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Dialectical Historical Materialism

An Effective Tool for Authoritarian Politics, Dominance
and Control in the Archipelago

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For many years Marxism has been the dominant ideology among dissent in the archipelago. It is a convenient tool utilized by social movements, civil society, scholars, academics and even a few government agents. This framework deeply influenced the way we view our history and alternatives. Its evolutionary logic provides certain analysis and proposes sets of actions and alternatives.

Historical accounts showed that *resistance* is not new to indigenous communities in the archipelago. Our ancestors were not dumb; indigenous people do not need to borrow ideas from the west to realize their own situation. Indigenous communities have mechanisms designed to protect and sustain their existence, culture and well-being.

Resistance that led to violent confrontation and war in different regions of the archipelago was complex. Every resistance has a peculiarity based on its context, culture and time. But statist politics became the dominant framework among those who have challenged the status quo. Because *dominance* is the very nature of the state. This kind of politics greatly affected the conduct of local dis-

sent which led to the establishment of republican and leftist institutions.

Marxism in the archipelago, which you today refer to as the “Philippines”, has many variations. Like the dominant religions, Marxism produced a variety of thinkers, ideologues, politicians, activists and even faith-based groups and individuals. Dialectical historical materialism (DHM) is one of Marxism’s fundamentals to analyze a society. This is widely criticized for putting heavy emphasis on economy. It reduces the societies through a focus on economic progress and sets the bench mark of development with the system and scale of production and accumulation of material wealth. It inevitably disregards other essential aspects of society by elevating some class into the pedestal of revolution.

It is said that capitalism will prepare the material and social capital for the establishment of socialist society. Since workers are the primary force of production of a capitalist society, Marxists believe that the proletariat will lead the revolution with the aim to establish a “dictatorship”.

Social revolution is a process of overhauling social relationships that reinforce inequality, social injustice, environmental destruction and patriarchy. This process can only be realized if heterogeneous agents of society participate. The workers’ role is to liberate themselves from the chains of capitalism; women should act against patriarchy; other sectors and classes must do their share for social change by acting directly in their interests. Social revolution will not take place if the people’s mode of thinking is generally respectful to the institutions that reproduce and reinforce rules that define property, ownership, privileges, roles and power. Putting a particular class or group into a pedestal of power is another form of hierarchy and therefore invites privilege and the centralization of power.

In relation to this criticism, I would like to reiterate that the *dialectical process* is *hierarchical*. It is no different from the band-tribe-chieftdom-state model pioneered by the archeologist Elman

Service, which refers to the hierarchical progression of society. It presents an evolutionary process of community from simple stateless egalitarian indigenous organizations like bands and tribes into chiefdoms and states, which are generally characterized by central power, uniformity and non-egalitarianism. The Marxist evolutionary model of the authoritarian left in the Philippines is consistent with this model. To apply this in our context, the indigenous communities “discovered” by Magellan in Leyte were supposedly primitive, inferior, savage, wild, ignorant and in need to be tamed.

Spain, according to the DHM model, was a feudal society governed by a King. Based on historical accounts, Philip had no intention of conquering the archipelago, it was an enterprise and he was in business with Magellan. They had a contract that defined every party’s obligations and shares.

The word “primitive” is in most cases used with prejudice by referring to traditional cultures as underdeveloped. There are hosts of communities that maintained their indigenous ways of life because they chose to protect and defend their culture by practicing it, by reproducing, innovating and improving it. They sustained their existence not because they were left out of social progression, as presented in the chiefdom model or the dialectical historical tool. Their resilience is attributed to their love of freedom and self-determination. Most of indigenous communities consciously maintained their cultures. Like any organization, they had mechanisms to protect their well-being by continuously doing things based on their customs and indigenous ways. Like the indicator of a healthy ecology, they were highly diverse and their systems myriad. Their commonality was a decentralized pattern of politics and of managing resources. Communities were autonomous and generally have horizontal social relations. The indigenous communities of the archipelago still live according to these principles.

Electricity, gadgets, cars, groceries, malls, appliances, bombs, cannons, nuclear power and arms, churches, guns and bullets do not exist in the remaining stateless societies. They lack sophisti-

cated technology and material culture in the same way they lack hunger, poverty, crime, ecological destruction, forced labor and different kinds of abuse and exploitation and social issues attributed to large-scale, centralized power, to authoritarian, consumerist and patriarchal modern societies.

For sure, indigenous communities are not perfect, but the imperfections are far less destructive than systems of states, corporations and churches that instigate war, exploitation, environmental destruction, hunger and poverty through the control of centralized political power. Since the common interest of organisms is to secure their existence, I could say indigenous communities are more developed and advanced because they are more sustainable than modern institutions, which are in constant struggle for dominance and aiming for infinite growth, which is totally inconsistent to ecological systems and the self-determination of communities.

I heard several times that what Marx did in his DHM was to interpret history. I agree. But you and me, we can also have our own reading. I would say that the evolutionary approach is not suitable to analyze our local context. Based on historical accounts, the indigenous organizations did not evolve into states but were rather coerced to adopt centralized patterns of organization such as states, churches and corporations.

Autonomous/indigenous resistance was the resistance staged by different communities and tribes throughout the archipelago. These were anti-colonial in nature and aimed to re-install their indigenous ways of life. Among them were Magat Salamat, Tamblot, Tapar, Bancao, the Mandayas, the Ifugao, Zambal, and others. In the perspective of statist, their initiatives will be labeled “primitive”.

DHM’s hierarchical process downplayed societies they considered part of a “lower” evolutionary process and treated them as underdeveloped and in need of evolving into higher form. I am not really sure whether they treated poverty, environmental degrada-

tion and social injustice as pre-requisites for their imagined perfect society.

Diversity, horizontality and spontaneity are the very foundation of life; ergo, life on earth will not flourish through singularity but rather through a multitude of systems that are interdependent, directly and indirectly connected to one another. No life on earth is guided by a systematic plan and a singular direction. Life on earth thrives due to an ending process of evolution of conflict and cooperation.

Our modern age is characterized by centralized politics; an approach that is seeking an absolute truth which aims to establish uniformity and singularity; a framework that is totally opposite to the foundation of life, i.e., diversity, heterogeneity and tolerance.

Institutions such as states, markets and churches exist due to a particular objective. They are designed to ensure obedience, submission and control.

You may observe that we are experiencing environmental destruction, discrimination, war and exploitation. It occurred due to anthropocentrism. Humanity’s domination and control over one another and the earth resulted in the destruction not only of our diverse systems and cultures but also of our very own habitat.

One will notice that DHM’s logic is not only hierarchical but also reinforces uniformity. It is supposed to promote freedom, and many leftist revolutionaries believe this. But its singular and hierarchical direction inevitably discriminates societies that are not Eurocentric and that oppose systems of industry, market, democracy and one-God-based spirituality. DHM replicates oppressive systems. We have seen this in various places that have adopted Marxism.