

## THE STORY OF BAGUMBAYAN AND THE EMERGING FILIPINO IDENTITY

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### ABSTRACT

**T**his paper asks a simple question: Does the traditional understanding of the Filipino story possess the imagination to help us face the challenges of the new millennium? In order to answer this question, this essay will examine the prospect of the contemporary Filipino story against the story of Bagumbayan. This Filipino word come from the phrase Bagong Bayan which literally means 'New Country' or 'New Town.' As a metaphor for our own story as a people, it can be interpreted in two ways: One is the road to Bagumbayan which represents the nationalistic story and is the fulfillment of our yearning to be an independent nation-state. The other is the road from Bagumbayan which represents the diasporic story, the current scattering of Filipinos all over the world.

This paper argues that the latter now supplies us both with the language and discourse of who we are, how we see ourselves, how we reproduce our communities, how we reclaim ourselves, and how we reconstruct our communities. In short, how we live.

A lot has been written about the Filipino Story, that is, the "national" version in the past one hundred years or so. To today's generation, much of it seems irrelevant or obscure, often because it is based upon tacit assumptions of a paradigm. I use the term paradigm in a Kuhnian sense, that is, a body of theoretical ideas that serves to define how we view the Filipino national story, how we go about studying it, and how we interpret research findings. One of Kuhn's concerns is to examine any paradigm as having a structure—the social, institutional, and historical conditions underlying the basis of knowledge. His other concern is to challenge the common belief that a paradigm advances incrementally and cumulatively (Kuhn, 1962). To Kuhn, any reigning paradigm will eventually be overthrown and replaced by a

new paradigm, hence, a "paradigm shift." Thus, my goal for this essay is to attempt a critical review of the traditional interpretation of the Filipino Story and to put forward an alternative interpretation which represents a paradigmatic shift in the way we view the Filipino Story.

To begin, this essay asks the questions: Does the traditional understanding of the Filipino Story hold the capacity to lead us into the next millennium? Does it still possess the imagination to help us confront the challenges of a new dispensation? We all know enough from recent years that we have become increasingly aware of the rapid transformation overtaking the world. As we approach the new millennium, old ideas and assumptions about our individual as well as collective relationships and experiences seem less and less useful. With accelerating global migration of both population and capital engendered by changes in communication and information technology, notions about ourselves and our identities in "old world" as

well as "new world" are similarly under scrutiny.

Curiously enough, in order to understand these questions, I wish to argue that if the Filipino Story is to maintain its vitality in the future, we must chart new directions and develop the critical constructs necessary to face the world that now confronts us or risk the fate of becoming an official paradigm legitimating the ancient regime (old order). Of course, there is nothing new to the constant challenge of "housecleaning," of throwing some and keeping some; this is a central problematic in the study of society. What is new, however, is the understanding of the dynamics of identity breakdown and formation as individuals and groups create new identities as they are caught in a maelstrom of social change where old institutions are rendered irrelevant and obsolete. And yet, these dynamics must not be construed as outright rejection of traditional thinking. It is, rather, an acknowledgment of the value of traditions that invites us to reflect on what hap-



pened to us, more so, what lies ahead of us.

Faced with these difficult questions, I wish to adopt a particular terrain, a particular vocabulary, which will allow us to narrate a distinctive story and hence, an identity. I wish to argue that to understand the contemporary Filipino story is to understand the story of Bagumbayan. The term comes from the Filipino word "Bagong Bayan" which literally means New Country or New Town. It came to be known as Bagumbayan because of the inability of the Spaniards to pronounce the *ng* and hence, "Bagum" rather than "Bagong." But most importantly, Bagumbayan is the location where Jose Rizal, the national hero, was executed before a firing squad for alleged treason against the Spanish rule. Bagumbayan provided us a martyr, an icon who composed to us both in life and in death a paradigm of our national struggle which structured our distinct political and national identity.

There are two ways of interpreting Bagumbayan. One,

is the road *to* Bagumbayan which leads us to the establishment of our Filipino nationhood. According to this view, Bagumbayan represents the "arrival," the epitome of our yearning to forge an independent Filipino nation-state. It answers the question: What happened to us? The other, is the road *from* Bagumbayan which leads to more roads ahead, perhaps, uncharted waters that Filipino travelers navigate. According to this view, Bagumbayan represents the "departure," or paradigm shift that allows us to reconstruct a more open and flexible identity. It answers the question: What lies ahead of us?

### The Road to Bagumbayan

A close reading of the origins of the Filipino modern state reveals a European mold, a system of thought articulated by Enlightenment *philosophes* like Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Condorcet. They held firmly to the conviction that the mind can comprehend the universe and subordinate it to

human needs. The ideas of the *philosophes* dominated the intellectual movement of pre-Revolutionary France. However, it was the French Revolution in 1789 that signaled the culmination of the *philosophes'* ideas and put them into action. The revolution represented the challenge to the legitimacy of the theocratic and aristocratic state based on the ideals of scientific progress, freedom, and human reason. Thus, in place of the *ancien regime*, a new order can now be constructed by a politicized and an enlightened individual. In the case of the Philippines, Cesar Majul's *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* (1960) evaluates the impact of the enlightenment's ideals among Filipino thinkers of the revolution especially those who studied in Europe. Now we know why our intellectuals of the revolution were called *ilustrados* (which literally means the enlightened ones).

