

RELIGION, POLITICS, and RATIONALITY

in a Philippine Community



RAUL PERTIERRA



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Preface

Like other human products, this study is the result of a collective effort. Chandra Jayawardena and Ken Maddock taught me social anthropology, colleagues at the University of New South Wales (Australia) have forced me to reassess anthropological theory in the light of contemporary sociology, the people of Zamora patiently explained to me the features of their society, members of my family shared the time in the field and, since then, have endured periods of neglect, while I unraveled the rich but initially incoherent experiences incorporated in this work.

Following an established convention, I have changed the name of the municipality where I conducted fieldwork. The fictitious name is Zamora. This was done both to protect people's privacy and to indicate to the reader that my analysis is a theoretical product several steps removed from "raw experience." Another investigator might have reshaped her experience of Zamora differently.

The major portion of the research (1975-76) was financially supported by Macquarie University and an Australian Commonwealth postgraduate scholarship. Several trips to Zamora since then were made possible by The University of New South Wales. Filipinists in Australia, by readily sharing their knowledge, have given me a broader and less idiosyncratic understanding of the country. Despite certain misgivings, the Ateneo de Manila University Press patiently agreed to retain what at times is a highly theoretical style of this study. While I regret the difficulty this may cause some readers, my position is that both theoretical and practical work often require considerable effort and perseverance. Moreover, since domination has both ideological and material aspects, emancipation consequently requires a theoretical as well as a practical critique.

Philippine society is currently undergoing significant structural changes, the end product of which, at least to me, is unpredictable. I claim it is unpredictable not because I hold a particular social theory; rather, it acknowledges the fact that people create the social world out of counterfactuals. Filipinos are presently reconstituting their range of social possibilities through contestation and struggle. I hope that the outcome will better represent their general interest than what has so far been the case. With its divergent range of individual and collective interests, this study of Zamora should dispel any illusions regarding the difficulty of determining the general good. It is to be hoped, however, that this difficulty can impel rather than prevent us from redoubling our efforts to so determine the general good.

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Introduction

This study examines the relationship of religion—viewed as an ideological system—to the wider social structure of which it is a part. Specifically, I explain why religion in Zamora, Ilocos Sur, has taken the forms that it has from the 1820s, when Catholicism was first introduced, to the relative success, for a few decades, of Protestantism early this century, and finally to the present role of radical and separatist denominations. These patterns of conversion are linked to the municipality's economic and political vicissitudes as well as to certain relatively invariant aspects of the local cultural tradition. The interplay of economic, political and cultural factors explain why religion in Zamora has undergone certain transformations while, at the same time, retaining invariant features. Thus, while Christianity has taken over most areas of public life, private-domestic rituals retain much of their indigenous orientation. More generally, this study explores how the processes of modernization are unevenly adopted and adapted. For example, while Zamorans successfully exploit new economic opportunities, such as the growing of Virginia tobacco and cotton, they

reject the new rice varieties in favor of traditional species. At the cultural level Zamorans, like most Filipinos, are extremely interested in pop music, modern dress styles, and stories of romantic love but, on most occasions, voluntarily conform to the exigencies of village life which, in many of its principles, is diametrically opposed to Western values.

The examples above indicate the complex and variegated relationship between consciousness and its associated material interests and practices. I explore this relationship using the classical sociological tradition established by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

Theoretical Orientation

Following this sociological tradition, I treat religion as a system of beliefs and practices that reflects the social structure of which it is a part while simultaneously contributing to the constitution of this structure. In other words, I see religion as having ideological and practical functions; it is both a view of the world as well as a position in the world. It is for this reason that Marx claimed (Schaff 1973) that while bourgeois society could provide a conceptually valid critique of religion, it is unable to eliminate its practice since this would require a radical revolution in social relations. For Marx, the fundamental contradiction of bourgeois society is indicated by this society's valid theoretical critique of religion while necessarily preserving its practice.

Religion constitutes a more essential element of social life for Durkheim than it does for Marx. While both agree on the social origins of religion, they disagree on the fundamental role it plays. For Marx, religion arises out of the hitherto inevitable contradictions in society. When these contradictions are resolved, the need for religion will disappear. Durkheim, however, sees religion as the moral expression of significant social relations and consequently all societies will express these relations in a religious form. Durkheim emphasized the importance of religious symbolism in expressing the unconscious yet intimate relations that members of a society have with one another.

