

Policy-Driven Research, Audit Culture, and Power: Transforming Sociological Practices in the Philippines

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During the last few decades, universities in the South have increasingly been pressured to engage in policy relevant research and to produce knowledge that is useful for national development. Alongside this trend is the emergence of the audit/assessment culture and knowledge management systems among bi/multilateral institutions engaged in overseas development assistance (ODA) programs. Meanwhile, university ranking systems have also become central in the sets of policies and programs that institutions of higher learning have crafted in their push to become globally competitive. These processes have greatly transformed the key roles of universities and academic institutes in the South in reproducing as well as reconfiguring hegemonic practices in teaching, research/knowledge production, and community service. Taken together, these processes have transformed the structures of power within and across academic institutions in third world societies, in general, and of sociological practices, in particular.

With the increasing dominance of policy-driven research programs, universities in the Philippines, especially those in the national capital and major regional centers, have recalibrated their faculty incentive and promotion schemes related to teaching, research, and community outreach activities. Overall, these recalibrations of the structure of academic practice in higher education have transformed the social conditions of sociologists and their sociological practices. These internal changes also been largely influenced by the rise of mode 2 research (Gibbons et al. 2004). They observed that after World War II, there has been a tremendous growth and expansion of this type of research which saw the rise of trans-disciplinary research and the massification of experts in industry and civil society working with university-based experts.

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Given the above contexts, sociologists and their sociological practice, then, become part of the creation of new academic hierarchies and stratification schemes among social science practitioners who are either linked or not linked to the assessment culture of multilateral institutions and their allied consultants or research institutes based in the North. These processes have largely influenced the research policies of the top universities in the country who take the results of university rankings seriously while others who do not figure positively in these rankings find it convenient to ignore it.

This short piece is a preliminary examination of the consequences of: 1) the increasing demand for policy-driven research, 2) the importance given to university rankings, and 3) the rise of the audit culture both in academia and in multilateral institutions administering overseas development assistance programs, to the academic practices of sociologists in third world countries like the Philippines. This paper briefly discusses how sociological research and other professional engagements of sociologists have reproduced and reconfigured social hierarchies in the universities and the larger social science community. Thus, the paper highlights the increasing dominance of policy-driven research and the creation of hierarchies among sociologists, especially those based in elite universities located in the national capital compared to those in the regional centers and provincial capitals of the country. Their sociological practices are largely shaped by their universities' strong linkages (or lack thereof) to the policy-driven research agenda of multilateral institutions and the significance given by their academic institutions to the university rankings.

METHODOLOGY / DATA SOURCES

This short paper is based on following data sources: (1) a survey of annual research reports of major university-based research centers (1999-2009) and (2) summaries of annual faculty reports of three major universities in the Philippines. This database was supplemented with 20 key informant interviews of: (1) highly respected sociologists and social scientists affiliated with the Philippine Sociological Society and the Philippine Social Science Council, (2) research program officers of aid development agencies or bi/multilateral institutions, (3) bid development officers of consulting firms, and (4) academic-based consultants to multilateral institutions. This was also supplemented by the author's insider knowledge as Chairperson of the Technical Committee for Sociology and Anthropology (1997-2009) of the Commission on Higher Education of the Philippines. This technical body formulates and revises curricular

programs of the discipline as well as assesses the competency profiles of sociology programs in the country.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, UNIVERSITY RANKINGS, AUDIT CULTURE AND SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Harloe and Beth (2008) argued that in the West, science and knowledge production were instrumentalized for economic and military superiority, with universities increasingly expected to produce and disseminate knowledge that support the nation's competitiveness in a globalizing market. They further argued that, to a large extent, the decline in public funding for research owing to fiscal stress have increased the pressure and competition for resources among universities. In part, this trend led to the rise of mode 2 research, i.e., an increasing trend towards trans-disciplinary research done by experts in industry and civil society working with university-based experts (Gibbons et al. 2004). The importance given to university rankings that became increasingly dominant starting in the 1990s, in part, is a result of the competition for students and resources among universities in an increasingly globalized education sector.

Meanwhile, a policy-driven research agenda leads to increasing privatization and segmentation of knowledge production while creating new academic hierarchies that both reinforce and reconfigure old hierarchies within universities and across universities. This trend had also eroded the place of universities as traditional centers of epistemic cultures (Evers 2004). In the process, it also creates diverse mini-centers of knowledge production in universities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and consulting firms which are largely driven by research agenda of the state and multi-lateral agencies. In a sense, Mode 2 research in third world countries is illustrated by the increasing number of consultancy firms working with CSOs and university-based experts on contract research from both state and bi- and multilateral institutions. These processes have transformed sociological practices in universities in the South, especially for those academics and research centers who are linked with the assessment culture in the North, multi-lateral institutions and civil society organizations in the North. Meanwhile, academics who are not linked to the overseas development assistance networks do not have access to research opportunities offered by these external donor organizations.

