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Conferences on the Cultural Minorities

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Notes & Comment

Conferences on the Cultural Minorities

At the Ninth Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference held in December 1965, discussion turned up many problems concerning the cultural minorities in the Philippines. Since many of those attending the conference were working among the various minority peoples, it was decided to hold a conference devoted exclusively to the cultural minorities and to exploring ways to relieve their plight. For although the Manahan Report (1963) contained much information, it was judged desirable to discover if the report was still valid and if the government had in the meantime initiated any program to solve the problems aired in the Report.¹

According to the 1960 census of the Philippines, there were over three million people of 53 ethnic groups who were considered members of cultural minorities. These people have their own customs, cultures, and languages. They may or may not have contact with the modern Filipino way of life. But to date they are not full participants in the social, economic, and political life of the country.

HISTORY

At the beginning of the American regime, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes was established. Its goal was to provide peace and order, especially in Mindanao among the Muslim groups and in the Mountain Province. Since the Americans felt that education was the solution to the problem, much time, effort, and money were spent for an education program. In 1957 the Philippine Government felt that the name "Non-Christian" should be removed, since many of the mi-

¹ Reference is to the Report on the Problems of Philippine Cultural Minorities, published in 1963 by the Senate Committee on Cultural Minorities, Philippine Congress.

nority peoples had been converted to Christianity, and the present Commission on National Integration was formed to continue the work of the older Bureau. The CNI's goal is "to render complete and permanent the integration of said minorities into the body politic."

In June 1965, Republic Act No. 1888 of June, 1957, the act creating the Commission on National Integration, was amended for the benefit of the cultural minorities. Protests were voiced against these amendments on the grounds that the minorities were being "pampered" and getting "preferential" treatment. But the legislation was a step toward the solution of their land problems.

SAGADA CONFERENCE

Against this background, the Sagada Conference on Cultural Minorities of Luzon and Mindoro met in Sagada, Bontoc, at St. Mary's High School. It was attended by 41 people interested in the different minority groups, including many articulate and knowledgeable members of these groups. Representatives of government and private agencies were also present at this and the Zamboanga Conferences. Food and lodging were paid for by the Agricultural Development Council for the four days from May 7 to 11, 1966. The conference was purposely not structured since it was the first of its kind and those present were not sure where interest and problems would lie. Area reports, in the light of existing government legislation and the Manahan Report, were presented on the Mangyan, Ilongot, Negrito, Dumagat, Gaddang, Isneg, Ifugao, Kalinga, Tinguian, and Bontoc peoples.

The reports revealed certain common problems centering around land, livelihood, health, education, and existing government policies. Some groups who were far removed from outsiders and had received help from private or religious agencies showed progress and adaptation to change, but these groups were a small percentage of the whole. Most of the cultural minorities face real and pressing problems which must be contended with now.

Land

One land problem reported was the state of the existing reservations for the cultural minorities, some sections of which have been occupied and cultivated by lowlanders. In one area, the squatters produced titles to land within the reservation. An agricultural school "borrowed" some reservation land; in exchange, members of the group occupying the reservation were to be given priority in enrolment and employment at the school. To date, not one has been enrolled in the school or put on its payroll. In other cases, land occupied by minority groups has been released to ranchers. In such areas the cows destroy the people's crops. Land grabbing by outsiders seems to be the order of the day.

With many of these groups, the land problem was seen to spring in part from the people's concept of land ownership. The people consider the land they traditionally use or inhabit as communal property, not "my land" but "our land," administered according to customary or traditional law handed down from their ancestors. Land titling is foreign to their way of thinking.

Livelihood

Most of the reports portrayed the people as living at a subsistence level. While a few are able to hire out to lowlanders or get government jobs, most are being exploited by the lowlanders and have incurred heavy debts. Insects, diseases, low productivity, and traditional methods of farming prevent a higher level of living. Much help is needed for these people who live close to nature and are dependent on its whims.