Weber is not as concerned in examining the origin and ultimate basis of religion as are Marx and Durkheim. In Weber's view, religion is primarily concerned with the quest for meaning and order which has consequences (intended and unintended) for the organization and constitution of social life. For Weber (as for Marx and Durkheim), "not ideas, but material and ideal interests directly govern men's conduct" (1970:280). Weber's main quarrel with Marx was directed primarily at Marxists who refused to recognize that ideal (read *moral* for Durkheim) interests often moved people to alter their material conditions. Weber was not arguing for the total autonomy of the ideological order from its material base but was simply pointing out that a person's image or conception of the world affects his response to

it. Moreover, this image is not, in Weber's view, only determined by material interests since material interests are themselves seen and expressed in ideal terms. Marx, Durkheim and Weber all agree that a person's position in the world (i.e., material interests) structures his conception of the world (i.e., ideology) which in turn shapes his responses to the world (i.e., conscious, purposive activity). They differ simply in the emphasis given to each of these three modes.

The theoretical model used in this study draws from the above tradition and views society as a system of culturally constructed material practices reproduced through communicative exchanges. This model sees culture and structure on the one hand, and ideology and practice on the other, as constituting one reality. Thus, attempts to separate meaning from organization or the ideological aspects of practice from the practical aspects of ideology are ultimately futile.

The emancipatory potential of critical reason has been a major theme of this classical sociological tradition and more recently, Jürgen Habermas has continued this interest in exploring how the structures of rationality constitute and organize social life. I use Habermas's work to investigate the notion of modernization in Zamora while recognizing that a critical consciousness and practical action proceed from different aspects of the social structure. Using the theoretical model indicated, I examine the problem of rationality and its relationship to the rationalization of social life in a society whose institutions have diverse power structures. Using Habermas's concept of communicative rationality, I show that Filipino peasants are as concerned to maintain conditions of unrestricted and rational discourse as they are to retain normative standards or to pursue strategic goals. Unrestricted discourse allows Zamorans to articulate values that underlie their normative expectations and constrain their strategic pursuits.

The possibilities for rational action in peasant societies obviously depend on both internal and external structures which control choices. These structures are neither uniformly constraining nor equally constraining on all aspects of actions. Thus choice may be constrained at the extradomestic level but open at the intradomestic level, or it may apply mainly to instrumental aspects (e.g., market exchange) and not to communicative or expressive aspects of action (e.g., religious practice).

The difficulty that social theory has had in conceptualizing the relationship between consciousness and structure (e.g., Giddens 1976, Tourraine 1973) is often due to the conflation of aspects of actions with their corresponding structures. Reason and its embodiment in structure (i.e., the process of rationalization) is, to use a mathematical metaphor, neither homogenous nor continuous. A major problem in social theory is to investigate the functional relationship between individual and social consciousness, and the nature of its discontinuity. It may be the case, as

Habermas indicates, that certain discontinuities are nonremovable, thus practical rationality does not generate structures because its institutional embodiment is undefinable. The rationalization of social life, as Weber understood it, is an attempt to remove these discontinuities. However, the persistence of practical-moral schemes of action like religion and other aspects of civil life shows that the gap between individual and collective rationality remains unbridgeable.

Society and Religion in Zamora

Although Christianity was first introduced in Zamora over 150 years ago and has, since then, exercised a considerable influence, certain aspects of the religious experience of its people have been relatively unaffected by it. The shortage of priests and the variable extent of colonial control only partially explain why some areas of religion have largely retained their indigenous characteristics. Essential features of Christianity like a supreme and ethical deity, an emphasis on spiritual merit and the transcendent, have remarkably little influence on people's religious practices and beliefs. In cases where Christian influence is strong, adherents are often those who have rejected more orthodox Christian denominations in favor of radical and separatist ones.

These features of religion in Zamora should be seen in an economic and political context characterized by shifting and diverse sources of patronage, the lack of an effective universal legal code with its agencies of implementation, and the necessity of maintaining a complex network of political alliances through a system of reciprocal and normative exchange based primarily on pragmatic and contingent considerations.

I argue that although these economic and political factors do not directly determine religious ideology, they favor and facilitate certain ideologies over others. People in Zamora who reject the dominant religious ideology are often those whose position within the traditional economic and political system has become increasingly more difficult and hopeless. While they are usually unable to alter their material conditions significantly, their new religious commitment offers them a satisfactory explanation for their poor situation in life.