By the 1990s, university ranking systems increasingly became a significant yardstick in academia, especially with the premium given to the internationalization criteria as a mark of quality among universities. Aside from an increasingly internationalized student population, this

ranking system highly privileges research and publication in internationally refereed journals. This system places academics in third world universities in a disadvantaged position for following reasons, namely: 1) these publications are heavily biased towards English language writers/speakers, 2) most of these refereed journals recognized by accreditation bodies and/or university ranking systems are based in English speaking countries, and 3) reviewers and editors of these journals are usually not in a position to appreciate issues and concerns coming from academics in most third world universities (Mills 2009; Porio 2009). Conversely, refereed journals considered in these rankings are mainly concerned with issues most relevant to the societies where these journals have been published, i.e., mostly in the North. Moreover, the current prestige ranking system of the journals is biased towards the natural sciences and those published in English-speaking journals (Mills, ISA e-bulletin). Thus, the chances for a third-world based journal like the Philippine Sociological Review (PSR) to be part of this list of internationally recognized journals considered in the university rankings is very slim.

The high premium accorded by academic administrators to university rankings has also led to the recalibration of faculty promotion and incentive schemes in universities. For example, the criteria of peer review or citations per faculty have led to the creation of university review committees that instituted policies to encourage faculty to publish in ISI or Scopus listed journals. These committees installed incentive structures like publication awards and cash prizes for publications in internationally refereed/recognized journals. These awards are often given in university-wide ceremonial rituals to publicize the importance of these activities, in the process affirming new normative standards for faculty performance. This stratifies faculty according to those who strive to publish in international journals to the detriment of local professional (i.e., discipline-based) journals because publication in the latter does not bring high economic incentives.

The policy-oriented research agenda of the third world state and allied bi/multilateral institutions further erode the weak position of academics in the South. Saddled heavily with teaching duties but poorly remunerated, research consultancies provide supplementary sources of income and provide scarce opportunities for research. The university ranking system emphasizes scientific publications or citations per faculty to underscore the scientific quality of institutions of higher learning. But the research opportunities available to sociologists mostly come from the assessment needs of overseas development assistance (ODA) programs which usually demand proprietary rights over the data and research out-

put. Therefore, getting a publishable output out of this type of research engagement is very low.

While university rankings put a premium on publications in internationally refereed journals, most of the research outputs generated by the audit culture of bi/multilateral institutions largely serve as inputs to the programmatic decisions of development managers in bi/multilateral institutions. To make these research outputs publishable in discipline-based journals need several revisions and iterations which third world academics do not have the resources nor time to be able to do it.

More importantly, university rankings do not really highlight the central focus of universities in the South. According to a former university president in the Philippines, the THES-QS University Rankings focus on graduate employability, peer review (citations per faculty), student faculty ratio but these do not deal with the total formation of students, that they become nurturing persons, life-long learners and heroic leaders, which is the need of the nation (Bernas 2007).

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

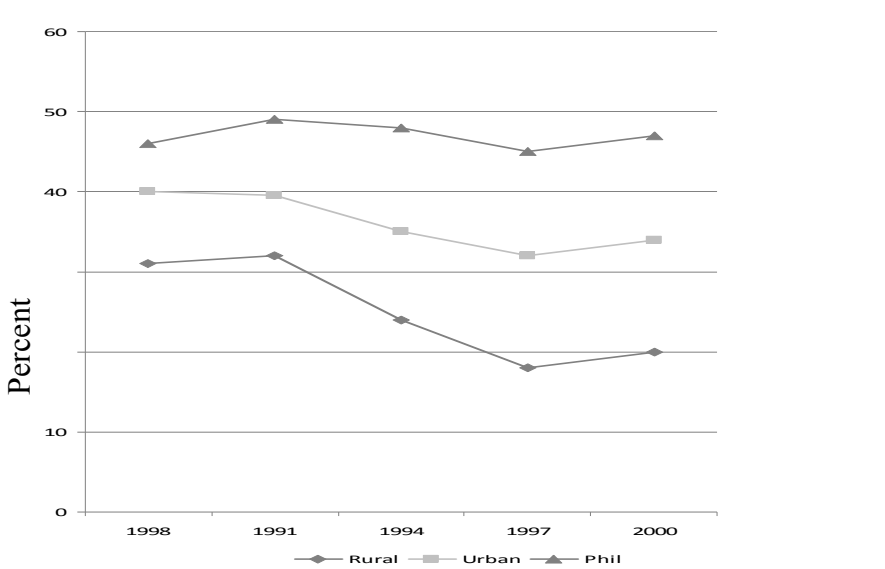
Sociological practices both in academic and non-academic contexts are largely shaped by the social, political, and economic conditions of the country. In third world countries like the Philippines, academics are under increasing pressure to produce relevant knowledge, i.e., useful for national development. This often comes in the form of policy and program driven research agenda on the part of universities, government research institutions, and multilateral institutions. How these forces have reconfigured academic structures and processes for sociologists in the Philippines have been primarily mediated by the highly unequal social structure confronting universities and research institutes.

