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Social Values: Rebellions in the Country



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The Perspective

In the science of Epistemology and Semantics there is an important principle that is summed in the statement “the map is not the territory.” By this we mean that we should NOT confuse reality with the representation of that reality, that is, confusing the descriptive word with the reality it describes and stands for. Confusion of this type is a serious categorical error, one with serious consequences (social alienation, imposed integration and assimilation and social exclusion) when actions are based on that error. At the level of individual action, the confusion may be called social “insanity.” But at the level of government when confusion becomes the state policy and action, it is called “political and social disaster” that inevitably leads to rebellion and separatist movements. In the field of Sociology, the construction of social reality is based on a similar sociological principle called “Thomas Theorem” to the effect that “situations that are defined as real are real in their consequences.”

I cite these two principles to show how these have been the theoretical and operational “ideology” that our colonial masters and the successor Philippine Government post July 1946 have been pursuing in their desires to establish a single body politics – “isang bangsa”. They have been concerned more with the map than with territory. In the short history of nation building in this thousand-island archipelago, there has been really no serious effort to take into account the historical, social, religious and cultural underpinnings of our many and varied ethnic tribes and peoples. In our haste in that journey to a mythical one nation and one people, our policy makers and governors have actually become prisoners of the Thomas Theorem, that situations defined as real are real in their consequences.

“Internal” wars, both the so-called “HOLY” and the “unholy”, rebellions, separatist movements and ethnic and religious conflicts would seem to be aberrations when viewed from the nation-state perspective, that of imperial Manila. But is this so? For most of our people, especially as you move away from “imperial” Manila, the institutions and values that still dominate the scenery remain those of family, kindred, tribe, ethnicity and religions. To rebels, separatists, and partisans in the present conflicts, imperial Manila and the governance it represents is the aberration. The much-flaunted “national” identity is

a relatively new concept – it has existed only since after World War II (July 4, 1946). But as believer of myths, we pass on the tradition that we were, indeed, a nation on June 12, 1898. Whether 1898 or 1946, the understanding of nationality and nation-state and its institution or its claims over all the inhabitants of the Archipelago is still very unfamiliar and weak as against the claims and loyalties of family, kindred, tribe and religion.

The central government's (imperial Manila) increasing demands and requirements for compliance understood as "rule of law" impose pressures on the population of many and varied nationalities and languages with their own distinct and unique culture, religion and history. The question we need to pose as a challenge to imperial Manila is not so much why there are rebellions and separatist movements in the Archipelago as of why there is not more of it. In short, with such shallow roots, with structure and boundaries fixed by colonial masters and mistresses, the current institutional hegemony – political, cultural and religious – will NOT command loyalty, especially in the face of family, kindred, ethnic and religious folkway. I repeat in clear language and with emphasis that the sense of nationhood and community based on an amalgam of languages, questionable boundaries, conflicting religions, varied cultures and "custombres" are, indeed, a very new thing!

Traditional Community Dynamics and Social Structure

An enduring truism from anthropology is the observation that indigenous categories – assumptions, premises, mind-sets, value-orientations – need to be understood in themselves and not be confused with the categories the field researcher or community worker or missionary or economic development consultant brings into an encounter with different cultures. One clear example of these is the *kaum* system in Sulu and in some settled Indigenous People's communities of Mindanao (Teduray and Manobos) – a residential system equivalent to the neighborhood or village and the Philippine *barangay* or *sitio* – a cluster of related families in which a leading family lineage is recognized.

In the religious circle, a similar vein is easily discernable in the *langgal* or mosque system – a community organization centered on the mosque and its officials; it is the source of moral teachings and sanctions. Representatives of this system include the religious teachers (*faqi* or *paki*), theologians (*ulama* or *panditas*), and morally mature members who have made the *hajj* to Mecca (*hajj*). They set the tone of the morality of the community. This system is reinforced by an educational system called the *madrassa* system – the Islamic religious school where faith, morals and ritual prayers are transmitted to the young, to shape their attitude to Allah and to the moral aspects of the faith community (*ummah*).

