

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION MEMOIR

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When I was a kid and started to talk and understand the meaning of each word I heard from other people starting with my parents, my siblings and my playmates, I dreamed about myself as a successful individual in different fields. One day, I was acting like a doctor using my older siblings as my sick patients after my mother and I had been to our local clinic for my required vaccination. On the next day I joined my father on our farm; I was very excited to see our farm animals like the newly born calf breastfed by its mother and on the other side of the farm was our piggery with some piglets that I tried to count but I kept forgetting the next number. There were also several hens followed by a group of five to ten chicks but I could not identify their sexes and also some roosters which I sometimes imitated how they crow roaming around the farm. As my father at that time would hear my little voice trying to crow like a rooster, he would burst into laughter and would come to me and lift me up with his arms saying, “I think you will be a good farmer one day.”, and without hesitation I would just reply to him with a big “yes”. My ambition in life or what I should become in the future had a great influence on these simple interactions with my parents. As the Mead’s stage of development explains, I prepared myself for my future life by imitating what I saw other people doing just like the cheerful doctor who gave me the vaccine shot. Although I did not often play as a doctor, this idea or the picture of me treating and helping patients was stuck in my mind as I grew up and made me believe that this would become a reality one day. On the other hand, my father’s advice to me being a future farmer made me believe in myself that I could do multiple things. Like in the looking glass theory mentioned, his perception of me increased my self-confidence.

With these great ambitions that were formed during my childhood, I came to realize that they were far beyond reach as I entered school. My parents sent me to a public school that was

almost a thirty-minute walk from our home. At school, most of my classmates lived in the same town and their fathers work on farms as well. In one of our classes, our teacher asked us to go to the front and state what we would like to become in the future. One by one, my classmates stood up in front of the class. I heard that most of my male classmates wanted to be a farmer just like their fathers and I wondered why. I asked myself, did my classmates never go to the local clinic and meet this cheerful doctor? Did they never have a chance to talk to the police officer who always smiles and helps us every morning cross the street a few blocks away from the school? I may not have come up with the correct answer to my own question before but now I can come to the conclusion that my former classmates lacked socialization. It seems that their interaction with other people was limited only to their parents or family and restricted them from knowing the perceptions of others and to having a wider understanding about themselves. My turn came to go in front of the class to share what I would like to become in the future. At first, I was thinking to conform with the majority of my classmates but then the cheerful doctor in our local clinic popped up in my head and helped me decide what I wanted to tell them. Without hesitation and with much confidence, I proclaimed that I wanted to be a doctor. All of a sudden, all of my classmates turned quiet and all their eyes were on me with some kind of disapproval. After a while, my teacher asked me in her controlled voice, “Do your parents own the farm that they are working on?”. I did not know how to answer my teacher as neither my parents nor my older siblings ever told me a thing about the farm if our family owned it or not. My teacher continued even without my answer to her first question. She explained, “To become a doctor, you are required to spend many years in college which mean your parents should have a great source of income to support you.”

At this early stage of my life, my mind was awakened to the reality that my family's financial resources could not afford to send me to school to become a doctor as our farm was owned by a bourgeoisie who lived in another town and my parents were just proletariat like the other families in our community. Although it was hard for me to accept the fact that my childhood dream to become a doctor was dismissed at an early age, I accepted the explanation just like a positivist does that to become a doctor was not meant for me because of the social class of my parents. However, learning my family's social status from my school teacher that time never put me down and I never incorporated this fact in to myself but instead thought of it as a temporary status. Because of this financial limitation of my family, I became hungry to seek as much knowledge as I could as this was the only way I thought that I would be able to mobilize vertically the social standing of my family from lower class to middle class or upper middle class. At school, I competed with other students to be always top of my class which I never failed to do. Every commencement ceremony, my mother would always come on stage to receive my medals in recognition of my academic excellence. From being known as a son of a proletariat, I became known in our community as a consistent honor student (master status). Looking back to this moment of my life, it never occurred to me that I was viewing my social environment from a conflict perspective rather than believing in myself or having a very clear self-concept that I could do many things that were not associated with being a farmer's son.

In 2003, around one year after graduating from college with the help of a scholarship grant by one of the government offices in my country, I was given a chance to work for the first time overseas. I secured a two-year contract to work in a manufacturing company in Taiwan as a factory worker. Though the job was not relevant to what I studied in college, I accepted it as it became a norm already in my country to supply highly educated laborers (e.g. maid, caregivers,

factory workers, etc.) around the globe. In fact, my two older sisters were already working as maids in Hong Kong at that time even though they were licensed school teachers in my country. It was kind of an easy decision also for me to accept this job offer due to cultural reasons. As part of our deep culture or as a family value, older siblings need to support the education of their younger siblings by all means possible as we all understand our parent's social status. This was a kind of unspoken courtesy to our parents by sharing the responsibility to provide education to their children.