The principal aim of this study is to show how religious practice and belief are firmly rooted in social relations. These relations often arise out of economic and political interests, but they are often defined in ideal or moral terms. Thus, although I agree with Marx (1976:38) when he says that "this state, this society produce religion," I disagree with its implication that its product (i.e., religion) must necessarily constitute "an inverted world consciousness." Marx's observations may be more applicable to societies with developed state institutions and whose religions stress spiritual merit and

the transcendent order (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, for example) than in a case like Zamora where political processes are comparably accessible and whose religious practice stresses contractual ties and an orientation to the present life.

Following Durkheim, I regard religion as a more essential component of social reality than what Marx implied. And like Weber, I believe that religion, among other things, satisfies the human quest for meaning and order at the level of nature and the cosmos. In Zamora, this quest for order has undergone several significant changes, in line with the economic and political fortunes of the municipality. Many of the forces of change affecting Zamora originate outside of it. Much of the local economy, local politics and even local religion are simply responses and adaptations to these external forces. As a consequence, the local ideological structure must be seen in relation to the wider structure, of which it is a part, to fully comprehend it.

However, despite the acceptance of Christianity in its several variants, essential features of the indigenous religious ideology have remained basically unchanged, e.g., the importance of ancestors and seniors, the emphasis on contractual relations, and the multiple sources of supernatural patronage.

This study discusses and explains why some indigenous religious elements like domestic rites have persisted, while others like public and communal rites have not. It also explains the varying degrees of success encountered by the Christian denominations in Zamora.

My immediate purpose is to show the links between religious ideology and its social substructure, i.e., make explicit the relations of inequality and exploitation that underlie much of the religious practice and belief. A second purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the substructure itself. In the words of Marx (1976:39),

Once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, the task is to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms—thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.

Institutionalized religion has been a major feature of Philippine lowland society since the arrival of the first Catholic friars in the sixteenth century. The formal and close links between Church and State existed throughout the Spanish colonial period from 1568 to 1896. These links were manifested at the level of the economy through Church control of the vast friar-estates (Roth 1977); at the level of the polity, through the institution of the *patronato real*, or the privilege exercised by the Spanish Crown to appoint Church officials in exchange for support of Church activities; and at the level of

ideological formation, through the Church's control of educational institutions.

The close articulation of Church and State interests had been so highly developed during the colonial period that even during the Revolution of 1896, the practical expediency of retaining these links was advocated by otherwise fervent anticlericalists (Majul 1967: 137-59). The eventual intervention of American colonialism imposed the separation of Church and State and finally broke the formal nexus between religious and secular interests. In its place, the Americans supported the notion of religious pluralism so long as the religious order recognized and accepted the authority of the State in national security. Catholicism quickly adapted to the new political conditions while a host of Protestant and nationalist sects spread throughout the country. Most of these latter denominations were accepted by the secular authorities, while those mainly of peasant origin were suppressed (Sturtevant 1976) because they often combined religious fervor with subversive secular ideals.

The close links between rebellion and religious dissatisfaction experienced throughout the Spanish colonial period were maintained well into the present century (Ileto 1975, Covar 1975, Shoesmith 1978, Pertierra 1983) and still characterize much of the discourse and rhetoric of radical and revolutionary movements.

However, beyond noting the historical, political and cultural significance of religion in the Philippines, there has been little systematic study of its role in the daily lives of ordinary Filipinos.

Earlier studies of religion in the Philippines have been marked by both methodological and theoretical weaknesses. These studies were often polemical justifications for a particular religion (e.g., Achutegui and Bernad 1961, Braganza 1965, Bulatao and Gorospe 1966, and Alonso et al. 1968), or they were conducted without a clearly articulated theoretical framework (e.g., Carroll 1970, Magannon 1972, Claver et al. 1973 and Lynch 1975). More recent studies have overcome some of these difficulties (e.g., Covar 1975, Ileto 1975, Sturtevant 1976, Love 1977, and Gonzalez 1985); these have shown the significant and complex links between religion and politics. My study of Zamora shows how religious practice at one level reflects and at another supports the secular order.

