

## **NATION, SELF and CITIZENSHIP: An Invitation to Philippine Sociology**

*Randolf S. David*

*Published by the Department of Sociology,  
University of the Philippines, Diliman  
2002, xiii, 368 pp. ISBN 971-8953-01-9*

*Raul Pertierra*

This is a collection of short essays written by Randy David, one of the Philippines' foremost sociologists. David is also one of its few serious newspaper writers. This is a collection of his articles that have appeared over the last seven years in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. They are far-ranging, covering issues such as martial law, child sexuality, poverty and Asian values. They also include reflective pieces on his family and early memories as well as theoretical reflections on globalization, postmodernity and the mass media. David brings his incisive analysis on these topics using mostly ordinary language rather than the abstract discourse of academics.

This diverse collection of articles is divided into sections on nationalism, identity and citizenship. Each section is introduced by his former students, now his colleagues in the Department of Sociology at U.P. The latter set of essays is more conventionally academic and attempts to theoretically contextualize the areas under consideration. They also try to bring together the scattered musings of David.

As a teacher of sociology, I am always torn between providing students with accessible articles on contemporary issues and introducing them into the specialist language of social science. The former allows students to appreciate a sociological approach to social issues, while the latter provides them with a more distanced perspective that science (albeit social) requires. One's approach to this pedagogical problem depends both on the selectivity of students entering university and the importance given to everyday knowledge as an approach to social science.

Filipino university students approach sociology with three main difficulties. First, they are much younger than their foreign counterparts and have not had sufficient scholarly formation, including the more

specialized training found in overseas curricula. Second, they have to use a foreign language (English) which, despite its general familiarity, is insufficiently developed for abstract reflection. Third, they have grown up in a society with very few developed sociological concepts. This last refers to the lack of a secular consciousness and awareness of society as a system or structure of consensual norms. Society is presented as a natural and moral entity rather than a political and legal artifact. Difference and dissent are difficult to regulate if they are seen as emerging out of a pre-given world whose main contours are unquestionable. Since sociology is an empirical discipline, its conclusions depend on verifiable data that, in the Philippines, are often unavailable.

Filipinos also have certain advantages in learning sociology. Their concepts of society and the individual, however limited, are often based on direct experience rather than mediated through ideologized institutions such as the family, schooling and the state. They hold an irreverent attitude toward the verities of public life, making its questioning much easier than in western societies with 'politically correct' views on most things. Filipinos can also cope much better than most westerners with the inevitable contradictions and perplexities of modern life without the temptation to grossly simplify them. There may be many superstitious and ignorant Filipinos but very few genuine fanatics. Almost anything can be an object of fun and mockery. In an often and increasingly incomprehensible world, mirth is the only reasonable response.

Under these conditions, how appropriate is a collection of short newspaper articles as an introduction to a serious academic discipline such as sociology? Like most things, it depends on the teacher using it. In the hands of an experienced teacher, who is able to draw out more detailed arguments from the undeveloped and unverified points suggested by David, this book can be a very useful way of showing the relevance of the discipline to unspecialized students. It may in fact stimulate them to pursue these questions more systematically in advanced courses. But in the hands of a poorly prepared teacher, eager to appear informed on a wide range of topics, its effects may be counterproductive. It can give rise to an impression that sociology consists of short, incisive and suggestive sketches, bricolage, rather than serious empirical and theoretical investigations of social life.

But David's book may find supporters among postmodern theorists who claim that social life consists of everyday knowledge and that claims of scientificity for the discipline are dangerous and delusional. In this sense,

short prose without jargon based on common-sense understanding is the best we can aim at. In fact, David's book is an excellent example for this argument, much better than its Gallic counterparts whose opacity exceeds most positivist texts. David's book is a good illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of Philippine sociology. It is down-to-earth, accessible and unpretentious, nay, even inspirational and literary. But it is also impressionistic and episodic, like the musings of a novella rather than a systematically argued treatise. The scientific study of Philippine society assumes the existence of a body of ascertained facts often presently unavailable. Reliable census data, trustworthy institutional sources, relatively effective bureaucratic structures and scientifically trained investigators are still fairly rare. Under these conditions, Philippine sociology remains, at best, a science of the future, assuming, that is, that the country has a future.

---

Date Received: April 30, 2004

Dr. Raul Pertierra is a Professorial Lecturer at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman.