

Orientalism? Privileged Vistas Most Probably

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I had to read Reynaldo Ileto's essay several times because my reaction after the initial reading was closer to wonderment than to enlightenment. Most likely, I even rationalized, I should have read the first two lectures that could provide me a sharper focus on his particular context and vantage point.

On second thought I realized the previous essays might not make me any wiser to appreciate more readily his Orientalism-laden analysis. I have been pulled to this standpoint by the fact that while the first lecture (as summed up by Ileto) seems very evident and I must concur with his overview based on my own reading of the pertinent materials; however, the second lecture's assertion appears to have overfocused on the American colonial regime. On this particular insight of Ileto's, my contention is that the "Filipino identity" had been steadily configured through the psychologically fermenting decades since the propaganda era of Father Jose Burgos. And this new self-image of the Filipino was further consolidated by the writings of the militant exiles in Spain, mainly via their periodical *La Solidaridad*.

Through Burgos's exposés as well as through various contemporaneous documents of the colonial government, there already emerged a clear and volatile distinction between the "*filipinos españoles*" and the "*hijos del país*". This separate class identities and contrasting allegiances became even more politically impassioned in the self-consciousness of those "*indios bravos*" aspiring for independence from Spain. Explicitly and implicitly through their advocacy and activities they had succeeded in reconstructing what was to be a "Filipino" and what was not, or who was Filipino and who was not – and it was no longer based on skin color or on progeny.

But as to the delineation of "indigenous social structure" in the Philippines as having been largely constituted by the American colonial scholars, bureaucrats and writers, Ileto asserts a valid issue. For instance, Beyer came up with a "scientific" racial typology of Filipino natives without a shred of evidence from fieldwork or from physical anthropology.

Barton also suddenly invented a distinct ethnic identity and expansive territoriality of the mountain-dwelling *Kalinga* who used to call themselves *Yapayao*, *Mandaya*, *Calasanes*, etc. (because "Kalinga" was previously used only as a generic term for anyone of those fierce warriors, headhunters, or those unconquered dwellers of that particular range in the Cordillera). Moreover, Jenks saw distinct ethnicities in such trivialities as in the shortness or length of hair, or in the style of hanging the head-axe on the wall.

It has become obvious to us today why those colonial-era social scientists had to engage in this kind of arbitrary "ethnographic" exercises. They had to situate the native groups with respect to their assigned identities and domains as a prelude to the colonizers' sociopolitical engineering by means of subjugating the natives' consciousness soon after the military "pacification" raids.

Now in this third lecture, which Ileto introduces as focused mainly on "how political behavior has been codified in ways that reflect the desires and fears of contemporary observers", I think he has used a smudgy lens for his focus on the multifaceted mosaic of academic renderings on Filipino political experience and traditions. His use of Karnow's book as the foreground as well as the binding thread in stitching various research findings of the implicated American scholars is, at best, a mere heuristic device to validate his suspicion of an Orientalist streak running across the cited works.

At worst, it is a daredevil tactic to entrap some of the eminent names in Philippine Studies by pulling them down

the slimy pool of Karnow's non-sequiturs and rakishly sensationalized instant savvy concerning Philippine political history. In sum, Karnow's book, despite the underserved accolade from the Pulitzer Prize jurors, cannot be seriously regarded in the same level of intellectual acumen as that of McCoy, B. Anderson, and the rest who contributed their insights to *An Anarchy of Families*. And this volume is more enlightening and exciting than Karnow's purgative propaganda (perhaps to purge the American guilt for having gloriously waltzed so long with the dictator, to paraphrase Bonner). Nor should anyone regard *An Anarchy of Families* as the last word on Filipino political dynasts and big-time opportunists. In fact, it has come out precisely as a challenge to Filipino scholars to surpass or augment the respective insights.

Significantly, Iletto says here that even Filipinos in Hawaii had earnestly endorsed Karnow's book to him, which may thus explain his using it as foreground for his analysis. This question must then be asked: Didn't he sense at all that those "well-meaning" Karnow idolaters in Hawaii are now hyphenated Americans and who just might be wishing deep in their hearts to revalidate their self-banishment from the accursed Philippines?