Health

Because of their subsistence level of living, the minority groups also have many health problems. Pulmonary tuberculosis, malaria, yaws, and skin diseases are common to all. There are a few cases of leprosy. Sanitation does not have a place in their lives because of ignorance of the causes of diseases. Home remedies are used to cure sicknesses. In many places, the Rural Health Units cannot reach the cultural minorities. Unfortunately, when the minority people come down to the health centers, medicines are not always available for them. Even in areas where modern medicine and doctors are becoming accepted, the expense is prohibitive.

Education

Some of the cultural minorities have had ample opportunities to attend schools. However, those who have graduated are unwilling to return to their own people, or if they do return, they consider such traditional means of livelihood as farming beneath their dignity. They themselves often become a burden to the community rather than a help. On the other hand, in remote areas it is very hard to get teachers, and the teachers often miss many days of school because of the time consumed in traveling back and forth from a semi-urban center. Furthermore, many students drop out because their parents cannot afford the expenses involved in schooling.

The CNI scholarship tests also came up for discussion. Many had no knowledge of these scholarship opportunities, and others did not know how the tests were conducted. There was evidence that some scholars passed not on *what* they knew but *who* they knew.

Government

Finally, many of the groups have been disappointed by government promises made but never fulfilled. Government laws and regulations are not understood. There is no available help to explain government processes. Government and police officials are looked on with suspicion and avoided where possible. It seems that the CNI itself has been hampered by red tape, lack of funds, and a dearth of competent personnel.

In spite of the mood of hopelessness and futility engendered by the area reports, members of the conference found encouragement in the work now being done by churches, schools, and private agencies. In order to explore solutions, members grouped themselves according to interest into five committees to discuss (1) land and livelihood, (2) definition of a cultural minority, (3) education, and (4) government and policies. The fifth committee was formed to plan and organize what was to be done with the findings of the other committees. Each group presented its findings to the whole conference for comments and suggestions. Then the committees met again to prepare a final version of their reports for approval by the body.

Suggestions

Among the more important suggestions of the different committees were the following:

1. Protection of the present reservations from encroachment by non minority persons and groups;
2. A survey of all lands occupied by cultural minorities;
3. Assistance to members of minority groups in the legal procedures necessary to title their land;
4. Inauguration of socio-economic development projects based on consultation with the minority groups involved, hence in harmony with their needs and feelings;
5. Adult literacy classes;
6. Adjustment of the school curriculum to the needs of the minority children;
7. Dissemination of information on the problems of the cultural minorities.

Before the members of the Conference dispersed, a committee was set up to plan another conference devoted to the minority groups in the Bisayas and Mindanao. This second conference was scheduled for July 5-8 at the Peace Corps Center, Ayala, Zamboanga, and was attended by 30 people.

ZAMBOANGA CONFERENCE

Drawing on the experience of the Sagada Conference, the Zamboanga Conference scheduled a program of reports structured around the problem areas of land, livelihood, health, and education. Transportation and peace and order were added to the list of topics. The reports included the Bukidnon Manobo, Cotabato Manobo, Negrito Tiruray, Bilaan, Muslims of Sulu, Higaonon, Yakan, Mandaya and Atá.

Problem areas

As at the Sagada conference, troubles appeared in all the problem areas. Many of the troubles were the same, but others came to light. Land problems reported were mostly over-logging and the intrusion of outsiders holding ranch concessions, and of squatters protected by politicians. In the area of health, along with the common diseases, there was frequent mention of intestinal parasites and goiter trouble. The belief of the people that sickness is caused by evil spirits or by their enemies often precludes the use of modern medicine and health practices.

The lack of transportation to and from market centers was reported to be a problem in some areas where the cultural minorities have cash crops. What few roads there are become impassable in times of heavy rainfall.

The lack of peace and order affects both the land and livelihood problems. Many fights and killings arise over land disputes and squatting. Since bandits and cattle rustlers with firearms roam unhindered, people are in danger of losing what little they possess. Furthermore, job opportunities are diminished because investors are afraid of this lack of security.