On the other hand, community governance is enshrined in the estate system – a category of high-status persons (*datu*, *sarip*) generally known as *berbangsa* or *bangsa*–

han, which are distinct from the class of commoners (*way bangsa*). Their recognized dominance in Moro society makes them the natural sources of authority, power leadership, and governance. This status is ascribed or inherited by blood; not achievable without lineage connection. The state system is the core of the political community.

The *datu* system (among the Tausug, Magindanao and Maranaw) – is an aspect of the estate system. The term *datu* is central to the notion of governance and authority. The term is not simply a title (a noun); it operates as a verb meaning to rule (*datu*), come under the rule of a *datu* (*dumatu*), to have a realm or district to rule over (*endatuan*); to exercise unrestricted power (*pangundatu*). The territorial system – the sphere where a *datu*'s power authority is effectively recognized and beyond which lies the sphere of another *datu*. Its territorial nature is distinct from provincial and municipal boundaries dictated by law, because its basis is rights over followers or retinue or subjects, which continues to be valid no matter where they are physically.

Then there is the *tau dagang* or traders system – a group of community members who are business entrepreneurs. Though they are not found in the social structure of power and governance, they are the core and the life of the economic system in the community. They finance and bank roll the community's enterprise, including the expansion of territories and new markets. Rightly or wrongly, the traders financed the so-called piratical wars and thus enjoyed the dominance over the slave or captive trade. (Eric Casino: 2001)

Human Dignity and Community Identity and Development

The condition of poverty and rebellion that Government wants to address in areas of conflict, particularly in Southern Philippines, should touch also the non-material, psychological aspects of this condition. By this is meant the experience of being assaulted in one's sense of human dignity. The mainspring of the MNLF and MILF rebellion, I believe, can be traced to nonmaterial and spiritual roots. The Philippine government was probably not sensitive enough to this dimension; otherwise the moralism of Islamic fundamentalists would not have become part of the central issue. To appreciate this dimension of the governance and cohesion issue, one can point to some comparable example. There is a famous Japanese quotation attributed to Sakuma Shozan: "Eastern morality, Western technology."

The Moros and Lumads may admit they need to catch up with the rest in terms of education and technology. But this acceptance of backwardness does not and should not extend to dehumanization, to an assault on their basic human dignity and pride. It should be noted that assault on human dignity at the communal level – e.g., by the Spanish, the American and Imperial Manila during the post independence Republic, providing a sense

of injustice – real or perceived – has been among the enduring sources of energy towards their continuing struggle. Conversely, a similar tapping of Moro and Lumad pride for positive and constructive action remains a potential energy source for community development, and is central to the issue of social cohesion, to rebuilding vertical, horizontal linkages broken or weakened by the rebellion.

Rebellions...

More recent developments, especially following the end of the cold war, make it clear that future flashpoints are more likely to be within than outside countries. Between 1985 to 1995, 91 of 96 violent conflicts were internal (Colletta & Cullen, 2001). This fact highlights a need for a new focus in viewing conflict and war. The new focus raises lot of questions that people are beginning to ask and the answers are difficult to come by. No doubt, there is the need to pay greater attention to what is happening at the level of society change.

The first issue to address is how do economic growth rates translate into changing social relations and structures? What are the distributional impacts of such growth on ethnic and religious groups and sentiments? What have the growth of the cities and the privileges of the center meant for the peripheries? What is the effect of spatial and demographic trends? Who have been excluded, and why are they deciding to take matters into their hands? Who are the winners and who are the losers? What is the role of the state in managing diversities as strength rather than vulnerability? These questions raise the need for another pair of eyeglasses to view rebellion, conflict and war.

