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This article addresses the question whether the way modern westerners look at society has any relevance for Filipinos. Since the Enlightenment, a sociological view of social life has gradually grown to dominate the western mind, but does this conceptualization fit Filipino culture? Does it provide abstractions that make sense in the Filipino construction of social life? The western optical illusion of a scientific—thus "objective," and normative—perspective not only imposes specific cultural products—democracy, basic human rights—on others, but also gravely distorts the picture of social life as seen by the native participants.[1]

It is the constructive logic of this native picture that will first be investigated. This logic appears to be anchored in private, personally known, and thus morally obliging, hierarchical relationships. This moralistic vision is also applied to the anonymous, public world, where it seems to have little regulatory power. Yet, the thought that the wellspring of its good order is in individual ethical behavior, is pervasive. These ideas are subsequently contrasted with an abstract, sociological understanding that is traced to its historical roots in modern western culture. The scientific approach severely disagrees with Filipino culture. This notwithstanding, the twentieth century also witnessed the rise of the Philippine Left. Its current wane cannot just be explained by cultural reasons, although they give reason for its persistent marginality. The decline seems to be best related to the fading of the conviction that society is constructable. The postmodern period of cultural and economic globalization seems to stimulate moral particularism and makes a moralistic approach to social life timely again. This development, in its turn, presents an important obstacle to emancipation, awareness creation, and social engineering.

The Known, Personal World

For the Filipino, the family stands at the heart of social life. It focuses on the mother who, because of her self-sacrifice and life-giving qualities, often assumes cultic proportions: She should be honored above all else in life. She is also the person who can be eminently trusted, who is close and intimate. Because of all this, she impresses herself deeply on the emotional life of her children, and tends to become and remain the primary superego representative. Conscience is consciousness of her. She is the moral center of the home that, in itself, should be the exemplary center of social life.

As recipients of her beneficence, the children are placed under a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid and that must always be acknowledged. This can be done by respecting the mother, by being obedient and tractable, by caring for the good order of the family and its reputation in the community. These values are emphasized over and over again, so becoming part of a basic view of social life.

Parents and children are embedded in the family, they are supposed to constitute a solidary group, and conflicts that occur should be made up and solved. They are certainly not to be brought out in the open, because discord in the inner circle of life is distasteful and damaging to good name. So, while sometimes tensions may simmer on for a long time, they should be patched up for the sake of maintaining a picture of harmony. People should be willing to give in a little, to acquiesce and accept each other, because all derive their primary identity from this same group that should function as their basis and protective umbrella in life.

One of the mechanisms to maintain the good order of the family is its hierarchical organization, expressing respect for status and seniority. There is more to this. We have noted the heavy symbolic load carried by the mother; she exemplifies goodness, the core of morality, and so epitomizes the moral hierarchy. The more distant—often authoritarian—father represents another aspect, namely, the reputation of the family. As its head he is ultimately responsible for its inner order that is the crucial mark for his and the family's prestige which he stands for in the community, in the world outside the home.

The principle of hierarchy is complex; it has many facets. The primary would be relative inequality, based, if on nothing else, on age. Another facet is moral, and flows from goodness received. A

third highlights order and authority. Hierarchy, as a means to achieve concord, also implies consciousness of position vis-a-vis others. Such relationships oblige, first of all to show kindness and respect, plain good manners, and may oblige deeper still because of goodness, protection, or favor received. It is these, normally unequal, obligations that serve as the glue of the known world; they are personally felt. Altogether, the hierarchical organization of the inner circle of life is an ethical arrangement, making hierarchy and inequality moral in themselves.

As a result, respect for relative position is more than good manners; it is moral behavior. The same goes for consciousness of obligations. It should be internalized, become part of one's *loob*. Not to reciprocate, not to know gratitude is the social sin par excellence, destructive of reputation and self. It is thought that all this needs to be learned, that people need to be made aware of correct, moral behavior which they further express in language *(mamupô)* and gesture *(magmano)*. Moral behavior is consciousness of others, and locates conscience in relationships, in the fulfillment of role and obligations.

