

# Emancipation Within Culture

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This essay discusses the main uses of culture, including its technical anthropological meaning. Culture expresses a basic contradiction of modernity — the simultaneous lack and surplus of meaning. This ambiguity of culture is indicated by the expression, 'human beings are animals with culture'. This essay argues that a basic misunderstanding of the nature of culture is responsible for many contemporary problems. The uses and implications of culture for Philippine society are explored based on recent practical examples from the ongoing centennial celebrations.

CULTURE IS LOOSE ON THE WORLD. IT COVERS INCREASINGLY more areas of our lives. We talk about world culture versus local culture, modern or primitive culture, national and regional culture, an ethnic culture or a racist culture, youth culture, feminist or gay culture, phallogentric and homophobic culture, a culture of privacy as well as a culture of consumption, high culture as opposed to low culture, popular and folk culture, culture for growing bacteria, culture shock or culture bound, material culture, corporate culture, cultured pearl, culture vulture. Cultural anthropology is the science of culture but its study also includes the culture of science. Psychologists talk about a culture of poverty which is often mistaken for a poverty of culture. Sociologists investigate the culture of work while postmodernists deconstruct the work of culture. Scholars argue about the merits of cultural relativism or cultural determinism. Some celebrate multiculturalism, others oppose countercultures. The Philippines has been described as a damaged culture. Finally, one can become a cultural attaché or, more often the case for overseas Filipinos, work in the culture industry.

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What do these terms and usage have in common? I will discuss briefly the meanings of culture and examine their implications for the Philippines.

#### DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE

ONE of the earliest definitions of culture was given by E Tylor. He defined it as a complex whole which included knowledge, religion, art, morality, laws, customs, techniques, artifacts and whatever else enabled people to make sense of as well as reproduce their world. This broad definition explains why culture can encompass such a diverse field. It also explains why the term is used in such confusing and often contrary ways. However, one must give Tylor credit for focusing attention on a broad range of phenomena whose origins lie in a peculiarly human orientation to the world. By doing so, Tylor enabled a discipline such as anthropology to establish itself as the comparative study of human agency.

More recently, Kapferer (1988) defined culture as the set of principles which locate and orient human beings within their existential realities. Culture is a framework for organizing the world and our position in it. Evans-Pritchard has said that we are trapped by our culture; we cannot imagine it to be otherwise because our way of thinking is culturally constrained. In its extreme form, this constitutes cultural determinism.

Other anthropologists see culture as an invisible lens through which we see reality — its categories are pre-given and usually located in non-

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conscious structures like language or in essentialist categories such as gender, caste or race. The difference with the previous position is that culture is not seen as a set of principles, often well known to their members and, at least theoretically, capable of change. Instead, culture is linked to primordial categories and

transmitted through non-conscious and hence non-rational processes found in language, myth and art.

Increasingly, however, we are becoming aware of the lens through which we see the world. In fact, the purpose of any theory of culture is to explore the structures which constrain and shape our view. We can combine some of the features of previous definitions by seeing culture as a set of ideas, values and practices as well as an orientation and predisposition toward a life-world. In this view, culture is a set of embodied practices as well as a framework of experience. Language, myth and ritual provide an affective world orientation complemented by a cognitive understanding.

This view is an improvement over earlier positions. It recognizes that culture involves both conscious and non-conscious processes. The result, however, is a holistic totality closer to the dreams of utopian planners or to programs of authoritarian regimes than to the practical experiences of everyday life. The latter are often fragmented, oppositional and even tentative.

Hence, in addition to the above, we have to see culture as incomplete, contested, inconsistent and never fully established. It is a process of a negotiated becoming rather than a set of fixed, pure or transcendent principles handed down from one generation to another. Culture is always in a process of change because its transmission is incomplete and because it is reinterpreted by each generation. The result is often more like an unfinished patchwork than an ethnographic monograph.

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*Culture as Conscious Self-reflection.* The conditions of modernity have given culture an unprecedented autonomy. The advent of mass literacy allows for the transmission of ideas, values and even practices to a large and anonymous readership (Anderson 1983). Combined with administrative institutions such as schools and other bureaucracies, culture can be uniformly transmitted to a large population. The modern condition not only results in a standardization of culture but also in its increasing self-awareness and scrutiny (Pertierra 1997).