What Karnow Swept Under The Rug

The thematic juxtaposition by Karnow of the American dream of implanting the ideals of democracy in the Philippines and the persistence of undemocratic Filipino traditions has been sufficiently debunked by Iletto as an idealized fable not based on documentary or historical experience. So, why the recourse to Karnow's book to bash the suspected "Orientalists"? It puzzles me; and in my wish to untie the knot in my mind I wonder whether Iletto has cast aspersion on the researches of these scholars because of his fear that they might have been causing such an intrusion into Filipino scholarship and self-consciousness, which is not a well-established fact anyway. Or, could they be intruding instead into his turf, considering that Iletto's eminence in the field is assured by his worldwide citation quotient!

But all that is best consigned to the realm of speculation. What is very certain though is that much as he takes to task the researchers he suspects of being motivated by Orientalism, I also put to question his reckoning of Karnow alongside these scholars. Meaning that I have such a hearty disdain for Karnow's attempt to misinform the American public, and the world at large, while hoping most likely to cash in on the dramatic sociopolitical sea change in the Philippines attendant to the collapse of the US-sponsored Marcos Dictatorship. (Indeed a U.S. vice president had praised Marcos for his "adherence to democratic principle and to the democratic process".)

Let me diverge at this point to expunge the propaganda crap of Karnow who doesn't really deserve to be cited at all along with the real researchers. His book is just a potboiler's brew of sensationalized cliché and hearsay plus slippery analysis that even his title phrase, "America's Empire in the Philippines" is out of context, while also exhibiting poor syntax. Probably unknown to him, an empire actually straddles many colonized territories and peoples. And precisely in pursuit of the U.S. Manifest Destiny of imperialistic expansionism since the early 1880s, America's empire encompassed Texas and California (wrested from Mexico), Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam – and therefore it could not just be "America's empire in the Philippines". This is not a triviality in the context of the attempt to cleanse history of America's experience in aggressive imperialism across the Asia-Pacific region.

Karnow's heavily slanted depiction of Philippine political history approximates that of a newspaper's editorial cartoon, which makes a point by means of facetious exaggeration of lines and stylish omission of details. This overrated book precisely glosses over the more significant details of U.S. greed for territories and global clout as depicted, for instance, by James Blount (who wrote a nearly complete narrative on the U.S. conquest of the Philippines from a participant's viewpoint). Add to Blount's account the smoking-gun evidence from W.H. Scott who wrote *The Ilocano Response*

to *American Aggression*, detailing the brutality of the American invading army in northern Philippines.

Karnow utterly lacks the sober inquisitiveness of O.D. Corpuz (*The Roots of the Filipino Nation*) or that of Samuel Tan (*The Critical Decade*), both of whom visited several U.S. archives to peruse documents on American imperialism. Or the honesty of R. Bresnahan who wrote *In Time of Hesitation*, which depicts the U.S. congressmen's ravenous rantings for new territories right in the halls of Congress, thereby providing the so-called yellow journalists with ample pious war-cries to drown out the anti-imperialist league in the United States. And not to forget, G.F. Kennan's documented revelations in his book, *American Diplomacy*, in which the scholar bared "that Theodore Roosevelt, who was then the young Assistant Secretary of the Navy...wangled [Commodore] Dewey's appointment to the Command of the Asiatic Fleet; that both he and Dewey...had some sort of prior understanding to the effect that Dewey would attack Manila, regardless of the circumstances of the origin or purpose of the war."

The whole point of this circumspection on some of the substantial works on American imperialistic experience in the Philippines is to underscore that Karnow has just been no more than a babe in the woods, whimpering about the lack of will among the stubborn natives to imbibe American democratic ideals, even as the American colonizers did grab the natives' goldmines and other resources – at the same time manipulating the economy and political life of their Philippine colony according to their vested interests. (The pioneer American public schoolteachers were a different breed, but their concerns were limited to the teaching of A-B-C and hygiene.)