The order of the private world that is based on hierarchy, moral inequality, obligation, embeddedness in group, and shared origin as an identity marker, conceptually fuses ethics with wisdom, or awareness, and aesthetics. People who are aware, are conscious of others, will know how to behave in a pleasing, orderly, and thus moral manner. This fusion, which is expressed in the key notions of *bait*, *husay*, and *inam*, results in true order (as opposed to false, or dissonant), and is the yard-stick to measure other areas of life; it is the only moral model available.

Wider Social Environment

It would be wonderful if the area surrounding the home would be orderly, in concord, or peaceful *(payapa)*, but nobody expects it to be so. Its hierarchical arrangement is far less stable and is not anchored in the depth of ethics the mother exemplifies. Symbolically, it is male territory; it is about power and prestige, the arena of local politics and economic opportunity. In brief, it is a competitive realm in which status needs to be validated, demonstrated, and fought for. Conflicts that arise are dangerous and confrontational, there being little inclination to compromise, and more to vindictiveness.

The basic moral rules are the same: conscience is located in relationships; not fulfilling obligations, not showing gratitude cause the discomfort of shame. Disrespectful behavior is a breach of elementary order, yet must be expected where the prize of competition is prestige. In this area, a person can expand his networks by ingratiating others, so becoming a patron, or by, conversely, seeking patronage. Altogether, it remains an intensely personal, relational world, the backbone of which is hierarchy, but where positions and the obligations they entail fluctuate.

The "Anonymous," "Public" World

The ideally stable area of life—so important to identity and acceptance—is surrounded by a more competitive zone peopled by known persons. Both are grounded in personal experience. They shade off into a sphere that is not personally known, where one is reduced to anonymity, where bonds and obligations are tenuous. It is the area of government, of business and politics, where individuals go their way in pursuit of their personal interest, each caring for himself (kanya-kanya). Often it appears as an area in disarray, of violence, of competition for power and economic advantage, of exploitation and corruption. This, at least, is the picture painted by the newspaper editors and columnists who appear to be highly critical of the "public" world and suspicious—often even cynical—of its political processes. Interestingly, this is also the image that appears in Philippine social science texts used in the first year of high school; presidents have good intentions, but invariably fail to bring order to the realm; corruption, fraudulence, and irregularities seem to be "naturally" at home in that vast outer space.

Seen from the vantage point of family-based ethics, this vast space appears to be in moral decay, that is to say, an area where individuals do not know their place and that is, as a result, in disorder. Perhaps this can only be expected of a place that is impersonal and anonymous. How can people orient themselves there and know their place? The remedy that is invariably proposed to bring order to public space seems to be to teach people their duties and obligations, while they should consider public space as private, as a common good, the good order of which depends on individual ethical behavior. People should regard the government as a benevolent patron who must be respected; because of its beneficence, people should pay taxes, honor the law, and salute the flag. This is what Quezon's Code

of Ethics is about, and why the preamble of the constitution and the good intentions of government, plus the rights and obligations of the Filipino citizen, must be studied in school. And, if the obdurate outer world tends to remain in disarray, still, values should be taught—and the department concerned produces a relentless flow of values education courses, while a Moral Recovery Program has been proposed to and in the Senate.[2] Apparently, the recovery of the country depends on the redemption of its citizens, and the burden of arranging it is conveniently placed on the individual and his knowledge of the right ways. In this thinking it appears that, if things do not function the way they should, the root of the problem must be sought in the moral decay of the individuals who, together, compose society. Obviously they are insufficiently aware of place and duty, and the morality, the values that should guide them. Because they are "without knowledge" *(walang pinag-aralan)* about the proper ways, they should be taught, receive moral guidance, then, enlightened and "wise," they cannot escape from a moral way of life, so making society a "good, true, and beautiful" place.