Philippine education, in general, and sociological practice, in particular, faces several constraints and challenges. In general, institutions of higher learning whether they belong to the public or private sector are confronted with the scarcity of education resources. The scarcity of resources available for research can be gleaned from the following three tables. Most of resources invested in education in the Philippines are heavily concentrated in teaching resources, facilities, and physical infrastructure. Very little, if any, is left for research.

Figure 1 below shows that almost half of the Filipino families have incomes below the poverty line of US\$ 1 per capita per day. The incidence of poverty among rural Filipino families is much higher compared

to their counterparts in the urban areas. Thus, those academics in rural, provincial or peripheral areas of the Philippines would be largely disadvantaged in terms of accessing opportunities for education and training. Moreover, most academic institutions located outside of the national capital would be focused on creating or responding to the credentialing needs of their student population.

Figure 1: Trends in prevalence of poverty among Filipino families, 1988 to 2000



Source: <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/poverty/2000/povertyprov.asp>

In the Philippines, the institutions of higher learning are dominated by the private sector (80 percent) and only a small percentage (20 percent) of colleges and universities are supported by the state (see table 1 below). But even state-supported institutions have minimal, if any, budgets for research. Most privately-owned institutions are operated like education enterprises where profits for the owners or shareholders is a major concern, so very little is devoted to research and publication related activities. Besides, most of these institutions have neither the professional expertise nor the physical infrastructure to conduct research.

Table 1. Distribution of Public and Private Colleges/Universities in the Philippines

Public	20%
Private	80%

Like those in other developing countries, institutions of higher learning in the Philippines do not get much resource support from the state. The meager education resources for higher education are primarily devoted to supporting teachers' salaries, teaching facilities, and other needed physical infrastructure. In general, this resource situation holds true both for higher institutions of higher learning in the public and private sector. With the exception of the top 1 percent of the universities in the country, most academics are heavily saddled with teaching duties and have no time and resources left for research and publication.

With the institutions of higher learning having very minimal access to funding support for research, academics become highly vulnerable to research consulting opportunities offered by overseas aid development agencies (e.g., Asian Development Bank, World Bank, European Union, and the United States Agency for International development or USAID), needing exploratory studies and evaluation or assessment of their existing policies or programs. In the Philippines, most of these opportunities are only accessible to academics in top universities in the national capital or in major regional centers.

Table 2 shows Burawoy's (2004) scheme of sociological practice which was modified by Bautista (2006) for application to the Philippine sociological community. The effect of a policy-driven research agenda on the part of the state and multilateral institutions is illustrated in the dominance of policy sociologists engaged in participatory-oriented research and development work. This is also affirmed by the 2004 Survey of Social Science Practitioners undertaken by the Philippine Social Science Council, where the majority of sociologists were mostly based in academic institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs). Moreover, because of the shortage of highly trained sociologists, there is a blurring of boundaries of engagement among the different arenas of sociological engagements. Academic-based professional sociologists often are also involved in extra-academic activities like policy and participatory development-oriented research.

Table 1: Context and Typology of Philippine Sociologies (Burawoy 2004 modified by Bautista 2006)

Knowledge / Audience	Academic	Extra-Academic
Instrumental	Professional	Policy/Participatory Development/Action-Oriented
Reflexive	Critical	Public

Distribution of Social Science Practitioners in the Philippines (2004)

Public/ Gov't.	24%
NGOs/CSOs	26%
Teaching/ Academic (includes research and consultancy)	43%
Research	7%
Total	100%

Source: Survey of Social Science Practitioners, Philippine Social Science Council

SEGMENTATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

As mentioned earlier, research/consultancy contracts generated by the audit or assessment culture of bi/multilateral institutions primarily serve the latter's policy/program agenda. These research contracts provide proprietary restrictions to the data sets and research reports produced by the project; so, more often than not, these outputs usually end up in the office/library shelves of program managers and multilateral institutions. If these reports are published, these usually come under institutional authorship. At best, publication and dissemination of research findings coming from this genre is very limited to a particular audience or readership. They are hardly accessible to university libraries and other public institutions.