And yet, far from undertaking the enlightenment's overhaul of society and the human condition, the *ilustrados* held fast to scholastic philosophizing in which, in the final

analysis, religious faith and the reign of God, rather than human reason and the ideals of scientific progress, prevailed. The anachronism of such philosophizing is highlighted even more by the fact that by the time the *ilustrados* expressed the ideals of the enlightenment, they were articulating an intellectual movement that was in vogue in France about a hundred years earlier.

In light of this, consider Rizal's inspiring "Mi Ultimo Adios" (My Last Farewell) expressed in a religious metaphor.

*Adios, Patria adorada, region del  
sol querida,  
perla del mar de Oriente, nuestro  
perdido Eden!  
A darte voy alegre, la triste,  
mustia vida:  
si fuera mas brillante, mas fresca,  
mas florida,  
tambien por ti la diera por tu  
bien...*

*Mi Patria idolatrada, dolor de  
mis dolores,  
querida Filipinas, oye el postrer  
adios!  
Abi te dejo todo: mis amores,  
voy a do no hay esclavos, verdugos  
ni opresores;*



*donde la fe no mata, donde el que  
reina es Dios...*

Fare thee well, motherland I  
adore, region the sun holds  
dear

Pearl of the sea oriental, our  
paradise come to grief;

I go with gladness to give thee  
my life all withered and  
drear;

Though it were more brilliant,  
more fresh with flowery  
cheer,

Even then for thee would I  
give it, would give it for thy  
relief...

My idolized motherland,  
whose grieving makes me  
grieve,

Dearest Filipinas, hear my last  
farewell again!

I now leave all to thee, my  
parents, my loved ones I  
leave.

I go where there are no slaves,  
a brute's lash to receive;

Where faith does not kill, and  
where it is God who doth  
reign...

(Laubach, 1936)

Here, the greatest Filipino *ilustrado* emerges as the "Tagalog Christ" (a term used by the famous 19th century Spanish philosopher Miguel de

Unamuno to describe Rizal) of the Spanish religious *Zeitgeist*. The discontinuity between Rizal's rhetoric of rationality and religion can be explained not only by the tenacity of his (as well as that of other *ilustrados*) Catholic socialization in the system of medieval scholastics, particularly Thomistic theology, but also by reference to the essentialization of the "one-size-fits-all" Pan-Filipino Project—that is, our inherent birthright to be also called Filipinos after the name of the Crown Prince of Spain, Felipe II, who later became King of Spain. A birthright that I believe must be reexamined and contested.

It is against this backdrop that the road to Bagumbayan bears the imperial imprimatur of the Spanish principle of *Transference of Sanctity*. This principle is premised on the Spanish practice of constructing their Christian churches, government buildings, and plaza complexes on sites previously occupied by the native religious or village structures. By using this principle, *the sacredness of the indigenous places was*

*transferred to their Christian successors and the power of the "old order" was usurped by the "new order" (Brunn and Williams, 1993).*

Moreover, with the defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the road to Bagumbayan also took the American ideology of the Manifest Destiny, that American idea of providential and historical chosenness. In contradiction to their political and social principles, the Americans debated the morality of the conquest and possession of the Philippines. Nonetheless, in the end, their once pacific ideal succumbed to the force of what John Fiske (1885) called "Manifest Destiny." He writes:

The work which the English race began when it colonized North America is destined to go on until every land on the earth's surface that is not already the seat of an old civilization shall become English in its language, in its political habits and traditions, and to a predominant extent in the blood of its people.

The colonizers found themselves bound by an un-

precedented drive to take possession of a territory. Their history was the history of uncontrollable men and women who grabbed the forest and skinned it, who turned rice fields into sugarcane fields; it was a history in which many soldiers prospected with priests and missionaries, and, sometimes stupidly, tortured and massacred the natives in the mad scramble to pacify and control them.

Devoid of sacred sentiments, the colonizers imposed a secular and calculating superordination-subordination relations which replaced the "way of the folks." Both Spanish and American systems of colonialism transformed traditional solidarity and consecrated the worst form of alienated "individualism" and "collectivism" without the spirit of community. Particularly, two general conditions emerged on our way to Bagumbayan—the emergence of the Filipino Elite and Filipino Nationalism.

### Filipino Elite

The Filipino elite emerged through the old no-



bility in native society. The Spaniards institutionalized these people as the *principalia* class. During the Spanish regime, the *datu* (chieftain) of the *barangay* (a small village of ten to one hundred houses) was transformed into the *cabeza de barangay* who collectively formed the *principales* (principal men) of the Spanish *pueblo* (town). The *principales* were charged by the Spanish authorities to implement their policies and orders as well as bring to their attention the problems of the people. By strengthening the position of the old nobility, the Spanish authorities provided a system of continuity between the old tradition of personal leadership and the new order of political leadership.

As a result, the *principalia* now embodied a new conservative power, a new way of life manifested by caciquism where the *barangay* chiefs became the native elite who collaborated with and were coopted by the colonial masters. They also bossed their way over their own people. The chieftain became the cacique/boss-incarnate. But

as a colonial subject, he was mainly an intermediary, (oftentimes, an unwilling mouthpiece) of the colonial masters. Cesar Majul's essay on "*Principales, Ilustrados, Intellectuals and the Original Concept of a Filipino National Community*" (1977), lends greater clarity to the evolution of the Filipino elite under the Spanish rule.