Thus, many people personally feel that they address the problems of society by emphasizing individual morality. They are aware of duty and responsibility, at least, to the people who matter, their relatives and friends. In their personal picture of social life, the good order of their family is the foundation stone of desirable social life, while the outer world has always been looked upon with suspicion. In the Philippines this latter aspect has been aggravated by the perennial low legitimacy, even illegitimacy, of government. The successive colonial masters who imposed their wills with impunity may have defined the size and shape of the country, but were not recognized as the proper, the true government. The heirs of these aliens, the mestizo oligarchy, had little to gain from nationalism, popular mobilization, or the creation of a vibrant public sphere of participating citizens. They rather regarded—and exploited—the "common good" as their private property, their privilege and birth-right.

In that view the outer world appears as the private space of others, or as undomesticated territory where one tries to stake one's claims in competition with others. It is the area of the state that tries to impose its rules, but its laws normally fail to become the values, the culture of public space. As in the family, its authority is not abstractly located in impersonal regulations, but concretely, in persons who may have their own ideas about legal expediency and who are often thought to exploit their position for personal advantage.

Summary

The way Filipinos view the social world is moralistic. This comes "naturally" in a hierarchicizing environment that builds on familial arrangements in which people should behave according to their place as defined by sex, seniority and status. There, order is founded precisely on the premise of moral inequality and the consciousness of reciprocal obligations to known people. And indeed, under such circumstances that arrangement is best served by the "ethics of place" that specify that everybody should fulfill his obligations to the members of his group from which, in his turn, he derives identity, reputation, security, and the satisfaction of acceptance.

The ethics of place belong to a morally particularistic conception of social life in which individuals are perceived as statuses. Also people themselves tend to identify with their position and the prestige attributed accordingly. Often, they develop a touchiness in matters felt to relate to honor and reputation. Consequently, they are careful in voicing opinion while avoiding controversy. They experience their social life in a very direct manner, a very ego-centered way. They have difficulty in distancing themselves from their felt circumstances. Logically then, direct, concrete means of social control acquire extraordinary importance; it is the eyes and opinions of others that matter, the dread of gossip, revenge, or violence, and respect for hierarchy.

While these are effective means to keep people in place and the known world in order, they lose their relevance in the "anonymous," "public" realm that appears to be run by political and economic expediency, and the privilege of the powerful. Seen from the vantage point of private ethics, it seems an area of moral decay, a place where people have lost their moral guidelines. From a sociological perspective, this public space is morally neutral. There, relationships are impersonal, monetary, opportunistic, and business-like; such bonds are not anchored in personal self-experience, but in contractual and immediate reciprocity.

Sociology

The moralistic approach to social life appears to offer interesting contrasts with the sociological. The first sees the group-embedded individual as the well-spring of good—or nondesirable—social order.

By being aware of relative position, obligation, and honor he creates order, and so it becomes his responsibility. The latter does not start from individual experience, but rather sees it conditioned by abstract, supraindividual social forces that shape social life; it sees people as the products of their time and social place. While the moralistic approach is subjective—and often intuitive—the sociological attempts to be "objective," value free, and theoretical.

Historically, sociology is a product of the Enlightenment. Its premise of human moral equality logically entails ideas such as the rule of law and the emancipation of the underdog. Society can be changed for the better; it becomes constructable. By abolishing royal absolutism, and the prerogatives of nobility and church, a disenchanted, secular society that centers on the citizen comes into being. Politically this is translated in the ideas of responsible citizenship, public affairs *(res publica)*, participatory democracy, and programmatic approaches to arrange society and the political economy. Altogether this stimulated systematic, scientific thinking about social life; sociology became a necessity.