*Culture as Forms of Representation.* This latter condition, where culture consists of representations of the good or proper life, allowed it to expand beyond its former boundaries. No longer tied to a specific life-mode, culture becomes a set of free-floating signifiers, at most loosely associated with a particular society. Culture becomes the domain of signifying practices, rather than, as before, the arena of practical significations. In this sense, Filipinos, Canadians and Singaporeans can be said to share a common culture (i.e. the English language and consumerism). For this reason, one can contrast a global from a local culture. The latter is tied to a distinctive set of significant practices, while the former consists of relatively autonomous representations. Culture is no longer spatially bound.

This process led to an awareness of culture as an organizing structure. We gradually became aware that we saw the world through the lens of culture, whether this be the particular language one spoke or the customs and rituals one practiced. Since language provides one with the most basic categories for thinking and experiencing, some anthropologists (Whorf 1973) argued that culture shaped and determined the world we perceived. This view is known as linguistic or cultural determinism. Furthermore, because each culture provides its own unique perspective and experience of the world, no two cultures are equivalent and there is no basis for their comparison. This is known as cultural relativism. Often it leads to cultural chauvinism. However, the mutual translatability of languages seem to disprove both cultural determinism and cultural relativism. Moreover, as already stated, cultures are never hermetically sealed from one another nor are they thoroughly consistent or evenly distributed. Instead, culture is embedded in particular structures, related to specific practices and located in distinct contexts as well as enjoying a partial autonomy from them all.

*Class and the Culture of Refinement.* Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the bourgeoisie developed the notion of culture as a gradual process of civilization or cultivation. While culture was artifactual, certain forms were seen as more evolved and refined. Culture became associated with the best thoughts and feelings that a society produced. Art, literature, and music became the main expressions for the cultivation of refined

sensibilities. The Romantics developed this idea most fully, often in contrast to the mundane orientations of science or the gross manners of the working class (Carey 1992).

This view of culture as the cultivation of fine manners, noble ideals or original thoughts became the source for the distinction between high and low culture. More importantly, it transformed culture into a self-conscious process aimed at exemplarity. Society, through its administrative apparatus such as schools, correctional institutions and media, can hereafter design and impose preferred cultural forms over others. The nation-state can insist that its members conform to national ideals and penalize perceived deviations. Rather than culture expressing a mode of life, instead it constitutes this mode. While I pointed out earlier that modern culture achieves a relative autonomy from its generating structures, it appears that certain cultures

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can generate their own reproductive structures. From seeing culture as a lens or a locating principle, we can now see it as a consciously compulsory mechanism for producing compliant subjects. No wonder that subaltern classes (e.g. proletariat) or oppressed minorities (e.g. blacks, women, gays) are insisting on deconstructing such cultures of domination (e.g. patriarchy) and replacing them with their own countercultures (e.g. feminism, queer theory).

Modern cultures, in their political forms such as colonialism and nationalism, are increasingly also seen as subjugative. Modernity resulted in the autonomization of culture from its generating structure. This became possible because culture was no longer attached to a mode of life but seen simply as forms of representation. This was the consequence of seeing culture as conscious self-reflection and self-constitution. It became the basis for identity formation.

The above conditions produced culture as a consciously organizing principle. The nation-state became its clearest manifestation and advocate. Culture was territorialized and spread uniformly within its national borders. The bourgeoisie became its initial proponent but later,

universal suffrage and compulsory schooling allowed the working class to shape the contours of a national culture. While the bourgeoisie generally support high culture, the working class prefer low or popular culture. Hence, class antagonisms express both economic and cultural divisions. Capital, in its cultural as well as economic form, shapes class societies.

*Dislocated and Mislocated Cultures.* From earlier being associated with a locality, culture, like capital in a bourgeois economy, became an abstract entity. Its reproduction was conducted by specialized institutions such as schools and was imposed by appropriate media and bureaucracy throughout a politico-juridical domain known as the nation-state.

Modernity has also produced major social disruptions, resulting in diasporas and cultural dispersions. Formerly localized or at least organically associated with a specific mode of life, members of certain social groups (e.g. Armenians, Jews) have been forcefully dispersed. Others were forced to migrate because of the disparities produced by capitalist development (e.g. Ilocanos).

*Culture as Invention.* Finally, there are invented and disputed cultures such as Esperanto, Filipino or the kibbutz. These are characterized by a consciously held set of principles whose constitution in the future is left relatively open. We can also include countercultures such as the feminist or gay movements and others who oppose dominant hierarchies. All of these point to the fact that culture is never totally hegemonic, completed or consistent. Hence, culture is necessarily anachronistic. It includes elements drawn from different pasts and from past differences. Moreover, culture is not always territorialized (e.g. diasporas) nor localized (cyberculture) but it is always located in particular structures of experience.