Generally, Philippine society was stratified with Spanish bureaucrats, Spanish clergy, and Filipinos (Spanish born on the island) on top; with Chinese merchants in the middle; and *Naturales* (included the *Indios* or the Christianized natives, and the *Infieles* or the pagan tribes) at the bottom. The Spaniards were given the right to collect tributes, taxes, and land grants from the non-*principalia* natives and impose on them the *polo* system (forced labor) which reduced them literally to the condition of servants. The non-*principalia* class composed of *mabarlika* (freemen) and *alipin* (slaves) existed under the *datu* system. The former paid no tribute to the *datu* but served him in his

house or on trips, while the latter served the *datu* or *mabarlika* as debt peons.

The caste-like system that the Spaniards imposed on native society transformed the *barangay* system. When the traditional chief's authority declined, the ways of the folks embedded in the *barangay* also declined. And yet, the chief's new authority inclined as the *barangays* were integrated as political sub-units of the Spanish *pueblo*. The result is clear. In due time, the *barangay* system evolved into caciquism and eventually into bossism. Today, the Philippines is a bossist society that owes its life to the colonial fathers. Benedict Anderson's "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines: Origins and Dreams" (1988) is instructive. In this essay, he discusses how the Filipino elite stifled the revolution from below to protect their narrow class interests.

Interestingly, within the context of Spanish feudalistic colonialism, the folkloric obligation to the strong man simply found a congenial niche in the *pueblo* system and in the notion of Christian servant-

hood to God and total allegiance to the Spanish Crown as the distinguishing virtue of a saved *alipin*. In effect, Spanish colonialism became the strong man from the inside.

Unfortunately, after independence, the *principalia* did not fare well. Within the context of American colonialism, the Filipino leaders and elite reinvented their obligation to the strong man in terms of mendicancy. Unlike the congeniality of Spanish feudalistic colonialism, America's colonialism (Calvinistic style) imposed a brand of outdoor colonialism, that is, the individual pursuit of financiers and industrialists supported by military officers, proselytizers, and bureaucrats to secure profitable investments and markets for quick accumulation of capital in the islands.

With the promotion of their businesses and foreign trade, Americans found a "taproot" for the commodification as well as the territorial possession of the islands. Underlying this enterprise is, of course, the idea of "specialness" and "altruism" of America to the Philip-



pines (an interesting affair which four decades later was self-fulfilled by General Douglas MacArthur in his well-known "I Shall Return" promise to Filipinos fighting the Japanese in World War II) and the consequent obsessive veneration of that idea by many Filipinos. With General MacArthur liberating the Philippines from the Japanese occupation, Americans displayed and enjoyed themselves as the "Uncle Sam"—the strong man from the outside with lots of toys, goodies, and canned goods.

Today, many Filipinos have a fetish not only for America's alleged benevolence but also for the so-called American things (especially for "Made in the USA" labels). Due to this, the Protestant Ethics of individualism, hardwork, and savings were displaced and did not permeate the Filipino consciousness. But most importantly, it did not permeate our consciousness because of the incongeniality of our Catholic's hierarchical and authoritarian upbringing to the Protestant's liberal doctrine of rugged in-

dividualism and the drive to self-direction and self-determination as distinguishing virtues of a saved soul.

Within the context of this displacement and incongeniality, it is not therefore inconsequential that the political relationship between the Philippines and the United States was dictated by mendicancy, bluffs, and blackmails. For example, as political strategies, they were employed by former dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his "Cold War" warriors to perfection and successfully against the various American leaderships. The same strategies, however, backfired when the Ramos Administration employed them in the U.S. bases negotiations. Reminiscent of the old caciques, Filipino leaders beholden to their American colonial master for monetary support, resorted to panhandling. An interesting childhood memory which remains indelibly etched in my imagination was reciting before my father's friends a poem about Rizal's statue located in the town:

*Ako si Rizal.  
Tungtung sa bato,  
ulanang, initang,  
tagai ako singko.*

I am Rizal.  
And upon this rock,  
rain or shine,  
spare me a dime.

Filipino mendicancy had produced an effect of what one American diplomat calls "a neurotic, manipulative, psychically crippling form of dependency" (Underhill, 1977). H. W. Brand's *Bound to Empire* (1992) chronicles this dependence under American colonialism which failed to foster a genuine democracy in the Philippines.

And yet, despite this limited vision of mendicancy, many Filipinos did not forget the "ways of the folks." Despite the internal or external polemics against Filipino culture, the numerous news and articles on Philippine corruption, and the attempts to evaluate Filipino politics in terms of thievery, greed, and selfishness, many Filipinos have kept their pride and their will intact to redeem and recover themselves. In-

deed, there is much more, however, to the Philippines than her destitute state. It is my thinking that from the subsequent wreckage of our culture and people is the continual emergence of our presence, which will bear the unmistakable marks of the folkloric parent.

### Filipino Nationalism

Many will argue that the emergence of Filipino nationalism is anti-colonial. Once it was institutionalized, the claim for the right to self-government was defined as an expression of independence and decolonization, and no further questions were asked about the basis on which the new nation had been constructed. However, I reject that view because it fails to recognize the fact that the articulation of Filipino nationalism really embodies the legitimation and reign of the Spanish colonial principle of *Transference of Sanctity*. Interestingly, the Ilongo popular mind has a way of explaining this: *Maski ano kalawig sang prosesyon, simbaban ang balik sa gihapon* (No matter how long is the



procession, it always returns to the church).

Today, the Philippines is 90 percent Catholic and stands as more purist, more conservative, and more devout in religious beliefs and practices compared to Spain. The anachronism of it all is that while her former colonial master (Spain) is moving forward, Philippine society stands still in a sort of time warp—of live crucifixion, of bloody flagellants, of *pasyon*, etc.