As a product of a particular social and intellectual history, the social sciences gradually grew to become part of European culture, part of a way of viewing and understanding life juxtaposed with the pre-existing, older, moralistic-hierarchical perspective that pertained to the private realm of the family. In public affairs, however, the premises of the Enlightenment applied and informed the political process, giving rise to the relentless demand for emancipation, and so, what began as the freeing of the citizen from the dynasty, continued in the emancipation of slaves, of labor, of women, and so forth, and, ultimately, in the emancipation of the individual from the state, such as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is of interest to note that the European view corresponds on many counts with the Filipino definition of disorder, and thus of moral decay. Equal people means unrelated people who each go their way. They have left the safety and embeddedness of their obliging and identity-affirming group, and so are beyond moral control. Equality means impersonality and anonymity. It is the chaos presided over by the state, and reined in by the rules of political and economic processes, by power and business. In Filipino culture, with its anchor in the family, the world of equality is not "good, true, and beautiful." It is not a desirable place.

The Rise and Wane of Modern, Progressive Thinking

This is not to say that Filipinos have not been thinking about equality or have not been desirous of emancipation. The nineteenth century Reform and Propaganda movements were all about these. Yet, and that is obvious from Rizal, it was about the emancipation of the educated class from an abusive and racist colonial overlord, and shied away from ideas about social reconstruction, or the emancipation of the masses. Neither were such ideas envisaged by the lower middle class leader Andres Bonifacio; his was the struggle for freedom from colonial oppression, not for social revolution.

Ideas about the plight of the underdog come later, and find an early expression in Lope K. Santos's *Banaag at Sikat* (1906). Yet, the view that society is constructable and that emancipation is a possibility only emerges in the 1910s when communist and socialist thinking spreads to Southeast Asia and gains a foothold in the minds of certain labor leaders and intellectuals. From that time on, we witness the founding of progressive ideology-oriented parties and labor movements that mature in the electoral success of the Democratic Alliance (1946), and its tragic aftermath, pitting a violent state against peasants.

Such political reverses and the counter-revolutionary oppression by the establishment seem to stimulate the growth of a modernist social imagination, especially at the University of the Philippines in the 1960s and early 1970s. Marcos's moral callousness and martial law suppression subsequently drive up the development of antihegemonic thinking and the popularity of the political Left to unprecedented heights.

The movement for emancipation also takes hold of the imagination of various women's groups, urban labor, social activists, and theology of liberation-inspired clergy and religious. Yet, all these remain marginal to the political process, and in spite of all the deceptions and disappointments of the Aquino period, it seems as if the exile of Marcos inaugurates the beginning of the decline of the organized Left that, now in the early 1990s, appears in disarray (*Kasarinlan* 8/1 and 2 (1992)). It seems as if the modern, progressive ideas about social reconstruction have run their course.

I do not want to argue that this is the case because of the incompatibility of an abstract sociological view and all that it entails with a mainstream private moralistic view of social life, although this

seems to explain the persistent marginality of progressive thinking. Most people, even the well-educated, simply do not understand what it is all about. They cannot view society in theoretical or ideological perpectives. They view the disorder the country is in as a moral problem that is probably inherent in modern mass society. Consequently, to them, the moral solution seems attractive; it draws many people. In protest to the unsatisfactoriness of modern life, the Iglesia ni Cristo and all sorts of sects are flourishing, a clear religious identity being experienced as a moral stance in a decadent world that seems to be devoid of moral moorings. Others organize in righteous civic clubs that heavily emphasize their codes of ethics, even advertising them on billboards along the roads. And, just as elements in the institutional Roman Catholic Church organize marriage revival weekends and short, intensive confrontations with the faith, official quarters stress the importance of values education and moral recovery.

The ideas of social constructability seem to live on in the lively NGO scene where social activists strive to develop "awareness" of the underprivileged segments of society in attempts to "empower" them. They are also alive among those who advocate demilitarization, are active for educational or agricultural reform, propagate debt repudiation, develop Filipino feminism, or fight ecological destruction. Where government is widely seen as failing in its tasks, it is encouraging to note so many serious activists. Their focus appears to be with specific action, remedying symptoms of a problematic society. It is small scale construction that is increasingly tenuously related to the grand visions of ideology, theory, or social utopias.

