

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE OF CRISIS AND THE CRISIS OF PHILIPPINE SOCIAL SCIENCE

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The period we are presently going through in our country is what social scientists commonly refer to as a period of transition. Such a period is normally characterized by break-down at different levels: at the level of social institutions, at the level of social relationships, and at the level of personal values.

Institutions begin to break down when they lose their legitimacy and no longer command the automatic compliance of people. We can think of any number of institutions whose legitimacy has been severely eroded: courts of law, law enforcement agencies, the military, so-called democratic processes, the financial system, the government bureaucracy, the entire apparatus of the State itself. People now question their rationale in the face of their apparent ineffectiveness and uselessness. Yet they are the same institutions which in the past elicited their almost instinctive conformity. What has changed, however, are the circumstances within which they are at work.

As people go about adjusting to the changed circumstances, the old ties that bind them to their fellow human beings are also being eroded. People do not always immediately realize this even as they themselves and those close to them are being transformed in the process. Families, for example, may be fragmented while their members continue to maintain an illusion of their wholeness. Traditional relationships, such as the feudal ties of loyalty and subservience, may lose their material basis. And entire communities may disintegrate to give rise to new and different social relationships.

It is quite amazing to see how people actually change in the process of adjusting to new circumstances. They are at first mostly unconscious of the entire process. Even in a time of rapid change, the immediate need is to survive, rather than to reflect on the meaning of what is happening. It is when they discover the ineffectiveness of their own survival strategies

that they actually feel the need to try to make sense of the events taking place around them. This is when they begin to be conscious of the crisis. A crisis therefore, in its sociological sense, connotes a perception of the existence of a real threat to the values that one holds. This perception may be vague or it may be clear. Ordinarily, people in everyday life tend to have only a vague sense that the things they value can no longer be pursued as before.

It is in this sense that a period of crisis is a time of confusion. People search for explanations for those large events that are transforming their lives and which they perceive to lie effectively outside their control. They demand perspectives and frameworks within which they can locate events as they unfold and in terms of which they can define their meanings. People ask how we got here. But most importantly they demand to know where we are going from here. Instinctively, they turn to their political leaders for illumination. But their own leaders are perceived to be part of the problem, and the political institutions are among those whose legitimacy has been placed under severe doubt. They turn to the media, but the media too have not escaped the crisis of credibility that is knocking down almost every rampart of the old social order. They look up to the Church, but the Church has not spoken with one voice. Torn between the agenda of the rebels and the inertia of the politicians, it has had to wear a double face and speak in equivocal and abstract terms, as it attempts to minister to the oppressed while seeking to remain on good terms with the oppressors.

Under such circumstances, in other societies, the people turn to intellectuals to make sense of the drift of the times and to allay what C. Wright Mills once termed "the vague uneasiness" that grips them. Social scientists, social analysts, or social critics constitute a large segment of this intellectual community. The question we must ask is whether the social



science community in the Philippines is intellectually and culturally equipped to respond to such urgent needs. Our own feeling is that there are a number of factors which prevent the Philippine social science community from being able to meaningfully relate itself to these emergent concerns of a society in crisis.

The first consideration is that in normal times, social scientists in particular are enlisted by various Establishment agencies to explain how society works, what the people are thinking, why they behave the way they do, and how this behavior may be managed and aligned with the dominant interests in society. These functions are sometimes defined under the auspices of a so-called "developmental social science", which is essentially nothing more than social analysis in the service of the *status quo*. From the perspective of this kind of social science, all problems are, in the final analysis, due to the recalcitrance of the people or their presumed inability to appreciate, understand and identify with the goals and intentions of the rulers, their experts and advisers. Within the parameters of this role, the social scientist is not expected to question the objectives or purposes of programs, or the purposes for which the research findings are ultimately to be used. The social scientist is expected to have no opinion other than what the data themselves suggest. He/she is supposed to be "value-free", an injunction that is erroneously understood as political neutrality and moral indifference.

The second consideration is what others have called the alienation of the intellectual in general, or of the social

scientist in particular, from the general masses. This is an alienation that springs primarily from the failure of social analysts to articulate their ideas in the language of the masses. In all of Asia, perhaps, Filipino intellectuals stand out, on this point at least, as the most alienated from the general public. They are very much the creatures of colonial scholarship, thinking, writing, speaking and perhaps even dreaming in the language of a foreign culture. It is also very often the case that their intellectual products are mainly destined for the export market, mostly as the raw materials from which the metropolitan scholars abroad then weave their dissertations, books, journal essays, and conference papers. They seek to excuse their failure or refusal to write in the language of the masses by claiming that the foreign language they use is better suited for the kind of complex meanings they want to convey.

To be sure there may be more than a grain of truth in this assertion, but how can one develop a language that is adequate for analytical thoughts if one does not consciously strive to develop that language? Languages do not exist in isolation from intellectual life. If, from the point of view of intellectuals, existing Philippine languages are inadequate for their purposes, this can only be a testimony to their own irrelevance as intellectuals to the life of that society, rather than proof of the failure of any language.

Unless Filipino social scientists as a community consciously confront these conditions and collectively try to overcome them, it would be difficult for them to intervene effectively in this critical moment of their people's history.