Colletta and Cullen have realized that the external factor accounting for internal social cleavages may be important; they are in some ways more obvious than internal factors. Furthermore, external factors largely work through internal factors to foment social cleavages. The determination of social cleavages by internal factors becomes paramount. This leads both researchers to investigate the concept of social capital as the space within which social conflicts can occur. High social cohesion strengthens social capital, reducing the risk of conflict, while low social cohesion weakens social capital, increasing the risk of conflict. The same authors posit that cohesion is determined in two dimensions. One dimension is through associative kin networks across individuals, families, kinship, villages and tribes. A second dimension is given by the relationship between the individual and the state. Which can be strong or weak. Cohesiveness in social capital is weakened in both dimensions – kinship, and civil society – through exclusion, inequality, and indignity.

An analysis of social cleavages made by Sharon Siddique postulates that social cohesion in societies of Southeast Asia is weakest where most of the society's members

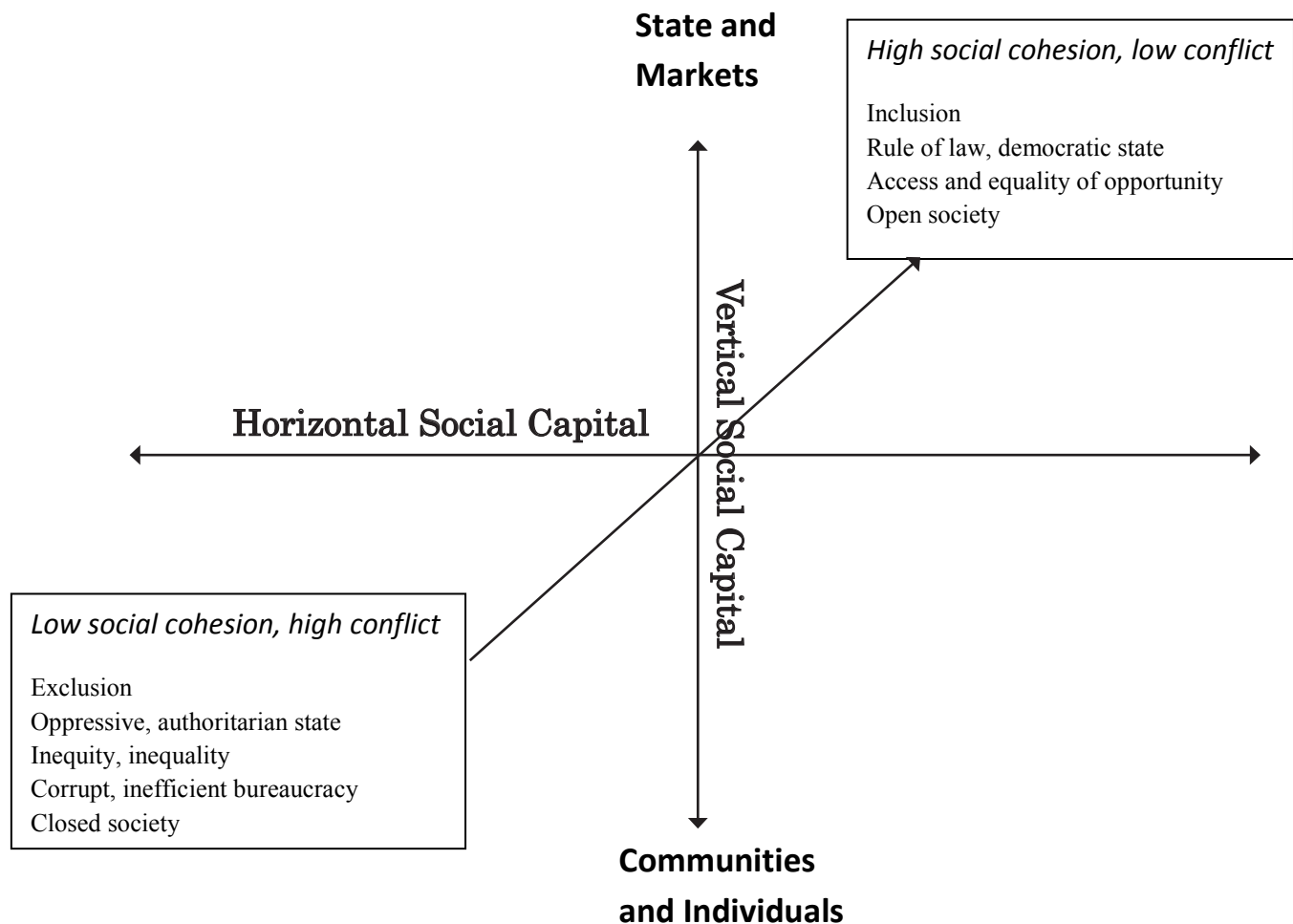


Figure 1. Social Cohesion: The integration of vertical linking and horizontal bridging social capital (Colletta & Cullen: 2000)