Anticolonial or not, the metaphor and vocabulary of Filipino national identity is enchantingly inspired by Spanish Catholicism. For example, is not the current conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao simply a reenactment of the Christian *moro-moro* play? Cesar Adib Majul's essay on "The Moros of the Philippines" (1988) provides us with the needed background to comprehend the current conflict. What about the *sacadas* (sugarcane workers) in Negros or Tarlac? Isn't this a replay of the feudalistic landlord-tenant relationship of the Spanish "hacienda system"? One of the

most engaging books ever written on this feudalistic legacy is Alan Berlow's *Dead Season* (1996) which is an investigation of murder and revenge in Negros Island. This book exposes a system where the abuses and guilt of the economic and military elite are whitewashed by *noblesse oblige* and where the poor *tao* (common person) without power to be abusive but pronounced guilty, is blamed for his/her victimization. What about the national amnesia towards "revolving door" politicians or what Dolphy, the Philippine premier comedian, calls "balimbing" or "transformers"? Do these conditions arouse a sense of *deja vu*?

If they do, *it is because Philippine social and political life is a feudal throwback, a "warrior state," where strategic alliances and power-grab rather than truth and justice dictate the condition of the national life.* Today, despite the decline of feudalism in Western Europe, we are still practicing outmoded feudalistic values that belong to the sixteenth century. Sadly enough, we are still haunted by

its effects within the readily available idioms of "warlordism," "nepotism," "cronyism," or religious ideology of the "little tradition" of millennialistic movements or "great tradition" of the Opus Dei and charismatic movements.

And for these reasons, *what Spanish colonialism did not achieve militarily, it achieved historically.* Spanish colonialism has come full circle, so to speak. One of the most important work that describes this historical matrix is Ileta's *Pasyon and Revolution* which was written in 1979. In it, he systematically developed his thesis on how popular movements in the Philippines assumed the *Pasyon* (nativistic account of Christ's life, death, and resurrection) as the framework for social change. As he aptly puts it:

To paraphrase Calosa (a follower of Felipe Salvador, leader of Santa Iglesia, a religio-political movement which flourished around 1894 to 1910 in Central Luzon), Salvador did not die because his "personality" lived on others. It makes little difference whether we speak of a De la Cruz

or a Sakay, a Rios or a Caneo, a Bonifacio or a De Guzman, a Labios or a Salvador. All of these leaders and their movements are, to use Calosa's phrase, "part of the same tree." We can include among the martyrs Gomez, Burgos, Zamora and Rizal—all educated men whose mode of dying was nevertheless perceived as signs of the *pasyon's* reenactment in the Philippine landscape.

And yet, until today, the dominant nationalistic view has not kept pace with the consequences of global restructuring animated by changes in information and communication technology. The overall effect of this restructuring is to bring about a new diasporic outlook in lieu of a nationalistic outlook. In the nationalist mode of development the main source of increasing surplus lies in the persistent utilization of proletarian, agricultural, and industrial energies as a key source to productivity. In the diasporic mode of development, the main source of increasing surplus lies in the generation of knowledge and information as a key source to productivity.



With the world tied together in a network of communication systems that allows individuals and corporations the freedom to reorganize, re-deploy, and relocate their resources, the nationalist agenda are rendered obsolete by the flow of goods and services across boundaries that once separated those with different ideologies and economies. Furthermore, they are rendered obsolete by business competitions and decision making made in corporate offices in North America, Asia, or Europe that affect the destinies and environments of countries and regions around the world.

In the end, this global restructuring results in the development of a new system of competition in the marketplace based on one's preparation, education, skill, and talent and not on one's national or ethnic identity. Nations will quickly realize that to maintain their competitive advantage, they have to engage the world rather than simply dabble in the theatrics and inanities of nationalistic life and politics.

This is not to say that the

nation-state will disappear. The nation-state will be with us for a long time. However, in its classical state, it is not fit to face the challenges that globalization poses. For example, the polarization of Philippine nationalism still rests on the unbridgeable gap between the "patriotism of the right" and the "revolution of the left." The view from the "right" still interprets the question of national political values and identity in terms of its confrontation with the Marxist ideological threat. On the other hand, the view from the "left" still invokes the role of a politically conscious proletariat whose collective oppression compels them toward a revolutionary change that will bequeath to us the freedom in the political order.

What is interesting about this condition is that we are about to realize that both points-of-view have not only sapped our energies and prevented us from engaging in serious, productive activities of entrepreneurial, managerial, and economic development or cultural renewal. They have

also thrown us into a sort of retrogression which marks the maintenance of a feudalistic memory and those religious, social, and political institutions that support it.

The anachronism of Philippine nationalism could not be further belabored. Our mental horizon has been shaped by just that—an outcome of reflex rather than reflection. What we have been doing in the last 100 years or so is simply trying to "mash the same potato" or revive a "mummified" nation-state idea whose end decidedly began in the French Revolution of 1789. Jean-Marie Guehenno's "The End of the Nation-State" (1995) and Walter B. Wriston's "The Twilight of Sovereignty" (1992) are brilliant essays that contest the notion of the classical nation-state.

But most importantly, we are about to see the fundamental and scary truth that throughout our years of street fights and fistfights, the real enemy is nowhere to be found. After all these years of riding the highways and byways of national struggle we realize

that we have been riding the wrong horses. This may sound to some as almost irreverent and nihilistic, but that is not my point. The point is not so much that we are wrong as the realization that we are wrong.