And so, back in 1989, when a friend gave me a copy of Karnow's book for my review in the former *Daily Globe* where I was regularly reviewing books, I realized it was a waste of my time reading it – and it would be a waste of space in the newspaper's books page.

Hence today, many years later, I am bothered by Iletto's intention in retrieving it from the dustbin to raise it up as the archetype, if not the apex, of the "Orientalism" that he discerns to be lurking in the current research works of Americans engaged in Philippine Studies.

It is very tempting to pry into the motivating factor behind Iletto's criticism, but such effort can only lead us to conjectures. Rather, I shall attempt (in shotgun manner) an epistemological interpellation on the practice and findings of visiting researchers in the Philippines, who tend to pursue a trend in their research interests and analyses, and why Iletto reacts with suspicion, to say the least.

Many of these foreign researchers usually proceed from a departmental perspective or "school of thought". Also, they bring with them to the field site a carefully chosen set of books to convince themselves of the validity of their research entry point, objective and methodology. Among those of us who have mostly stayed at home, there is this longstanding observation expressed as a joke – that any archaeologist from Michigan doing fieldwork in the Philippines will sooner or later unearth some remains of "chiefdoms". Why so? Principally because this notion of settlement structure and dynamic is what their mentors had primed them to discover. Failure to unearth this settlement configuration would complicate their postgraduate studies, and inevitably the diplomas get delayed. The immediate implication is the job hunt or enrollment in a doctoral program gets suspended.

Consider, too, that their research time and budget is not infinite, nor are their professors gifted with infinite knowledge or patience to explicate the diverse and confounding data. Which now reminds me of the legend common in Asian countries: the wise frog at the bottom of the well thinks that the world outside, including the sky, is as small as the rim of the well. So it doesn't bother to climb up because there is nothing beyond what is visible to it from the bottom anyway. This frog is pragmatically adept in

conserving his energy and in comforting himself in his tiny niche – so much like many scholars confined to the university departments here and abroad.

Thus when the American scholars who contributed the results of their research works to *An Anarchy of Families* observed the tradition of warlordism and opportunism in Philippine political life, it is worthwhile considering that the research ventures were certainly limited at the outset as to subject, time frame, funding, and certain risk factors.

Elsewhere I have described this research mode as “spotlighting” because the researcher must concentrate his effort on the particular issue being “problematized” in his field of study, at the same time blurring the “peripheral” concerns and factors intertwined with the multifaceted reality, wittingly or not. I have enclosed the two words in quotation marks by way of underscoring that they have been somehow predetermined before the undertaking of any fieldwork or interviews.

In lieu of such “spotlighting” imperative among academia’s departmentalized producers of knowledge, another mode of learning is in the style of Herodotus of ancient Greece or Chau Ju-Kua of pre-modern China – which is primarily to satisfy one’s intense curiosity of the diverse ways of life outside of the timetable, mindset and diploma from academia.

Still another way of pursuing knowledge is to embark on a lifetime work of several volumes like those of Toynbee’s or Myrdal’s. But obviously these two men had pursued knowledge outside the publish-or-perish, and finish-or-fail, demands of today’s universities whose current mandate is centered on giving academic degrees, employment, promotions, and research grants (to generate knowledge or craft new policies).

From this viewpoint, anyone can therefore make a safe guess that, invariably, researches originated in or oriented

to academic programs – whether done by outsiders or insiders – have built-in limitations rooted mainly in their departmentalized perspectives and worldviews. And also arising from the individual scholar's subjectivity in representing or reflecting on an ever-changing society. Hobsbawm reminds us in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780...* that not even the officially programmed concept as "nation" can be presumed to be an unchanging notion or entity. Thus it is more reasonable for scholars to take off their naïve blinders and masks and reckon with those researches done from development frameworks or from "schools of thought" that are anchored in liberalism to be, more often than not, programmatic – a crossbreed of analysis and advocacy, or a potent brew of field data and institutional bias.

