Anthropology and Nation-Building in Post-War Philippines

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In assessing the scholarship of Dr. F. Landa Jocano, the five preceding commentaries belie the substantial impact of an academic who "laid the groundwork for the advancement of the disciplines of cultural anthropology and Philippine Studies in the country" (See Sobritchea in this volume, 137). Even with these brief reflections, however, one does gets a glimpse of Dr. Jocano's intellectual contributions. First, he helped play a significant role in Filipinizing the study and practice of anthropology in the Philippines. Trained in US academia, Dr. Jocano was well-versed in the dominant disciplinal paradigms of his time. But in his insistence on language learning and his meticilous mapping of Filipino social life, he helped cultivate anthropological studies that was grounded—sometimes literally so—in the minutiae of Philippine social life. As Paul Rodell writes in his essay for this special issue, "what made Jocano, and his generation so critically important was his addition of Filipino insights and analyses that modified Western academia's approaches" (140). Dr. Jocano was part of a generation of scholars that sought to Filipinize (or decolonize) many academic disciplines, including history (Teodoro Agoncillo and Zeus Salazar) and psychology (Virgilio Enriquez), among many others. His studies on *diwa*, *halaga*, and *asal* were informed by the zeitgeist that produced *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology) and *Pantayong Pananaw* (literally, "for-us perspective")

The Filipinization thrust occurred alongside broader questions of the modernization and development of a young independent republic. For Dr. Jocano, both phenomena had to be rooted in the culture and social life of Filipinos in order to be effective. This much is evident in his "Cultural Idiom and the Problem of Planned Change" and betrays his critique—or at least adaptation—of Modernization Theory, which was the dominant developmental ideology of his time. Specifically, his detailed look at Filipino customs sought to, among other things, reconcile Filipino traditions and the modernization project, which were already impinging on rural societies across the Philippines. It was also a way of preserving and defending these traditions and beliefs amidst criticisms and accelerating changes in Philippine society. In one of his later writings, he spoke up for this culture, which were considered backward and detrimental to social progress, and called for a more positive appreciation of such values (Jocano 1997, 1–13). In addition, he stressed that the study of non-Christian Filipinos is essential to helping them "adjust to the currently changing world" (1967, 30). He adds,

> ...by understanding the general characteristic features of the non-Christian society and by fitting any planned changes into the central value of these cultural minorities is it possible to provide adequate solutions to disruptions in their lives. (30)

Reading Dr. Jocano's admirable ethnographic accounts is a throwback to a different time and place. As urbanization proceeds today across the Philippines and agriculture languishes, one wonders if and to what extent many of the beliefs he catalogued—in rural societies—are still held today. Either way, his writings serve as snapshots of Philippine social life at a particular historical conjuncture.

At any rate, that Dr. Jocano's field sites lay in the provinces is testimony to, among other things, the centrality of the countryside in his time, and attests to the contested nature of rural areas. His academic forays there were just one of many attempts to grapple with the provinces, from state-led initiatives to revolutionary movements. The peasantry would prove to be a hot-button issue of the time, witnessing studies from Harry Benda, Benedict Kerkvliet, and Reynaldo Ileto, among many others.

This attention to the countryside formed part of a widespread concern for the marginal. Dr. Jocano took the time to study and immerse himself among the urban poor, an experience that resulted in *Slum as a Way of Life* (1975). Coming from an impoverished background himself, this was an act of sympathy with the poor, and arguably an implicit critique of developmental ideologies that did not benefit many Filipinos.[1] In addition, his field work brought him in contact with, and helped map the cultures of, what we today would call indigenous peoples like the Sulod of Central Panay. In his own way, Dr. Jocano looked at Philippine society from below.

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There are at least two impulses in Dr. Jocano's work. While his ethnography focuses on a microlevel, it also had a macrodimension: a link to the nationalist project of the time. Like many of his generation, he was trying to define, construct, and perhaps even (re)invent the Filipino (in the Hobsbawmian sense). His catalogue of medico-cultural practices and beliefs took stock of Filipino identity: who is the Filipino and what does she believe in? Indeed, the range of his anthropological research is impressive: pregnancy, childbirth, infancy and childhood, puberty and adolescence, courtship and marriage, death and burial, family, and kinship, religion, literature, and mythology. In this respect, Dr. Jocano was one of what the late Teresita Maceda elsewhere called the "early scholar-miners" who

> searched for the ore beneath the surface, collected whatever they discovered to yield a rich lode, documented their process of retrieval, and in some instances, did preliminary assays to determine the value of what they gathered. Their efforts enabled other scholars and cultural researchers to explore on their own, add to what has already

> been collected, assess and reassess the findings, and take the process to a higher level of critiquing and possibly theorizing. Those of us who began our own work on different aspects of Philippine arts and culture in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s know only too well the many obstacles cultural researchers had to hurdle to gain access to even just primary materials. This was the period when just to gather primary data was an important task in itself. Basic information about our varied literatures and cultural practices was so scarce that leaving behind the comfort of a library to brave the harsh conditions of field work was almost always inevitable for serious researcher. (Maceda 2007, i)

The straightforward, seemingly 'descriptive' nature of Dr. Jocano's scholarship belies the enormity of his—and his generation's—contributions. As scholars of a young and independent republic, they, for all intents and purposes, had to start from scratch, seeking in nationalist spirit to define Philippine life outside colonial and imperial influence.