Take for example, the patriotism of the right, whose military junta's passion for *coups d'état*, and the Schwarzenegger-like fantasy of extirpating evil through force and violence inspire us to dutifully murder one another in the name of building a better world. What about the revolution of the left? They insist on bringing the masses to their "La-La Land" riding the doddering Marxist horse and whistling anti-American jingles along the way. Such vision is not only jingoistic, but also, too dishonest to be serious—short of cultivating a mood of spite or envy for our two million or so kith and kin in America who quietly and regularly support millions of family members and relatives back home. It is projected by the U.S. Census that by the year 2000, the Filipino population in the United States will reach two million, half of



which will live in California.

However, equally important to our critique of *The Road to Bagumbayan* is the care to be taken to avoid the rendering of our political and economic journey into the ritualistic celebration of the nationalistic procession year after year. In short, we are now confronted with a road sign, unlike the old one, that leads us to a new and different road which we will now consider.

### **The Road from Bagumbayan**

The road from Bagumbayan provides us with the basic metaphor and vocabulary for our contemporary individual and communal experiences, and these, in turn, supply both the language of discourse and the rationale for our very existence. It provides us the structure of discourse of who we are, how we see ourselves, how we reproduce our communities, how we reclaim ourselves, and how we reconstruct our society. In short, how we live.

The road from Bagum-

byan is the road of the diaspora. There are two aspects to the diaspora. *The first aspect is the scattering of Filipinos all over the world.* According to N. V. M. Gonzalez, long considered the dean of modern Philippine literature:

It is a myth we live by unknowingly as individuals, and more so, as a people. In the Filipino imagination it has been seeded for generations in the *Ibon Adarna* story about an ailing father with three sons. They must set out into the world and return with the cure for their suffering parent.

Today, many Filipinos can be found working or living in Asia, Oceania, Africa, Middle East, Latin America, Europe, and North America. It is estimated that there are some six million Filipinos abroad of which 4.24 million are migrant workers and 1.76 million are emigrants. In view of this experience, we are now identified as guest workers, expatriates, residents, or citizens of many nations. To some extent, these emerging identities undermine

our national group identity; at the same time, they allow us to construct ourselves with new identities for ourselves.

Diaspora comes from the word *dia* (through) *speirein* (spores). In biology, the diaspores carried by various media like heat, water or wind, are scattered to regenerate life where they fall, perhaps resembling a new colony, a *Bagong Bayan*. It is from this context that Filipino diaspora results in the possibility of recovery. When one looks for the possibility of recovery in the diaspora, one necessarily must look at the abject dispossession of Filipinos, particularly the non-*principalia* class. Needless to say, from the very beginning of Filipino migration, particularly to the U.S., one thing has stood out—the Philippines has never been a socially and economically viable place for many of us.

As a former colony, we lived lives redefined and rendered by the colonial masters in terms of paternalistic arrogance. We were the “savages” and the “people sitting in darkness,” and for that reason de-

served to be ruled as wards. As wards, we were led, muted, and sometimes betrayed with the cooperation of our own leaders to satisfy the master's ambitions and self-interests. Dispossessed of our name and birthright, many hard working Filipinos emigrated or revolted and eked out an existence to survive, while many elite collaborated to protect and perpetuate their privileged positions. Today, Philippine society shamefully stands as a caste-like and highly stratified society of scandalous affluence and conspicuous poverty.

And yet, through the diaspora we have come to realize the possibility of our opportunity and recovery. This is not to say, however, that the diaspora does not have its share of problems. Indeed, it is a very difficult road to travel. Still, the diaspora has come to represent our different prospect where the “old world” now sees samples of its great potential through the immigrants in the “new world.” An interesting sample is the overseas remittances. It is estimated that in the U.S. alone, Filipinos remit



more or less two billion dollars a year to the Philippines (excluding undocumented remittances or parcels and cargoes). Philippine Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) remit close to three billion dollars a year. Joaquin L. Gonzalez's article on "The Philippine Labour Diaspora" (1996) seeks to provide an overview of the relative size and distribution of Filipino diaspora, while Cecilia Tacoli's analysis on "Migrating 'For the Sake of the Family'? Gender, Life Course and Intra-Household Relations Among Filipino Migrants in Rome" (1996), and Maruja M.B. Asis's "Family Ties in a World Without Borders" (1994) point to the overall positive impact of Filipino diaspora to family life and social mobility.

*The second aspect of diaspora is even more fascinating because it refers to the persistent construction of Philippine society as a "tradewind culture" and a place of diaspora.* Historically, the Philippines has always been a strategic location for global trade and diaspora—Arabs, Indians, Chinese, Spanish, British, Americans, and others.

This phenomenon makes the Filipino national identity inevitably a diasporic identity. What is interesting about this identity is that it simply reaffirms our *baranganic* origins. That is, the idea that the *barangay* is more of a metaphor for journey rather than settlement. Consider, for example, how we ritually greet our familiar friends with "Where are you going?" ("*Saan ka pupunta?*" in Tagalog, "*Diin ka makadto?*" in Ilongo, or "*Asa ka paingon?*" in Cebuano). What does this tell us about how we think and behave? I think, it tells us how our social life sensitizes us to perceive our diasporic condition. In the simplest sense, this particular greeting perfectly makes sense within the context of diaspora.

Currently, Philippine society is indispensable to Chinese diaspora and vice-versa. What is most intriguing about this condition is that it emerged without fanfare and almost imperceptibly. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the manifestations of this identity were in place. Lynn Pan's *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the*

*Chinese Diaspora* (1994) gives an excellent account of the stretches of Chinese Diaspora globally and how it intertwined with Western imperialism.