Into the research results may creep in "universalism," "nativism," "anarchism," or even "Orientalism" and "Marxism" – but this prospect stimulates a continuing dialogue and refinement of the studies much more than the Inquisition ever did. One thing that cannot be ignored at this point is the ongoing debate over quantitative vis-à-vis qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis, as well as the continuing "etic-emic" disputation. On top of all this divergent discourse is Said's oft-quoted concept of an insidious and elaborate Orientalist mindset among university-based intellectuals, mainly from but not limited to the "West" that has, semantically and semiotically, persisted to consign and reconstruct the long-lived legacies of the "East" to the backwoods of world civilization.

BUT it may be worthwhile remembering that Said has not confined his critique only to the epistemic elements of the scholars' text. He has pursued it to its ethical context – right on the ground level of realpolitik. No doubt, he has not only debunked the intellectual deception embedded in the Orientalist mindset, but also, and more significantly, he has pursued one of the Orientalist projects in the geopolitical conflict through his active support for the Palestinians in their confrontation with the Israeli conservative bloc whose power play is supported by Western states led by the United States and Britain.

In this light, I cannot see how the scholarly *modus operandi* of McCoy and company can be reckoned with Said's engaged view of Orientalism. How can it be a case of Orientalism when Bentley simply focused his research on a warlord in Mindanao? What if there was a Filipino scholar with the tenacity (and a martyr complex, perhaps) to study this warlord's oppressive manipulation of the electoral process? Would this amount to Orientalism too?

Rather, I can detect in their style of study some sort of "scholastic academism" – an institutional process of resonating or elaborating on a regimen of knowledge as perpetuated by a "school of thought" or by the "masters of discipline". Earlier I made a caricature of such mode of scholarship by citing the habitual discoveries of "chiefdoms" in remote dig sites by the archaeologists from Michigan. A variant of this work style discernible at least among some of the scholars criticized by Ileto involves padding the research with footnotes and rhetorical flourish, whether in pursuit of the current institutionalized fashion or to exhibit to excess their thoroughness in erudition – although a few footnotes do reveal slippery elisions, not logical insight. Anderson, probably the most eminent in the gallery, and who is often exciting to read, can surprise his admirers in the Philippines with a few non-sequiturs for footnotes or endnotes.

For instance, in Anderson's essay "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines", his endnote on Conrado Balweg (the ex-priest, ex-guerrilla of the New People's Army, and ex-chieftain of a paramilitary force equipped with arms by the government of President Corazon Aquino) asserts that "in the Marcos era [Balweg] had formed his own guerrilla force..." This statement is a piece of disinformation Anderson might have gathered from Balweg's publicists belonging to the defunct Cordillera News Agency that the government Peace Commission supported with funds. Balweg was an NPA cadre throughout the Marcos era, but then being subjected to disciplinary action during the last months of Marcos's rule, which Balweg and his co-tribal followers resented. Upon the assumption of Aquino to the presidency in early 1986, Balweg was secretly contacted by

government agents, one of them a journalist, encouraging him to leave the NPA and form his own group in order to undertake a "peace pact" with Aquino. During the ritual compact, Balweg got an assault rifle from the president, and his followers subsequently got their own powerful rifles from the military to be used in "peace-keeping" duty across the Cordillera or against former comrades in the NPA. My own assertion is not gospel truth, but the reader can countercheck Anderson's endnote and my counterclaim.

In Anderson's essay "Hard To Imagine" he mentions "...the widespread myth in the Philippines that American teachers systematically punished any schoolchildren found using their mother-tongues in the classroom⁵³ (Was this perhaps the reason that the American-educated Guerrero expunged Tagalog from his translation of *Noli*?)" This parenthetical conjecture, which is an obvious rhetorical spice, does not really follow the train of thought; nor does it lead to any scholarly insight. It is expressed more as an innuendo or a piece of gossip.

But when one goes over his Footnote 53, Anderson's elaboration reads: "A myth because as early as 1927, 99 percent of public schoolteachers were Filipino! See David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay...*" But where is the insight regarding the "myth" in this intertextual presumption? So what if since 1927 Filipinos dominated the public-school teaching force? What is the connection of this statistical item to Anderson's assumption of a "widespread myth"? Is he insinuating, beyond the facts he had gathered, that Filipino teachers did not or could not punish schoolchildren for speaking in their vernacular inside the classroom? And can this insinuation suffice as evidence for his presumed "myth"?

