

An Alternative Look at History

TRANSNATIONALIZATION, THE STATE, AND THE PEOPLE:
The Philippine Case. Working Papers of the United Nations University Asian
Perspective Project (Southeast Asia). Third World Studies Center.
University of the Philippines. 1985.

When we attempt to answer the question "What is History?" our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question what view we take of the society in which we live.

E.H. Carr

The recording of history has never been an objective task. On the contrary, it is determined by the subjective positions the dominant historians and intellectuals of society in a particular period.

The UNU report, *Transnationalization, the State, and the People: The Philippine Case* is one such work. Done by a team that is reportedly composed of some of the best minds of this generation, it presents an interesting view of Philippine history which is totally different from the conservative view that history is merely a collection of facts and nothing more.

What makes the report different from previous historical works of this sort is its use of the transnationalization framework into the Philippine historical context. Transnationalization there is defined as "the economic and political integration of . . . society into the world capitalist system (WCS)".

Although the use of the framework to explain the Philippine experience is not new, the UNU report is perhaps the first attempt to integrate the economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of the transnationalization process into a single, comprehensive compilation.

The report starts off in Chapter 1 with a highly theoretical discussion on the center – semi-periphery – periphery framework as culled from Kondratieff, Amin, and Wallerstein. The discussion follows the theory of the cycles of expansion (A) and contraction (B) of the WCS. The Philippine transnationalization experience is then situated within these cycles. The authors identify three periods of the integration of the Philippines into the WCS: 1) 1780s - 1940s, 2) 1940s - 1960s, and 3) 1960s to the present. The first period represents the time when the economy was basically exporting a few primary products, the second corresponds to the period of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), and the third period represents the period of the ISI together with the export oriented industrialization (EOI). The rest of the chapter is devoted to tracing the roots of economic underdevelopment to the structural characteristics of the Philippine political economy. These characteristics are identified as: a) the low rate of accumulation which has led to a weak domestic financing capacity in the economy, b) the weakness of the domestic market in terms of size and nature caused by the ISI, social inequality and the use of cheap labor to attract foreign investors, c) the absence of linkages between the import and export industries and domestic resources, and d) the control of political power of the dominant economic and social groups that had the propensity towards consumption instead of advancing the forces of production has resulted in the preservation of the existing social structure.

The discussion here is somewhat similar, though not in classic terms, to a historical analysis through modes of production. However, this kind of comparison invites the inevitable criticism that the transnationalization framework has a highly undeveloped theory on the mode of production primarily because its categories leave space only for analysis where peripheral countries like the Philippines are perennially tied up with the WCS.

Chapter 2 deals with the socio-cultural aspects of transnationalization and people's movements. It traces the dialectical interplay, through the centuries, between the actuations of the colonial and neocolonial power and the people's reactions. The first section of the chapter deals with the socio-cultural mechanisms of transnationalization identified as religion, media, and education. It is contended here that religion was "the main ideological weapon utilized by Spain to colonize the islands" while media and education played primary roles during the American colonial period. The second half of the chapter is more interesting as it outlines people's movements from the early colonial years up to the martial law regime of Marcos. The more relevant parts, especially for students of politics, would be the history of the radical movement; from the old communist party (PKP) to the birth of the CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines) in the late 1960s and how it operated amidst the repression of the martial law regime.

The second chapter is somewhat disappointing. Instead of reinterpreting

the socio-cultural aspects of Philippine history, the chapter merely dishes out a rehash of already existing works on the topic. This is then forcibly, and awkwardly, fit into the transnationalization framework with generalized and sweeping statements. The result is a detailed discussion on Philippine history with very little original analysis. This is not to say that the chapter would make for an adequate historical reference manual. On the contrary, because it crams so much details in so little space, it falls short of presenting a complete panorama of Philippine history. Instead of this chapter, one would be better off reading Constantino's "Identity and Counter-consciousness" and Nemenzo's "The Millenarian-Populist Aspects of Filipino Marxism".

In fact, it is possible to bypass the second chapter altogether and go straight

to the last chapter which delves on the economic, political and social alternatives for Philippine society. The chapter in itself is already a "mini-blueprint" for an alternative society. In the concluding section entitled "Dialectics of Transition", the authors echo the growing sentiment of Filipino radicals that "the most appropriate and effective means are not only nor always the violent means or armed resistance. ...". In the light of recent developments leading to the restoration of liberal democracy in the country, these are words that should be profoundly pondered upon. There is also an attempt to resolve the dilemma of the state-in-transition and participative popular democracy, but at this point the discussion gets rhetorical and no substantial arguments are advanced.

Readers who expect the report to be a clear and detailed blueprint of an alter-

native for Philippine society would be greatly disappointed. But then, this does not seem to be the intention of the authors who merely wanted to present their view of history from their own framework.

The basic flaw of the report lies in its attempt to put as much historical facts in a work that is meant to be mainly analytical that eventually some details are left out or the work itself suffers from a lack of a more rigorous analysis. Some of the sections where there were detailed discussions on facts, especially Chapter II, could have been partly dispensed with, if only to avoid repetitive discussions on the same subject.

Although far from being a landmark in historical works on the Philippines, the report is still highly significant as it sheds light on historical problems which are also contemporary.

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