Since most elite universities are located in the national capital, research consultancies and/or commissioned studies of the government and bi/multilateral institutions are usually given to the academics in these institutions. In the same manner, research institutes in the North commissioned by multilateral institutions to manage global or regional research projects would recruit their national counterparts from these elite institutions. In turn, these national-capital based researchers would recruit regionally based academics/researchers to support the local data collection activities. What results is a chain of research networks starting from the metropolitan centers of first world countries to the national capitals and regional centers of third world countries. This chain of relationships highlights the dimensions of metropolitan provincialism and provincial cosmopolitanism in global-local knowledge production (Ribeiro 2006).

The above set of relationships among global-national-local researchers is clearly illustrated in the research reports published by journals of academic-based research institutes outside of Metro Manila. These research articles and reports showed that : 1) the substantive foci of these research outputs originated from the research agenda of bi/multilateral institutions, and 2) they were mostly part of a larger national or global research project administered by a university research institute based in the national capital or in a research institution in the North.

Academic sociologists in elite institutions located in the national capital are usually the ones who also provide leadership in professional associations and in the technical panels or committees organized by the government to set the standards of the discipline. Often these individuals are the same professionals who are recruited to evaluate government programs supported by bi/multilateral institutions administering overseas development assistance programs. Thus, the interlocking networks of power work to the disadvantage of academic sociologists in the regional centers or provincial capitals.

DE-CENTERING OF UNIVERSITIES AS CENTERS OF EPISTEMIC CULTURES

Another effect of the rise of mode 2 research is that increasingly, most of the research activities are carried out by consulting firms, research institutes not associated with university instructional programs. Dieter-Evers (2000) argued that the rise of mode 2 research has also seen the displacement of universities as centers of epistemic cultures. More and more of the knowledge production activities have increasingly come under the domain of consulting firms, industry consultants, and CSO-based re-

searchers working with a handful of university-based experts. The last two decades or so in the Philippines have seen the emergence of many externally funded university-based research centers or research clusters that have no direct relationship to instructional programs. In the same manner, many NGOs have also established research centers to respond to the assessment needs of bi/multilateral institutions. Some illustrative examples are the research institutes established specializing in women and gender issues, environmental resources, climate change, etc.

RECONFIGURING ACADEMIC HIERARCHIES WITHIN AND ACROSS UNIVERSITIES

Within the university system, faculty promotion and incentive structures have accommodated the demands of policy-driven research agendas of the state and of multilateral institutions. Prior to the ascendancy of externally funded research programs, consultancies of faculty were not given much value. But during the last few decades, much prestige/recognition is accorded to professors who can generate their own research funds or bring huge grants from external sources, usually from overseas development agencies. Thus, research-based contracts have lately gained acceptability in favor of the faculty who can bring funds to the university. In some cases, senior faculty members are de-loaded for research with the younger faculty taking over the former's teaching duties.

The influence of the research agenda of donor agencies on universities is also reflected in how degree programs have been created to support the policy agenda of donor agencies. Examples of these are: Master of Arts in Reproductive Health and Master of Arts in Gender and Sexuality, to name a few. The drive to obtain external funds for research from donor agencies have also highlighted the competition or "turfing" of certain research niches/areas among universities and their faculty. Because of the premium given to applied aspects of knowledge production by donor agencies, university-based research institutes often craft consortia relationships and partnership with NGOs. To a certain extent, this has eroded the university's privileged role in knowledge production and transmission.

In academic circles in the Philippines, the contradictory demands for policy relevant research and the publications rating system of universities (i.e. ranking of universities and research/publications in ISI or Scopus listed publications) have confronted university administrators with a serious dilemma. Do they encourage their faculty to engage in policy-research driven agenda that cater to national development needs but do

not lead to publications in internationally refereed journals? But academics in the South have very limited choices in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The increasing dominance of policy-driven research and the rise of the audit system in overseas development assistance and universities have resulted in the reproduction and recalibration of academic practices and hierarchies of power between universities in the North and South and within and across universities in the Philippines.

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