Let me counter with an experiential account. In the early 1950s some of my Filipino grade schoolteachers in Vigan Central School in northern Philippines (who were educated by the American pioneer teachers commonly referred to as "Thomasites") promptly pinched my belly for my "speaking in the dialect". And it also cost me five centavos in fine, plus another five when I would instantly utter the Ilocano word

for "Ouch!" Anderson, as an outsider, cannot have real access to much of the "native" insiders' experiential recollection, as well as the phenomenological twists and turns of consciousness, self-identity and vested interest from one time to another among individuals and among local communities – especially when the local language is unknown to him. Adaptive change (although sometimes stimulated by intrusive factors) is the continuum in communities and within individual consciousness, including tradition and rituals, which are reconfigured over time by the people themselves.

Any research, no matter how earnest and faithful to the facts of living, can only reflect the *modus vivendi* of that particular season of that particular generation that the study has tried to observe and reflect on. The big picture instantly drawn, such as that of Karnow's *In Our Image: American's Empire in the Philippines*, is just a drawing that cannot represent the dynamic reality but the author's opinions and agenda. But the mode of reflecting on the deeper facets of Filipino political life in the hands of Lande is even more insidious than Karnow's, and I see the merits of Iletto's criticism of Lande's programmatic "studies" – of which the details in my own critique I shall provide in a subsequent essay.

Privileged Vistas of Insider/Outsider

Casting aside Karnow and Lande, let me conclude by trying to sum up the respective characteristics and diverse research standpoints and strategies. And this attempt deliberately transcends the issue of Orientalism raised by Iletto since I think it has been misappropriated versus McCoy and company. While I have mentioned that Anderson cannot have access to certain aspects of sociopolitical life and phenomenological configurations in consciousness, he and the rest enjoy distinct advantages particularly in the Philippines (but not in Indonesia and Malaysia, which have not encouraged visiting researchers to choose their wild simply because they are under regular supervision). Visiting researchers in the Philippines, compared to Filipinos, usually enjoy better funding support; and the proverbial hospitality

of Filipinos works in their favor because they are seen as congenial links to the outside world, if not the bearers of chocolate and buyers of souvenir handicrafts. If certain local personalities dampen the villagers' hospitality, or worse, hamper the research work, they can make use of local research assistants. And when faced with grave threats, they can seek protection from their embassies or pack up and go. Filipino researchers do not enjoy such safety nets. Which may explain, but only partly, why Maranao scholars have avoided researching on the Maranao warlord Dimaporo and it took an outsider like Bentley to do it. And if he did not, it would be a detraction of local science.

In short, the outsider's viewpoint and efforts toward earnest scholarship are, more often than not, an addition to Filipino self-knowledge, as well as a stimulus for local scholars to compete in the challenging arena of research. The outsider's privileged vista does not negate that of the insider's, which I have demonstrated above in my comments on a couple of Anderson's slippery endnote elisions and unwarranted innuendoes. Far better I think to regard these contraposing privileged vistas as a dialogue in reflexivity, in the hope that a yin-yang dialectic may emerge out of the continuing contention.

I am wondering if Ileo's Orientalism shotgun blast might just reveal that he has found himself eventually as neither an insider nor an outsider – and has therefore engaged in the rarefied epistemic discourse from the vantage point of "migratory scholarship". Which is Vicente Rafael's neologism (in the book he edited, *Discrepant Histories*) to refer to the scholarly attempts at "negotiating between and among epistemological regimes." More to the point, Rafael describes migratory scholarship as being engaged in "reconfiguring the relationship between and among the 'Third' and the 'First' worlds, and all others beyond and in between." Although I am not very sure if this lyrical vision better serves as an alibi for scholarly self-exile, somehow I find myself situating Ileo's current stance as some kind of navigating toward an epistemological horizon beyond which beckons the homeland and yet remains faraway. ❖