Suggestions

The committees made some suggestions other than those already made at the Sagada Conference. Among them were the following:

1. Development of cottage industries for the cultural minorities;
2. Establishment of credit unions and cooperatives;
3. Provision of some medical training for local *herbolarios* and midwives;
4. Endorsement of police reform bill pending in Congress in order to take political pressure off the police forces.

The members of both conferences expressed the view that education of the Filipino public about the problems of the cultural minorities must include education of the minority groups themselves as to their role in the life of the nation. They cannot remain isolated; they

have duties and obligations to the government and to their neighbors. In this spirit, assistance given them is not "charity"; rather its purpose is to help them integrate themselves into the modern and changing world here in the Philippines.

FORMATION OF AN ASSOCIATION

Many individuals have been working alone with little help and little success for the advancement of the various cultural minorities. The members of the Sagada and Zamboanga Conferences proposed the formation of a permanent association of these people and others interested in the achievement of the same aims. Such an association would provide both moral support and greater effectiveness. It would provide a clearing house for information and opportunity for the discussion of mutual problems and solutions. As a non-political organization, it could exert pressure on other agencies. Furthermore, funds and grants for surveys, studies, and projects might be made available to such an association.

National Conference

A national conference is planned in the near future to discuss ways to implement the suggestions of the Sagada and Zamboanga Conferences. The proposed association will be formed at that time. We hope and pray the national conference and formation of the association will be a success.

JOHN RICH

*Biological Aspects of Race**

The undersigned, assembled by UNESCO in order to give their views on the biological aspects of the race question and in particular to formulate the biological part for a statement foreseen for 1966 and intended to bring up to date and to complete the declaration on the nature of race and racial differences signed in 1951, have unanimously agreed on the following:

1 All men living today belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens*, and are derived from a common stock. There are differences of opinion regarding how and when different human groups diverged from this common stock.

* Reprinted from *The Unesco Courier*, April 1965 (18th year), pp. 8-11.

2 Biological differences between human beings are due to differences in hereditary constitution and to the influence of the environment on this genetic potential. In most cases those differences are due to the interaction of these two sets of factors.

3 There is great genetic diversity within all human populations. Pure races—in the sense of genetically homogeneous populations—do not exist in the human species.

4 There are obvious physical differences between populations living in different geographic areas of the world, in their average appearance. Many of these differences have a genetic component.

Most often the latter consist in differences in the frequency of the same hereditary characters.

5 Different classifications of mankind into major stocks, and of those into more restricted categories (races, which are groups of populations, or single populations) have been proposed on the basis of hereditary physical traits. Nearly all classifications recognize at least three major stocks.

Since the pattern of geographic variation of the characteristics used in racial classification is a complex one, and since this pattern does not present any major discontinuity, these classifications, whatever they are, cannot claim to classify mankind into clear cut categories; moreover, on account of the complexities of human history, it is difficult to determine the place of certain groups within these racial classifications, in particular that of certain intermediate populations.

Many anthropologists, while stressing the importance of human variation, believe that the scientific interest of these classifications is limited, and even that they carry the risk of inviting abusive generalizations.

Differences between individuals within a race or within a population are often greater than the average differences between races or populations.

Some of the variable distinctive traits which are generally chosen as criteria to characterize a race are either independently inherited or show only varying degrees of association between them within each population. Therefore, the combination of these traits in most individuals does not correspond to the typological racial characterization.

6 In man as well as in animals, the genetic composition of each population is subject to the modifying influence of diverse factors: natural selection, tending towards adaptation to the environment, fortuitous mutations which lead to modifications of the molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid which determine heredity, or random modifications in the frequency of qualitative hereditary characters, to an extent dependent on the patterns of mating and the size of populations.