Even this brief discussion of the usages of culture reveals that its meanings are seldom consistent. We started by seeing culture as a lens or a locating principle which orientates us. We ended with the view that this orientation also constitutes a basis for oppression. This shift in its function depends on whether culture arises unselfconsciously from a

mode of life or is used as a conscious principle for its structuration. In the former, practices shape culture, in the latter culture determines practice.

ELEMENTS OF PHILIPPINE CULTURE(S)

FOR most Filipinos, religion provides society's orientating principles. Since culture is not only a set of official doctrines and practices, it also includes folk beliefs regarding *anting-anting*, *aswang* and *engkanto* as well as practices like *penitensya*, *atang* and *pasyon*. These beliefs and practices often span broad areas of life such as politics, work and the private sphere. Attempts to differentiate and rationalize these areas of Philippine culture often fail. For this reason, Filipinos find many life situations undecidable and resort either to a fatalistic attitude, *bahala na*, or take their chances in gambling. These are not unreasonable responses. Scholars who assume culture to be systemic and hierarchical see this Filipino behavior as an inadequate instance of enculturation. Instead, we should see it as a differential use of cultural resources.

Perhaps even more basic than religion, Filipinos insist on the principle of reciprocity. In fact, many apply this principle in interactions with the supernatural. The importance of the gift or *pasalubong* is a main expression of this principle. While it often implies a strategic goal, reciprocity is as much a recognition of a moral duty as it is an instrumental practice. Reciprocity locates a Filipino identity even as it assists its bearer to operate within existential realities. It seems that only the *aswang* remains outside this moral order, reminding Filipinos that not everyone shares this cultural principle (Pertierra 1995).

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*Foundational Events of Culture.* The centennial celebration of the Philippine revolution of 1896-98 has focused attention on the country's national traditions.

While these national traditions were taking shape well before the revolution, this event sharpened a consciousness of being Filipino. Thereafter, local and regional traditions could be incorporated into the conscious structure of the nation-state. Nationalism sharpens this conscious-

ness and this ideology can be used as the basis for the further constitution of a national culture. Rizal and the *ilustrados* provided a narrative structure for this consciousness using media such as the novel and the *zarzuela*. The *ilustrados* preferred these modern media to earlier ones such as the *pasyon* and the *komedya*. These latter were less suitable for their secular ends. The *pasyon* and the *komedya* were deeply rooted in local life and hence less suitable for the conscious exploration of a national imagination.

*Culture as Self-constitution.* In their struggle against the new American imperialism, revolutionaries such as Mabini used the theme of conscious self-constitution as a basis for their resistance. In a letter written in 1899, Mabini argued that to capitulate to the Americans 'would reinforce the belief of others that Filipinos lack culture...or that they were an uncivilized country' (Diokno 1994). Filipinos were unwilling to have others, including Americans, define them. This notion of conscious self-constitution marked the early struggle for Philippine independence and laid the foundation for a national imagination.

Exactly when the shift from local resistance to national liberation took place is still a matter of debate. The early revolts against Spanish rule (e.g. Bohol and Leyte in 1621-22, see Pertierra 1995) were mainly instances of local resistance. A century later, Tagalogs (1745) and Ilocanos (1762) were distinguishing between religious and political freedom. But it was only in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that these distinctions were linked to the political structure of the nation-state. By then, the *ilustrados* conceived of culture as deliberately and artifactually created on the basis of a territorial sovereignty. Philippine history does not, however, present a chronological evolution from a local to a national culture. Malong in 1660 already differentiated between religious and political freedom, while Aglipay advocated their conflation over a century later. This confirms the anachronistic as well as the *bricoleur* basis of culture. Only ideologues insist on presenting the evolution of Philippine culture in a linear form.

*Cultural Prescriptions.* Because cultural practices can stem from different sources, we should distinguish between continuing traditions and



national prescriptions. Hence, the Philippines has a plurality of languages which form part of its cultural heritage but Filipino is privileged over others. It receives special attention from the state and is used as part of a policy of developing cultural homogeneity. While other native languages evolved unselfconsciously following their practical uses (e.g. Ilocano as a lingua franca in Northern Luzon), Filipino is consciously cultivated. Most indigenous languages are based on locality, this being the rationale for their use. Filipino, however, is not locally but territorially based. Its usage is determined by the politico-administrative boundaries of the state.