Today, more important than the impact of Western imperialism, is the impact of Chinese diaspora in the Philippines. From hindsight, there is nothing unique about this phenomenon. Historically, it was the bourgeoisie—a notable, yet secondary element of a predominantly agrarian, medieval society—who embodied a new world-view of economic and social arrangement that undermined the traditional foundations of the clerico-feudal system. Through their wealth and business acumen, the bourgeoisie sapped the traditional basis of theocratic and aristocratic domination of land, religion, and warfare but at the same time, pauperized the peasants since their great enterprises employed them as laborers and wage workers.

In Philippine society, the Chinese was the middleman, the true bourgeoisie who eventually replaced the Spaniards

with their feudalistic system and the Americans with their outdoor colonialism. It was the Chinese businessperson who saw the archaism of the feudal "warrior-state" and outdoor colonialism. Through capital and entrepreneurial spirit, the Chinese undermined the fundamental basis of these systems and replaced them with capitalism (Confucius-style). But more significant than their capitalistic activities was their quiet and creative solitude in the midst of prejudice and discrimination. Despite their sufferings and persecutions, *they stayed and intermarried.* Growing up in the Philippines, I learned my Sociology 101 in prejudice and discrimination by making fun of the Chinaman as "*intsik bebo*" (the old and decrepit Chinese) or "*tulo laway*" (the drooling retard). Such derogatory socialization by my peers as well as by the adult members of the community was done by mimicking "Chinese talk and song." Soon, I found out that this malady not only infected my town, but also the general Philippine society. Worse, it has now gradu-



ated to murder, kidnapping, and extortion of Chinese-Filipino citizens.

Still, the Chinese bourgeoisie prevailed because their movement was not only a movement of capital but also a movement of population, of a natural system of family, clan, and people—of conjugal colonialism founded on strong Confucian ethics and great capitalistic tradition. *Forbes* magazine (1996) reports that the majority of the nine known billionaires in the Philippines are Chinese. Tan Yu whose estimated net worth is \$7 billion is at the top; followed by Jaime Zobel de Ayala and family, \$2.6 billion; George Ty, \$2.6 billion; Andrew Gotaniun, \$2.4 billion; Lucio Tan, \$2.2 billion; John Gokongwei Jr., \$2.0 billion; Henry Sy and family, \$2.0 billion; Manuel Villar and family, \$2.0 billion; and Eugenio Lopez and family, \$1.0 billion.

Today, as we are slowly and unawaresly stripped of our colonial and nationalistic skins, a new Filipino Story is emerging. In the main, it is a decentered story because its center has collapsed. And yet,

it is a story of a new center, a new road, a *Bagong Bayan*. As such, it is now a story of Jose Rizal, a Chinese mestizo who is the best contribution of China to the Philippines. It is now the story of the Sons of the Yellow Emperor in diaspora visiting in "silken robes" their ancestral homes. It is now a story of Muslims who, despite the prejudice and dominance of Christians, continue to live "The Way of Islam." It is now a story of overseas workers who religiously sustain their families, despite the indignities they suffer and the minimal support they get from the national government. It is now a story of "manongs" who, despite their being exploited and oppressed in California's agricultural fields, refuse to live like victims. It is now a story of an Ilongo, a Cebuano, an Ilocano, an Aklanon, a Tausug, or a Tiruray who resists the ethnocentric and monolingual reading of their stories. It is now the story of Filipino immigrants building permanent communities in the New World. In short, it is now a story of the flowering of ideas,

cultures, and ways of life, and truthful and honest cultural pluralism—of languages, of natives, and of immigrants recovering and reconstructing themselves a new story in *Bagong Bayan*.

### The Basis of the Emerging Filipino Identity

To understand the basis of the emerging Filipino identity is to find the source from which the cultural expression of much of our inner consciousness and behavior as a people flows. To explain that source of our truest expression is to reveal the structure of folk mind and feeling. Here, we must bear down straight away upon the most pressing of our problems—the recovery of our primary identity, that is, our language, our vocabulary, our center, and our roots. In other words, our folkloric identity.

This identity is conceived in precolonial times; its symbol is the social and moral world of the *barangay* (village) and the respected *datu* (chief-tain)—of familism, kinship,

community, and obligation. Nourished by devotion and hospitality, it is still found among family, distant relatives, old acquaintances, honored friends, and hometown friends. It is a way of life embedded in our various languages. But most importantly, it is our way of life based on moral relation—of consideration, tolerance, and openness.

The Ilongos understand the value of consideration as *patugsiling*. However, more than mere consideration, *patugsiling* is a moral relation based on personal and civic value that enables the Ilongos to understand each other by including themselves in the same framework through which they grasp the conditions of others. When one is *wala* (no/without) *patugsiling*, it does not only mean "no consideration" for others but also no deeper regard for one's self. Such moral self-assessment nourishes us to cultivate an individual identity that represents a totality of beliefs and sentiments—a "socialized feeling" of a face-to-face and spontaneous relationship embedded



in mutualism, collective-orientation, and "we feeling" of the "village life." Charles Horton Cooley (1918), an American sociologist, suggests that:

Such groups are primary...in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual. The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a "we"; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which "we" is the natural expression. One lives in the feeling of the whole and finds the chief aims of his will in that feeling.

