization and the government bureaucracy are still ruled by a personal and subjective manner of interaction. Such notions as *palakasan, utang na loob*, and *pakikisama* still dominate the social system of the Philippines. One recent political issue that exemplifies this subjective manner of interaction was the method in choosing the Cabinet officials of the Estrada Administration. Disregarding policies on qualification criteria, President Estrada allegedly put his friends and political supporters as Cabinet officials in order to repay his personal indebtedness (*utang na loob*) to them.

Another aspect that is typical in contemporary Philippine society is the practical role of religion in shaping the collective consciousness of society. Unlike in the West where it is mainly an aspect of personal belief, religion in the Philippines possesses an inter-subjective validity (Pertierra 1997). In Western societies, religion has retreated from being the sole source of Truth as it was in the Middle Ages, to the private sphere under the modern condition. However, in a society

where the line that separates the private and public life remains blurred, religion still crosses the boundary and plays an active role in the public domain particularly in politics. During elections, political candidates take great care to cultivate relation with the appropriate religious blocs, including the *Iglesia Ni Kristo*, charismatic groups, and specially the Catholic hierarchy (Pertierra 1997).

Philippine urban societies manifest the inability of Filipinos to conform to the modern condition and the failure of modern planners to accommodate the needs of the people. The inefficiency of the system that is exemplified by traffic congestion, poor waste management, and many other problems reflects the society's inadequacy in setting modern standards in a largely unprepared premodern consciousness.

In the West, modernity started in the individual. Modernity was part of Western cultural evolution, a product of natural interaction between the individual and the society. The Period of Enlightenment started when people recognized their capacity to determine their own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature (Giddens 1999). However, the modern condition in the Philippines and in other developing countries started in the society. Modernity is something that is imposed and forcibly introduced. Modern condition alters the social setting that forced people to conform to their environment. Instead of controlling modernity for its advantage, people became mere puppets in the modern spectacle. Modern condition creates much pressure that leads to the alienation of the person to the society. People could no longer relate to their environment that is increasingly becoming even more unfamiliar.

CONCLUSION

Modernity preceded sociological theory. A fully developed sociological theory is only possible in a fully developed modern society. The primary reason behind the underdevelopment of sociological theory in the Philippines is largely due to the lack of a concrete setting that would serve as a stable grounding for any venture in sociological theory.

There is a need to rebuild the companionship of modernity and sociological theory. Sociological theory must emancipate itself from the existing social setting that limits its growth. It should take a big leap by taking an intelligent speculation of the future. Sociologists should take from what little foundation that the present society could provide and anticipate a distinct Filipino sociological theory, a sociological theory that would light our way out of the dark trappings of modernity that clouded Philippine society.

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