Certain physical characters have a universal biological value for the survival of the human species, irrespective of the environment. The differences on which racial classifications are based do not affect these characters, and therefore, it is not possible from the biological point of view to speak in any way whatsoever of a general inferiority or superiority of this or that race.

7 Human evolution presents attributes of capital importance which are specific to the species.

The human species, which is now spread over the whole world, has a past rich in migrations, in territorial expansions and contractions.

As a consequence, general adaptability to the most diverse environment is in man more pronounced than his adaptations to specific environments.

For long millennia, progress made by man, in any field, seems to have been increasingly, if not exclusively, based on culture and the transmission of cultural achievements and not on the transmission of genetic endowment. This implies a modification in the rôle of natural selection in man today.

On account of the mobility of human populations and of social factors, mating between members of different human groups which tend to mitigate the differentiations acquired, has played a much more important rôle in human history than in that of animals. The history of any human population or of any human race, is rich in instances of hybridization and those tend to become more and more numerous.

For man, the obstacles to inter-breeding are geographical as well as social and cultural.

8 At all times, the hereditary characteristics of the human populations are in dynamic equilibrium as a result of this inter-breeding and of the differentiation mechanisms which were mentioned before. As entities defined by sets of distinctive traits, human races are at any time in a process of emergence and dissolution.

Human races in general present a far less clear-cut characterization than many animal races and they cannot be compared at all to races of domestic animals, these being the result of heightened selection for special purposes.

9 It has never been proved that inter-breeding has biological disadvantages for mankind as a whole.

On the contrary, it contributes to the maintenance of biological ties between human groups and thus to the unity of the species in its diversity.

The biological consequences of a marriage depend only on the individual genetic make-up of the couple and not on their race.

Therefore, no biological justification exists for prohibiting inter-marriage between persons of different races, or for advising against it on racial grounds.

10 Man since his origin has at his disposal ever more efficient cultural means of non-genetic adaptation.

11 Those cultural factors which break social and geographic barriers, enlarge the size of the breeding populations and so act upon their genetic structure by diminishing the random fluctuations (genetic drift).

12 As a rule, the major stocks extend over vast territories encompassing many diverse populations which differ in language, economy, culture, etc.

There is no national, religious, geographic, linguistic or cultural group which constitutes a race *ipso facto*; the concept of race is purely biological.

However, human beings who speak the same language and share the same culture have a tendency to inter-marry, and often there is as a result a certain degree of coincidence between physical traits on the one hand and linguistic and cultural traits on the other. But there is no known causal nexus between these and therefore it is not justifiable to attribute cultural characteristics to the influence of the genetic inheritance.

13 Most racial classifications of mankind do not include mental traits or attributes as a taxonomic criterion.

Heredity may have an influence in the variability shown by individuals within a given population in their responses to the psychological tests currently applied.

However, no difference has ever been detected convincingly in the hereditary endowments of human groups in regard to what is measured by these tests. On the other hand, ample evidence attests to the influence of physical, cultural and social environment on differences in response to these tests.

The study of this question is hampered by the very great difficulty of determining what part heredity plays in the average differences observed in so-called tests of overall intelligence between populations of different cultures.

The genetic capacity for intellectual development, like certain major anatomical traits peculiar to the species, is one of the biological traits essential for its survival in any natural or social environment.

The peoples of the world today appear to possess equal biological potentialities for attaining any civilizational level. Differences in the achievements of different peoples must be attributed solely to their cultural history.

Certain psychological traits are at times attributed to particular peoples. Whether or not such assertions are valid, we do not find any basis for ascribing such traits to hereditary factors, until proof to the contrary is given.

Neither in the field of hereditary potentialities concerning the overall intelligence and the capacity for cultural development, nor in that of physical traits, is there any justification for the concept of "inferior" and "superior" races.

The biological data given above are in open contradiction to the tenets of racism. Racist theories can in no way pretend to have any scientific foundation and the anthropologists should endeavour to prevent the results of their research from being used in such a biased way as to serve non-scientific ends.

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