Writers such as Santa Romana (1955), Ellwood (1969), Lynch (1975), Covar (1975), and Love (1977) have discussed in other contexts some of the matters that I raise in this study, like the variable influence of orthodox Catholicism on ordinary rural Filipinos; the limited success of Protestant conversion, and the present role of radical and separatist sects. These writers, however, do not attempt to situate religion explicitly within a social structure wider than the community of believers. For them, religion consists of beliefs and practices with a life and character of their own, a phenomena

sui generis. I do not accord the religious life such a degree of autonomy and for this reason, I discuss religious practice in Zamora after I have described the major economic and political parameters that shape and limit its expression. This approach would only be complete if one situates Zamora within the national and international economic-political framework significantly affecting it. I shall only be able to indicate briefly some of these external factors: the role of external capital, the urban political bias, the importance of education, the growth of a national bureaucracy, the effects of migration.

For the immediate purpose of this study, I have imposed analytic boundaries limiting my choice and treatment of religion. These boundaries explain the emphasis and focus on local interpretations of religious orthodoxy and their links with elements of the local economy and polity. It is therefore not so much a study of village religion as it is of religion manifested at the village level.

Fieldwork

My treatment of religion has concentrated on aspects that are accepted and understood by a large majority of people—example of these aspects are the main calendric rites, healing rituals, life-crises rites—rather than present an account of religion as practised and understood by religious virtuosi, such as indigenous practitioners, local ministers, and/or theologically educated Catholics.

My interest in the external and accessible areas of religious life stems both from methodological and theoretical considerations. The limited time of fieldwork (sixteen months) and the practical difficulties of gaining acceptance into the community prevented me from acquiring the linguistic competence in Itneg, Kankanai and Iloko necessary to evaluate the highly abstract systems expounded by religious specialists. In addition to these methodological problems, my theoretical framework considers religion to be primarily a social phenomenon expressing collective ideas and practices rather than something expressing only an individual's theoretical reflections on the natural and transcendent orders. For these reasons, the more private and edifying aspects of religious experience in Zamora are not described in any detail.

The main period of fieldwork was from May 1975 to June 1976. An earlier visit of one month and a subsequent one lasting two months brought the total time in the field to just over sixteen months. Apart from short stays (one or two months) in the barrios of Ambugat, Dayanki and Macaoayan, most of the time was spent in Luna. This barrio is centrally located and allows easy walking access to most other barrios in Zamora.

To gain acceptance into the community, my wife and I helped teach

English and mathematics (part-time) at the local private secondary school; we also took a general interest in other aspects of education. However, the event that most facilitated our acceptance into the community was the birth of our first child. Many people saw this event as a confirmation of the strong ties we had developed in the municipality.

Our initial contacts with the community were mostly with its elite members—municipal and barrio officials, teachers and other professionals—but gradually, we established friendships with ordinary people in the local neighborhood and the barrio.

I began my research using both English and Tagalog but after a few months, made increasing use of Iloko. My understanding of Itneg and Kankanai was never more than rudimentary but most informants in the barrios where these are spoken are also fluent in Iloko.

Rationality and Social Change

In my fieldwork, like many anthropologists, I was struck by the uneven pace of social, political and economic change that affected the village. Certain areas of social life seemed remarkably resistant to outside influences, but other areas not only yielded to change: change was actively anticipated and promoted there. To give some examples: Catholicism as a religious ideology was available to most villages since the early 1800s, some accepted at least a nominal version of this religion while others doggedly resisted conversion to it well into the 1930s. And even then, they rejected Catholicism in favor of the recently introduced Protestantism. Among Catholics, certain areas of life like public rituals are heavily impregnated with Catholic practice while others like private-domestic rituals still retain much of their pre-Catholic orientation. In the sphere of politics, there is a similar incongruity: local or village politics appears to follow externally imposed forms—barrio captains, barrio meetings, etc.—but it often operates according to traditional lines: elders, ritual specialists, etc. However, in extravillage matters, people are highly attuned to the most recent political practices. They make extensive use of urban-based relationships and even anticipate radical political programs. In the sphere of production, a crop like rice is treated with extreme interest and concern: change and innovation in its production are not rejected but are subjected to great critical examination since it is the major subsistence crop. Other crops such as tobacco, maize, and cotton, however, are accepted or rejected with the equanimity and interest of a capitalist entrepreneur. In the legal and regulative spheres of village life similar discrepancies are encountered. The national law is applied under certain circumstances and ignored in others. Certain disputes are settled along customary lines while others are brought before the courts. The procedure preferred is determined by normative and strategic factors.