On the other hand, the Cebuanos have a beautiful way of expressing tolerance. It is the practice of acknowledging an individual's or stranger's presence by extending the modest question of: "*Tabi, unsay ato*?" Literally, it means: "Pardon me, what is our pleasure, need, or concern?" Thereafter, it can be

understood as: "If there is anything that we can be of help, let us help you." What is interesting about this expression is that it is unlike the third person reference and mercantilistic tone of the Tagalog's: "*Ano po ang kailangan nila*?" That is, "What is it that they need or want?" Its parallel expression is the Ilongo's "*Ano kuntani ang aton*?" That is, "If I may say, what is our pleasure, need, or concern?" Through this expression, the Cebuanos and Ilongos can lay the ground of mutual recognition where the interests of individuals or strangers are set higher than theirs yet set within the collective's interests. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) is relevant to our understanding of this particular value because it engages us to revisit Plato's notion of *thymos*, the primordial struggle for mutual recognition and dignity as the foundation of our individual or collective life.

In doing this, the Cebuanos or Ilongos construct a moral world that is inclusive and tolerant of others and strangers. A far better world

than the Hobbesian Leviathan necessitated by continual fear, danger of violent death, and the life of man: solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, 1651).

Finally, our openness as a value suggests that our primary identity is not romantic but rather diasporic. It is diasporic in the sense that our primary identity is reconstituted by historical, geographical, and global influences that affected our lives as a people over time. Sometimes narrated as the resiliency of a "bamboo that bends with the wind," openness projects us as the "great imitator" or a "*halo-halo*" (mix-mix) culture with no distinct belief and value system and suffering from inferiority complex. And yet, our openness is not synonymous with resiliency. While it may entail the necessity of resiliency, it does not entail complete resiliency. In fact, openness is closest to the Cebuanos notion of *baruganan* or one's personal and moral position towards private or public issues or social change. Its meaning is close to but deeper than the Tagalog's

*paninindigan* (one's belief or civic position on private and public issues or social change). When one is called *walay* (no/without) *baruganan*, it means, not only that one does not have a personal or civic position about a private or public matter, but that one is personally and morally bankrupt with almost no meaning or existence in relation to others.

Nourished by a trade-wind culture, openness is no stranger to us. In fact, it is our constant companion because it represents to us the willingness to struggle with change and to take position on issues that affect our individual as well as collective lives. Robustiano Echaiz's *Sketches of the Island of Negros* (1894) presents one of the most moving accounts of our openness, dramatically demonstrated by our curiosity to welcome new ideas and strangers, and yet, defend even to death when our *baruganan* is at stake.

Overall, folkloric identity persists because it grapples with change and situates itself in time and space. Take for example, the issue of the search



for identity—the process of discovery and learning of valuable lessons and events from our past that help shape our future. This for me, provides us the frame through which we see how our primary identity is socially negotiated and reinvented in time and space. As a process of self-definition and self-identification, it grants individuals an origin, a past, a sense of belonging, values, and traditions. So that when one calls himself/herself Filipino, Filipino-American, Cebuano, Bicolano, Pampango, Ilongo, Aklanon, Waray, Ilocano, *Manong*, *Pinoy*, or a combination of these, in effect, one appropriates to one's self not only a name, but also a consciousness of one's primary identity and history.

What is interesting about our condition is that we come from different islands, and because of that, we are fortunate enough to have lived in and be protected by the islands. Thanks to that, our geography saved us. The scattered islands which have been maligned for our so-called disunity and regionalism, in reality, provided

us the “elbow room” to maintain our languages and to resist the unrelenting internal as well as external hegemonies that homogenize us into the wholesale reading of our social and cultural histories as peoples. Foremost of these is the indiscriminate bombardment of our people by nationalistic and metropolitan initiatives and programs towards the “monolingualization” of our languages.

I appreciate the hard work and effort but not necessarily the intention. For me, the intention is too high on emotion but too low in introspection. I say this because the national language movement exacts sameness and represents the marginalization of our languages. Why should we accept a movement that only speaks of a Tagalog notion of language or national life? Why should we accept a movement that does not embrace our diversity? Why can't we build a nation-state on the basis of diversity? Furthermore, why should we subject ourselves to the pubescent and pidgin construction of “Taglish” or “Engalog” (mix of

English and Tagalog) when our languages with their attendant creative arts and imagination cry out to be spoken, sung, heard, or written?

I raise these questions because it is not only disrespectful but also immoral. It is immoral because when one marginalizes a language, one marginalizes a culture. And when one marginalizes a culture, one marginalizes the power of a people to evolve in their own distinct way. I also raise these questions because I believe that we do not have to be the same to be together. A man and a woman are different, and yet, can be united. Perhaps, our nationalistic or metropolitan effort must be redirected towards the study, research, and advocacy of our various languages and literatures so that we can thrive with the treasure of a healthy, beautiful, and strong multicultural life.

Interestingly, despite the unrelenting homogenization of our varied and multifaceted lives, our languages survived. In fact, not only did they survive but they persisted in the

colonial experience and are still persisting in diaspora. If the greatest crime of colonialism is cultural disintegration, the greatest contribution of folk-thought is languages, creative arts, and imagination *persisting*. In diaspora, it persists through our impulses to extend our way of life, our personal, civic, and moral relations of consideration, tolerance, and openness. These are vocabularies and values of our languages that will enable us to live and work peacefully with others, especially strangers, while at the same time, recovering and reconstructing our search for “home” within the place of relocation. Undeniably, our folkloric roots are deep and our trees grow in the “new world.”