The above example is not meant to favor one form of culture over another (i.e. traditional use vs. political imperative) but to illustrate that our understanding of culture often conflates important distinctions. Since culture always involves both consent and constraint, it is important to understand the basis for cultural policies. Insisting on the exclusive use of a national language despite the opposition of speakers of other languages may produce divisions in the body politic rather than improve national unity.

*Territorially Administered Cultures.* The area encompassed by nation-states always includes a plurality of cultures. This is particularly true for the Philippines, where cultural traditions long preceded its formation. But national policies may prefer some traditions and proscribe others. The nation-state may prescribe a cultural practice (e.g. Filipino) over its entire territory. This is often the reason for conflating territories with cultures. Only a modern administrative unit such as the nation-state has the capacity to impose culture over its territory. Otherwise, cultures are localized (e.g. Kankanay) or non-territorial (e.g. Christianity). Filipinos who assume cultural continuities as the basis for the country's territorial boundaries illustrate this conflation. Others, who admit the absence of such continuities may, however, insist in prescribing them. Indonesia is a case where assuming cultural continuities defies logic as well as ethnology

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and where cultural prescription can only lead to enormous suffering. Ironically, it is this insistence on cultural continuity that often causes the political fragmentation of the nation-state. Advisedly, many nation-states now declare themselves to be multicultural. They insist only on political unity when faced with cultural discontinuity or plurality.

Except in the preceding case, cultures are seldom territorialized and they often cross regional or national boundaries. For example, Ilocano culture is not limited to the Ilocos region but is found throughout Northern Luzon, including provinces such as Pangasinan, Tarlac and Nueva Ecija where other cultures are also present. The Badjao regularly cross national boundaries. As Anderson (1983) has argued, only the modern condition insists that everyone identify with only one nation-state. While most people easily identify themselves as belonging to several cultures (e.g. a Chinese-Muslim Filipino or a Kankany-Christian-feminist), the territorialization of culture in the nation-state constrains this identity choice by confusing cultural with political allegiance.

*Materializations of Culture.* This territorialization of culture via the nation-state often leads to other confusions. For example, culture may be confused with place and its surrounding landscape. One refers to a cultural heartland, where culture has its deepest roots and its oldest monuments. Others think of it as a birthplace, with the connotations of home such as *patria* and *bayan*. For nationalists, this may be Malolos and the surrounding Tagalog provinces, while traditionalists may prefer the Ifugaó rice terraces. In both instances, culture is given a material embodiment. This is not necessarily problematic but it is pernicious when combined with the ideological constructions of territory. Jerusalem is the heartland of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, obliging their adherents to accommodate to each other's needs. The danger enters when it becomes the capital of the nation-state of Israel and ideological interests rather than cultural accommodations, dictate the city's use.

Another conflation of culture identifies it with a particular people or ethnicity. When this conflation of culture with physiognomy is extended to territory, it can result in the worst excesses of human vio-

lence. Racism owes much of its virulence to its capacity to mobilize cultural affinities even across territorial borders.

*Culture in Performance.* Culture often serves as the medium for the representation of self and other. As part of the Philippine Centennial celebrations, the Filipino community in Australia performed such a representation of its national identity. This consisted of the usual historical enactments of Spanish and American colonialism as well as a mixture of songs and dances in English and Filipino, a fashion show, ending with a medley involving members of the local Filipino community. Since no commentary on the various acts was given, an uninformed viewer would have found it very difficult to form a consistent picture of Filipino culture. The main impression must have been of a *pastiche* culture whose members rejoice in *bricolage*. But the performance was not primarily meant for non-Filipinos. Instead, it was for Pinoys abroad who, despite their generally successful integration into Australian society, continue to celebrate their earlier identities. Judging from the audience's response, the presentation was a success.

But representation is also performed for others in order to bestow an identity for the self. In this sense, the Centennial performance was disappointing. The lack of a coherent narrative during the performance only confirmed Filipino culture as eclectic and incoherent. Moreover, it lacked an expression of culture as the cutting edge of creativity. Most performances were either conventional or predictable. Only a very informed member of the audience would have known that Filipino culture, like all others, is constantly experimenting with traditional forms. It would have been nice to have had creative artists such as Grace Nono or Santiago Bose, writers like Jessica Zafra or Danton Remoto to illustrate the creativity and challenge to conventional forms. This challenge occurs at the level of high culture as well as popular culture (e.g. Grupong Pendong, gay beauty contests).