In the area of culture, a very large degree of acculturation is found in the villages. Gone are most of the traditional arts and crafts; radio and television sets are eagerly purchased whenever possible and people are aware of the latest city fashions in clothes and music. Yet even in apparently superficial matters like learning the latest dance steps, external influences are not simply being arbitrarily imposed on village culture. Selective forces are at work accepting certain behavioral modes, rejecting others, or adjusting them to suit local requirements. Barrio children, for instance, spend a considerable amount of their time at school learning the latest dance steps, but display their newly learned skills only under specific conditions like school programs. The latest dance steps are not integrated with the dancing repertory of adolescents or adults who retain the more traditional and modest demeanor expected at public dances. In other words, while a new behavioral orientation has been readily and willingly learnt—in the form, say, of a religion like Catholicism, or of new political affiliations, national legal norms, new productive techniques, or the latest cultural fashions—it is recontextualized to meet local conditions. The extent of this behavioral recontextualization depends on the degree of articulation between internal village structures and external forces at the provincial, national and international levels. It is this varying degree of articulation between village and external structures that explains the variable response of peasants to the technical, normative and strategic choices available to them. These typical observations lead many anthropologists to dispute theories of modernization that portray peasant society as static, conservative, and xenophobic or theories that fail to appreciate the variable response of the peasantry to forces and influences that seek a fundamental overthrow of the traditional order.

Within anthropology, there are two main approaches to the study of peasant societies: (1) moral economy (e.g., Scott 1976) and (2) political economy (e.g., Popkin 1979) approaches. Moral economists view peasants as largely homogenous, moral communities concerned with maintaining minimal subsistence levels for all their members. They see peasant traditions as adaptations to technological and environmental limitations; any threats to these traditions challenge the very existence of peasant life. The political economists, on the other hand, point out the heterogeneity and the self-interest found among peasants. In this view, peasants take risks if the calculated returns appear promising despite the existence of norms to the contrary. Political economists also point out that significant divisions characterize peasant society and the survival of the individual is not always the concern of the village community as a whole, that market forces and technical innovations that threaten traditional relations do not always have adverse effects for all peasants, and that poor peasants are often disenchanted with traditional village society because the traditional order did not

meet their legitimate expectations, not because their position has been worsened by the impact of a cash economy. In such cases, the movement from the village to the town may reflect not only the attractions of a modern economy but also the failure of the traditional economy.

Both of these approaches to peasant society have their merits. While peasants, like everyone else, often pursue their strategic interests, they also defend their deeply felt moral values. Purposive-rationality and value-rationality characterize peasant social life. What I wish to explore, however, is how these rationalities are responsible for the differential responses to social and technological forces currently acting on peasant society. To do this, I shall first examine the idea of rationality to see how it applies to cognitive structures, social relationships, and expressive states. Rejecting the more naive and simplistic aspects of modernization theory, social anthropologists have fallen back either on normative models like those advocated by the moral economists or on the strategic models by the political economists. This dichotomy, however, rests on a specific and restricted notion of rationality. The first unduly emphasizes value-rational action; the second considers only purposive-rational conduct. For this reason, I am attracted by the not yet fully developed concept of communicative rationality suggested by Habermas in his latest work, *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984). I am not claiming that peasant societies exemplify Habermas's concept of communicative rationality better than other societies. My present concern is to use this concept to examine the differential response to change in a peasant society and to supplement the existing concepts of peasant rationality.

Initial studies of the peasantry often portrayed village life as culturally and intellectually inferior to town life. Peasants were described as naturally conservative, inward-looking, and irrational. Judged by urban standards, peasant life was seen as changeless, archaic, and inefficient. Social change had to be imposed on the village and the response to drastic change varied from anomic resignation to violent, if usually ineffective, resistance. Modernization theories pointed out the distinctiveness of urban structures and their technical, moral, and rational superiorities (Weiner 1966). Peasants have to be "infected" with the need for achievement (McClelland 1966), this latter always being defined in instrumental terms. Institutions like formal schooling (Anderson 1966) and Western style of jurisprudence (Galanter 1966) are seen as typical examples of rationalized urban-based structures that have to be imposed on the less rationalized and by implication, the less rational village institutions. This rationalization of social institutions is seen as a necessary precondition for the adoption of technology and hence, a more efficient economy. The replacement of this urban perspective by one more sympathetic to village values challenged many of the earlier views on the peasantry. The moral economists have established that peasants act