Today, our primary identity and way of life are reinvigorated and reinvented through the creation of urban villages in North America—permanent ethnic enclaves where we can anchor ourselves. Sociologically, one significant view behind this phenomenon is the assumption that the dominant, formal, and rationalistic political and economic



institutions operating throughout the place of destination have little significance to many "urban villagers" compared to their identification and participation to a specific residential locale. Numerous studies have shown that the most enduring commitments of many urban dwellers are to the kinship and associational solidarities of their communities and to the long standing cultural patterns organizing their daily lives over the yearly cycle (Firey, 1947; Gans, 1962, 1967; Liebow, 1967; Suttles, 1968, 1972; and Whyte, 1943).

To many of us in the diaspora, especially parents and children, the question of folkloric identity lies at the root of a great many cultural as well as practical questions. Our attitude to it constitutes the majority of our questions because it reliably defines our energy and essence as a people. It is the unconscious recovery of our dignity born out of our humility and will to rediscover the primordial idealisms and realities we have forgotten and continue to neglect in the course of our journey as peoples.

Unlike the old story conceived through colonial and nationalistic discourses of dominance and ethnocentrism, the new story is a more inclusive and mutualistic process of continual recovery of materials drawn from the past and located in the present; thereafter, it becomes a practice of everyday life, production, and reproduction toward a reconstructed community.

We know enough from reading our Filipino story to accept that our narrations and narrators had imperialistic as well as nationalistic flaws. Yet, we continue to live with those flaws in order to draw from the wells of our primal metaphor and vocabularies to bring out our muted and silent voices and flaws that tend to come with the "breaking out" of wisdom that our multicultural people represent.

This is a view that N. V. M. Gonzalez has been alluding to for a long time. Take for example Gonzalez's "A Warm Hand" (1950). Many of my friends have asked who do you think fondled Elay? To their amusement or puzzlement, I

have always answered this question with "you." Of course, I also hope to invoke a sort of self-examination from my curious friends. Unbeknownst to many, this allegorical rendering of our experience is represented by the notion that scarcely a corner of our lives is untouched by the "hands" of colonialism and its genealogy. And yet, like Elay, we find comfort and affinity with our "Obreganos"—of moral relations, of self-sufficiency, of *patugsiling*, and all.

N. V. M. Gonzalez's works also do not settle well with popular or imperial thinking especially for those who prefer to relegate his ideas and works in the dustbin of archaism. As one Filipino narrator said: "N. V. M. is old and done." This form of social or literary criticism displays poor manners—it is nothing but the practice of *gerontophagy*, the primitive ritual of eating one's elders. Besides, it is simply foolish impoverishment for some Filipino narrators to eat the popular or imperial crumbs when Tiyay Dolores offers us boiled bananas and hot *suman*.

For how can one haphazardly ignore one's soul? How can one casually dismiss *patugsiling* or ignore *baruganan*? How can one deny fate?

Particularly, unless one rediscovers the vocabulary of N. V. M. Gonzalez as a ritual speaker, any critique is bound to fail. In an era of voguish and bookish scholarship, seeking a popular or imperial explanation to our story conceived in diverse mythical and folkloric terms is destined to be futile. To know the soul of a people is to find the source from which the expression of folk-thought flows. To explain the truest expression of the structure of folk mind and feeling is to reveal much of the inner consciousness of a people. This seems invisible to the popular and imperial mind.

Our task then is to encourage every generation in any time and place to work its own particular image of recovery and reconstruction. No hero or heroine worship, only one's integrity and self and *desponibilit e*, that is, the ability to share one's language, culture, imagination, and intellect



to others. However interpreted and accounted for, whether as an exemplary mode of economic development, as a model of political experience, or as an object of scholarly and literary research, our "diverse" primal metaphors and vocabularies embedded in our languages remain our essence and structure of our existence and well being. *Considerate, tolerant, and open* is our life, is our fate.

## Notes

References to N. V. M. Gonzalez's personal thoughts are based on my conversation with him during one of our weekly discussions at Southland Mall, Hayward, California, 1995.

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## THE MIRACLE OF DIALOGUE: ITS ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*Douglas J. Elwood*

### ABSTRACT

As the world faces the frightening prospect of extinction brought about by political controversy, racial bitterness, religious tension, economic disorder, and the whole disarray of international institutions, the almost forgotten art of dialogue becomes not only an option but a moral principle, and a necessary first step in resolving conflicts, large or small, at the interpersonal and societal level.

This paper examines the subject of dialogue in relation to conflict resolution, in particular, the face-to-face dialogue that opens the way and make resolution possible and, in the end, effective. But two conditions are required for dialogue to take place—it must proceed from both sides, and the parties to the dialogue must persist relentlessly. Resolving a conflict through dialogue requires that each party recognizes and affirms the humanity of the other. More than face-to-face encounter, dialogue involves the spirit of conviction with openness in which each party is sensitive to the needs of the other, and willing to negotiate openly rather than force a solution by using power tactics. In the face of daily unfolding conflicts of varying magnitudes which threaten to annihilate the human race, the need for a real dialogical encounter in the spirit of genuine give and take cannot be overstressed.

An observation many would share is that genuine dialogue is often a neglected option, especially among people in positions of power, but sometimes even among those seriously concerned with issues of peace and justice. We immediately think of the long-standing conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and that between North and South Korea, not to mention others like the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

At the village level, it is common for people with a grievance to file a legal suit against another party without first hearing the other side of the issue. People often press their demands before making their request. They often use coercive force and bypass