are alienated or “stakeless” and is strongest where members consider themselves to be full stakeholders in their societies. To Siddique, social cohesion is the outcome of a policy environment that facilitates the maximization of stakeholding (Sharon Siddique 2001: pp 18-19)

Current peace scholarship analyzes rebellions and internal wars from the perspective of social cohesion. It is shown that in a community where social cohesion is high, there is low conflict. Characteristics of social cohesion are the following: politics and culture of inclusion, access and equality of opportunity, open society, rule of law, democratic state and efficient and non-corrupt bureaucracy. On the other hand, low social cohesion manifests also high incidence of conflict. The characteristics of low social cohesion are the politics and culture of exclusion, inequity/inequality, closed society, oppressive and authoritarian state, and corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy. (Colletta, Lim, Viitanen: Social Cohesion and Conflict in Asia. WB, Washington, 2001).

Social Cohesion Based on Our Diversities

Social cohesion is described as the glue that bonds society and community together promoting harmony, sense of community and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good. The highly centralized governance (the real aberration in our history) is a reactionary response to the unresolved issues of ethnicity, nationality, identity and nationhood. The Philippine Republic's policy as well as governance is simply a continuation of the prevailing paradigm in nation building. This is defined, during the Spanish period, in the missionary slogan: “reducer, civilizer y cristianizar” peace and “voila” one community of people “un Pueblo Filipino de Aparri hasta Jolo.” And during the American period, the slogan is: “to develop, to civilize, to educate, to train the natives in the science of self-government.” The underpinning ideology of the two slogans is to level off the differences on account of ethnicity, religions and custombres; to eliminate diversities; and to establish a national unity on the basis of “isang wika, isang bansa at isang lahi.”

The recurring rebellions and separatist movements in the country simply point to the fact that we have NOT bridged and outgrown the social ethnic and religious fault lines that continue to divide our peoples. We live under the myth of “isang bansa” at “isang lahi” yet the truth is we are of many and different bangsa. The wars, rebellions and separatist movements along primordial fault lines not only in the Philippines but in the whole world notwithstanding the era of globalization indicate the necessity of bringing the issues of social cohesion and the management of diversities into the policy debate.

There is the natural bonding within the family, kindred, ethnic and religious group. The individual as well as the community's capacity to bridge the natural bonds that are based on family, ethnicity and religions to state, institutions, bureaucracy and market will shape the cross-cutting ties and values that become the bedrock for nation-building and national identity. In the 50's and the 60's, the issue of social cohesion in nation-building was addressed by the late Senator Camilo Osias in the bridging of the “kami” (indicating the natural bond of family and kindred that is exclusive) into the “tayo” (the unity and spirit of “bansa” that is inclusive). There is, indeed, a real need to go back to the basics and begin to demythologize the ideological underpinnings of the so-called Philippine nation-state. Until we face squarely the issue of our diversities ... seriously understanding and accepting the challenge and demands of social cohesion in the midst of maraming bangsa, maraming wika, at maraming lahi, nationhood in the sense of “tayo” will continue to elude us. Meanwhile we have to train ourselves to be adept in moving from one crisis to another, from one conflict or rebellion to another, and from one separatist movement to another in a never ending internal conflict.

SHAPING PUBLIC POLICY FOR PEACE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) is an independent and non-partisan think tank founded in 2001 to generate ideas on making autonomy an effective vehicle for peace and development in the Southern Philippines. IAG is an institutional partner of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in the Philippines.

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