

A Role for the Social Sciences

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It has been bruited about more frequently that perhaps the intellectual maturity of Filipino social scientists has reached a point where we are not as beholden to the knowledge and theorizing done outside the country, but that more Filipino social scientists are generating knowledge emphasizing indigenous theorizing, studying and reflecting on Philippine issues from a perspective that is more home-grown rather than dominated by theoretical constructs borrowed from non-Filipino academics. Or that the research and writing done by Filipino social scientists is more focused on utilizing our own ways of understanding ourselves that speaks more clearly and more understandably to what Filipinos themselves also find more enlightening.

There is a clearer acknowledgment as well of what epistemic community one is answerable to. The notion of an epistemic community has arisen because ultimately it is to other practitioners that one is accountable to, the primary community of academics or intellectuals that one is held answerable to for one's knowledge claims. Epistemic community because not only is one accountable for the knowledge claims but also for the reasons and justifications one argues for in one's contentions. "Epistemic" because the intellectual production are presumed to be for the discovery or articulation of what can be considered as knowledge, or social facts. The immediate consequence is that these stipulated social facts inhabit one's social universe, one's view of the social realm, and have implications as well for how one will conceive and design social and cultural institutions.

Institutions, as embodiments of practices and traditions, are also influenced by collective decisions and critical interventions by government, social movements, political groupings and influential leaders.

The epistemic communities become the loci for exchange, dialogue and the generation of discourses that carry the on-going debates and contestations so that not only the generation of better and more skillful argumentation and constructions is undertaken, but also and more importantly, the generation of thinking that builds on the achievements of the epistemic community's exemplars such that indeed knowledge and ideation is advanced. The ideas and theories generated by epistemic communities are cultural achievements. They also stand as part of the intellectual landscape, the content of which are utilized by thinking individuals when it comes to making sense of the social reality they confront. The social explanations that persons use for the behavior and phenomena they experience as members of society, have been constructed and conceived by social scientists and other thinkers. The cogitation and innovation that have produced these social explanations are as much a part of the social universe as the material and natural world are. In fact, the meanings attached to the material and natural world are more important and have been the results of the choices, perspectives, creative responses of thinkers, within or without the hallowed walls of academe.

The investigations, analyses, insights and conclusions of social studies, or the reflections on social phenomena by intellectuals and academics thus contribute to how we view ourselves and our social life, the many issues and challenges that confront us. Social scientists are crucial for a nation's definition of itself. Whether or not social scientists are able to fully depict or articulate the significant and meaningful dimensions of social phenomena has a bearing on how a people can also understand itself better, and perhaps consequently, also choose and define what its future trajectory will be, as a collectivity. Social scientists are important for better-considered and more reasoned collective choices.

Social scientists as public intellectuals not only describe the social situation and the ways of understanding present phenomena. Ideally they must also be able to proffer visions of and alternative scenarios for the future, especially the options available to society and how these can be actualized.

An important part of the social sciences is its methodologies and procedures. If the constructions of social scientists are to be understandable, acceptable and justified, the methodologies and procedures used must be credible to others, especially those in the epistemic communities to which these results are offered as contributions to the stock of knowledge we draw upon. When a survey outfit for example says that the president only has this level of public trust and the deputy presidential spokesperson belittles the survey results because "there is really no way of knowing how the nation feels about its president", this speaks of a level of intellectual incompetence that is truly disgraceful for a nation, even as the president herself knows what sampling is all about. There is perhaps the greater problem of denial, not being able to accept the truth. But social scientists do ask what are the epistemological grounds for knowledge claims, especially when either the claims are controversial, are new, or have profound implications. We want to have a level of certainty that whatever implications or consequences we may draw from social investigation have fairly robust bases.

In Philippines social sciences we usually talk about quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the post-modern turn brings in the interpretative mode, recognizing as well the hermeneutics of discourses, i.e., that pay attention to the words themselves, what words are used, even what language and discourses are employed. These already have significance, are already saying something, already have meanings. Notions like "pook" in Filipino, "pino-pook" in giving contexts and significations, and providing space as well for notions like the 'life-world' of a culture, or a community. There are many occasions when the quantitative mode is primordial because the results are verifiable in terms of counting noses, so to speak, and because this mode