This can probably only be expected in this postmodern—postnational and postcitizenship—period when the optimism of modernity and progress is fading. The global mass society, run by an international, capitalist economy, leaves little room for grand designs of social restructuring, and by its own logic seems to stimulate the moral particularism that is inherent in a moralistic vision of social life.[3] It is a time of sectarianism, often of ethnic identification, of righteous societies, of vigilantes, and, above all, of the family. As a result, it may be argued that a moralistic approach seemingly befits the experience of contemporary society, that it is identity-affirming, and that it is certainly not on its way out. Consequently, a scientific view of social processes will remain restricted to academia and will find little response in society; it is not part of its culture.

Consequences

The nonsociological, moralistic vision may have many interesting consequences in how people judge things. It may, for instance, throw up formidable barriers to digging for historical roots and being serious about the quest for national identity; people will feel more comfortable with misguiding mythology. It will definitely hinder the evolution of feminism and feminist theory. After all, the sexes are biologically given, they are "natural" and arguments about the cultural conditioning of gender will fall on deaf ears. The experience of urban anonymity may even strengthen gender identity feelings, especially among the frustrated masculinity. Oligarchy, traditional politicians, monopolies, privileges, and private profiteering are all potentially ensconced in a moral vision that is more at home with hierarchy than with equality. Besides, the moral vision is personal, centering on individual ethics, and does not enable one to see social and "public" things very clearly; it provides an ideal mental fog to keep social reality at bay. Problems become personal, not general, and thus the many poor people who squat, who become prostitutes, who steal, become the problem—not poverty and its structural, systemic causes.

Notes

1. This short note contains in essence a conclusion of a larger work that is still in progress—parts of it already published, others in press, or submitted for publication. It is short because it is a theory-oriented interpretation that relies heavily on the contrast and disagreement between two ways of viewing social life, namely, an abstract sociological and an individual-centered ethical vision. The first time I consciously hit upon this contrast was when reading Mitsuo Nakamura's *The crescent arises over the banyan tree; a study of the Muhammadiyah movement in a Central Javanese town* (1983, 176–77); I found it a useful device and applied it to my interpretation of the relationship between *Individual and society in Java* (1989, 147–54).

In theorizing the analytical distinction, such as I have attempted here, I also need to present descriptive statements as illustrations; for these I am indebted to almost everybody who has contributed to our knowledge about lowland Christian Filipino culture. The view I offer evolved over the ten years of intermittent anthropological research about the culture of the educated, urban middle stratum of Tagalog-Filipino society, and the comparison thereof with my Thai and Javanese findings. So, while I could add a lengthy footnote to almost every sentence, I think I had better refer to A. Timothy Church's very useful, commented compilation of interpretation, *Filipino*

personality: A review of research and writings (1986) and the relevant chapters of my *Inside Southeast Asia: Thai, Javanese and Filipino interpretations of everyday life* (1992).

I am indebted to Raul Pertierra for problematizing the cultural historical origin of sociology, and its relevance for the analysis of non-European societies. We discussed these matters in depth during the year he tutored at the Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam on "Occidentalism, the social sciences and the study of Asia" (1990–91); his recent contribution to *Pilipinas* 1992 is not available to me at this time of writing. In those days, Raul also drew my attention to the perennial legitimacy deficit—and thus also the weakness of nationalism-from-the-center—of Philippine governments. A finely drawn historical background to this can be found in the essay in Ruby R. Paredes (ed), *Philippine colonial democracy* (1988).

For commenting on an earlier draft of this piece, I would like to thank Han ten Brummelhuis, Gerold Moltzer, Otto van den Muijzenberg, and Irene Stengs, all connected with the University of Amsterdam; also the, to me anonymous, editorial readers of *Philippine Studies*.

2. *Building a People, Building a Nation. A Moral Recovery Program.* A report submitted by Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani to the Committee on Education, Arts and Culture and the Committee on Social Justice, Welfare and Development, 9 May 1988.

3. This is also expressed in West European and North American—let alone East European—societies where the welfare state is in retreat and where the appeal to "family values" and the individual-based call for a "caring," solidary society have grown louder in pace with growing budgetary deficits and unemployment.