This mapping of Philippine social life belonged to an ambitious nation-building project. In the late 1970s, Dr. Jocano headed and took part in a research project that produced studies on the Sama Bajau (Sama d'Laut), the Maguindanaons, the Maranao, the Negritos of Pinatubo in Zambales, the Tausug, the Hiligaynons, the Ilocanos, the Tinguian, and the Yakan. As far as imagining the nation was concerned, this was a marked difference from, if not an advance on, the imaginary of national(ist) and local historiography; the former was often Manila- or Tagalog-centric, while the latter simply shifted the focus on other areas. In contrast, Dr. Jocano's studies envision an entire nation composed of different ethnolinguistic groups. These works sought to account for, and find the common thread among, the different regions and cultures of the Philippines. An identity-building discourse, it was

> "an attempt at empirically defining our unity as a people underneath the veneer of diversity resulting from our historical encounters with foreign cultures" (Jundam and Sabalvaro 1978, 3). This discourse

> hews closely to the American slogan of "unity in diversity" (E Pluribus Unum) which in turn is paraphrased by the Marcos Regime's Bagong Lipunan (New Society) official propaganda slogan as "Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa" ("one country, one spirit")" [Cañete, Santamaria, and San Valentin 2014, 153].

This was the political context of Dr. Jocano's scholarship (at least in the 1970s), which Christa Wirth has touched on in this issue. Apart from pointing out the background of the Cold War, she identifies the links, or at least parallels, between the discourses of the state and anthropological practice.[2] Produced when Dr. Jocano was part of the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, a think tank of the Marcos administration, the project was "an ethnography in the service of the state" (Cañete, Santamaria, and San Valentin 2014, 153).

This discourse of unity was among other things a response and proposed solution to the lack of affinity to the nation, if not the Philippine state, in the 1960s and the 1970s. "Although considered Filipino citizens, these cultural minorities still form local societies which are rarely linked with the national feeling" (Jocano 1967, 31). With the creation of the Commission on National Integration in 1957 (Republic Act 1888), integration was vital. Later on, in critiquing a proposal to put non-Christian tribes into reservations, Dr. Jocano wrote,

> Are we not building a wall of prejudice around the lives of these people, instead of integrating them into the wider framework of Filipino culture....?. (1967, 29–30)

Dr. Jocano's deployment of structural functionalism arguably makes sense in this light. Just as this theory sought to envision a social order whose parts work harmoniously, so does it seem suitable for a nation-building ideology that projected the unity of a country. But as David Gowey points out in his discussion of Talledo's critique of Dr. Jocano, the notion of a unified whole (i.e. a country) is problematic.

> This last aspect touches one of the main critiques of structural-functionalism itself, which is that constructs as large as societies—from the national level to Jocano's much-studied village of Bay, Laguna—tend to be far too messy for such a totalizing paradigm. Rather than being wholly cohesive machines with consistently predictable inputs and outputs, they consist just as much of describable practices, articulated systems, and recognizable institutions as they do of contradictions, impurities, paradoxes, ironies, exaggerations, secrets, impositions, and lies. (See Gowey in this volume, 148)

Gowey's critique has more than a slight tinge of postructuralist language, with its talk of contradictions and the like. More importantly, it speaks, with the benefit of hindsight, of the failure, or at least elusiveness, of the Philippine state's unifying, nation-building project. For the most part, that project has been unable to account justly for the "contradictions, impurities, paradoxes" of Philippine society. Unity and nation-building are noble, but not at the expense of differences and diversity. Today, language remains a bone of contention among many Filipinos, especially non-Tagalogs. There has been the familiar refrain of Imperial Manila, and the Tagalog-centric nature of Philippine historiography has come under fire, to say nothing of calls for federalism to empower regions outside the capital.

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This essay and the preceding commentaries have described the pioneering efforts of Dr. F. Landa Jocano and its historical, intellectual and political context. Much certainly remains to be discussed, and this special issue of *Asian Studies* hopes to initiate what should be a deeper and longer discussion on his scholarship: its intellectual roots, historical context, and political assumptions, as well as the various facets of his work, from kinship and values to questions of national integration.

Notes

[1] I owe this point to Dr. Matthew Santamaria.

[2] See Cañete, Santamaria, and San Valentin 2014 for a discussion of the politics of one of Dr. Jocano's research projects.

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