On my first day at work in Taiwan, I felt that I was already outside my comfort zone. Communication was so challenging due to the fact that most of the people in the company spoke their own language, mandarin, and few of them could barely speak the international language, English. Nevertheless, I re-socialized with my new environment in order to cope. I studied their language and learned the basic words which were useful in my work. Changing some of my self concepts to fit in was necessary especially since I had this two-year contract to finish. Accepting the fact also that I was not a local in this country limited me to get the additional benefits given by the company that the local employees were receiving even though we were doing the same job. Because of my ethnicity, I was limited to work in this company that hired me for the rest of my stay in Taiwan and did not have any kind of freedom to work with another company. However, as a Filipino citizen working in Taiwan we get more respect from Taiwan citizens compared to other nationalities working there such as Thais and Indonesians. This may be due to the fact that we try to fit into their culture including by adopting some of their religious beliefs so we can gain their trust and we can survive in this country.

My experience in Taiwan was not comparable with my experience living and working in a Middle East country. It was in 2006 that I moved from Taiwan to Dubai to look for a new and

better job opportunity. With a lot of hope and ambitions in me, I never expected the tremendous amount of racial discrimination that would welcome me in this newly created city in the Arabian Peninsula. Even though racial requirements are not published in any job advertisements, I quickly came to know that jobs were categorized according to race despite the fact that you have all the necessary documents that you need to work in any position that you want and most importantly the required experience. As I learned, most of the top management positions of most companies were usually given to white races predominantly from United Kingdom or from European countries. Asians like me were limited to service oriented jobs or blue-collar jobs like sales retail, food servers, cashiers, hotel staff and construction workers. Government offices are run by locals only and they have no intention to hire other nationalities unless it is for a consultant position. However, as a Filipino in Dubai, my choices of jobs were far better than nationalities from South Asia like India and Pakistan even though we fall into the same race. Filipinos were given more preference by local employers to work in a better environment like in five-star hotels or in shopping malls while Indians and Pakistanis work mostly in construction sites where weather conditions are the worst especially during summer. Racial discrimination in Dubai never discouraged me to pursue the search for the right job for me or forced me to go back to my country where there is equal opportunity. At the right time, I found a logistics job in an international retail company (a French based company) that never considered my race or ethnic background as a requirement for the job but instead judged me based on my knowledge and my skills. I enjoyed so much working in this company because of its intolerance to any kind of racial discrimination. I stayed there for almost eight years before deciding to move out from Dubai by fall 2015 and to fulfill my dream to be part of the Canadian society.

Being single as a marital status gave me great power and freedom to decide quickly about what I want to do in my life. Without any commitment, my plan to move to Canada was easily finalized as I did not need to get any permission from anyone. I decided on my own that I did not need to discuss the consequences of this move or balance my decision in anyway as no one would be affected except myself. My singleness gave me more edge compared to my friends who were married and who wanted to move from Dubai to other countries. They usually complained to me that they would have heated discussions with their partners whenever they raised the topic of moving out from Dubai. Others would think that they would break their families into pieces considering that their partners or children would be left behind.

On the other hand, being part of the male kingdom of the human species has given me more control and independence over the way I run my life. My male sexuality that is rooted in my great bond with my father has made me a decisive person. I have witnessed his strong character many times when dealing with problems and making the final decisions, either family related or about the farm, which I think influenced me a lot. I learned about my sexual orientation mostly with him because he usually brought me to the farm. In the farm, he taught me a lot about male stuff like how to ride on the back of a cow, how to chop wood using an axe bigger than me, showed me some techniques to catch fish in the river and many more. However, my mother played her part also to balance my gender orientation. While my father taught me how to be tough and strong, she guided me how to show respect to the opposite sex like my older sisters and other chores normally intended for the female group. My mother taught me how to do household chores like cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning the house and doing the laundry. I remember that whenever I complained about doing this stuff, she would always tell me, “Women would prefer more to marry men who can put food on the table and at the same time

who can prepare a meal for their family.” This kind of upbringing that my parents gave me never confused me about my true sexual identify. As an interpretive individual would do, I would consider that being able to perform both gender roles is an asset and helps me better understand both sexes.

The person that I have become today is the result of diversified factors that I have been exposed to. Beginning from the significant people, mainly my parents, that greatly influenced me in recognizing my real self. They help me identified where I should belong in terms of my sexual orientation and perform the associated gender role based on the norms or expectation of society. My experiences in socializing with multi-race individuals from Asia with different culture backgrounds to elite and ethnocentric races from the west of the globe have made me bullet-proof from any racial discrimination including their judgements and perceptions to my race. Living in different countries with different cultures, religions and norms has further expanded my understanding about myself and the social environment. It has helped me rebuild my self-concept by resocialization; adopting some of their traditions and discarding some of my obsolete beliefs. In conclusion, the society that I am living in continues to influence who I am today and what I become in the future, either it will change me to become a better person or the opposite. In return, I consciously or unconsciously contributes to the process of remolding or rebuilding the society that will later impact my life again. Thus, this whole cycle and the relationship of between society and individuals is what they called sociology.

Reference

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