Recently, I attended a cultural presentation in Malolos as part of the Centennial. The performance consisted of dances drawn from different regions of the Philippines. What struck me about it was that it could just as well have been shown for tourists at the Manila Hotel. In other words, it was a representation of Filipino culture for others.

The routinization of culture results in forms of self-expression more appropriate as representations for uninformed others. What is the point in performing familiar dances to a Filipino audience in Bulacan? Their

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endless repetition dull rather than sharpen a sense of identity. Furthermore, it exoticizes the self for the other.

*Culture as Ethnicity.* When I first conducted research in Zamora, Ilocos Sur in the mid-1970s, people from barrios with significant non-Ilocano popula-

tions were reluctant to perform their ethnic dances. Ilocanos often made fun of the so-called natives. Over the years, ethnic consciousness has significantly changed and non-Ilocanos now proudly display their native cultures. Many Ilocano barrios now also routinely perform Itneg and Kankanay dances. Whereas earlier the Cordillera people were deprecated, presently Ilocanos exoticize themselves by appropriating native Cordillera culture. In the meantime, a traditional element of Ilocano culture such as the *komedya* is forgotten or at most consigned to a museological status. Vigan, the showpiece of elite Ilocano culture, crumbles in neglect, admired mostly by tourists and its preservation supported mainly by foreign grants.

*Expositions of Culture.* Cultural displays and expositions became major events during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of these expositions were meant to impress the general population with the growing achievements of science, including ethnological discoveries. Native peoples were regularly included in these expositions to entertain and inform Western audiences. In the St Louis World Exposition of 1904, Filipinos from different ethnic groups were displayed to indicate the task and challenge of the American civilizing mission. Since then, culture has become a major source of entertainment. Culture parks abound, combining scientific exhibits, state propaganda, national hubris, ethnological expertise and infantile pleasures. Apart from its extravagant excesses, alleged corruption and bureaucratic incompetence, there is a deep irony in the present Centennial Exposition at Clark Field. Its

American link to the St Louis Exposition expresses a similar aim, which is to display Filipino culture and its achievements. Such displays are now part of big business, which the modern state employs to trumpet its accomplishments or titillate and distract its citizens.

*Culture and the State.* The Philippine Centennial Exposition is a major state-sponsored representation of Filipino culture. We enter the site through a massive gateway leading to a central monument resembling a giant torch. This pathway leads to the main section which consists of a huge dome housing various exhibits, including stalls belonging to major private corporations e.g. Toyota, Honda, Tanduay. There is a big pavilion celebrating the near-future achievements of Philippine society. This consists of giant, colorful posters announcing — without details of how they are to be achieved — a glorious future blessed by scientific advancements. There are no displays of this future technology except for a cardboard computer surrounded by brightly painted stools with 'do not use' signs. We are informed that the family of the future will still consist of extended kin but all its members will have easy access to work, study and entertainment through an efficient rapid transport system. The pavilion of Philippine history featuring a walk through time lies unfinished with no indication for its completion. The rest consists mostly of empty stalls leading to a vast auditorium. This section gives the impression of a project that has run out of funds, ideas or support. It does not inspire confidence in a state able to deliver on its promises.

*Minorities and the Past.* On one side of the main section of the exposition, one can encounter cultural minorities and recapture the past. This path leads to the Maranao, Badjao, Kalinga and Ifugao. There is no explanation for this ethnographic choice nor information about these cultures except through short dance performances. One can also observe their members engaged in traditional crafts.

After this diversion into ethnicity, one comes to the Spanish colonial period represented by a plaza and the Barasoain Church. Beside it is a museum extolling the 1896 revolution. Next to it is the global city with pavilions from China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, the USA, United

Kingdom, Singapore and the Philippines. Most of them, with the exception of Indonesia, which celebrates its rich cultural diversity, stress modern technological achievements. The Philippine pavilion is the biggest but also the most controlled. While one can stroll freely in and out of all the other pavilions, for the Philippines one has first to sit through a 15-minute film before being allowed into the main section. It consists mainly of tourist advertisements e.g. beaches, hotels. Finally, one comes to the industrial display which advocates investment in the Philippines on account of its having a highly-educated, disciplined workforce supervised by a stable state. On the corners of the pavilion are projected 35 values motivating Filipinos. Among these are discipline, hard work, excellence, hospitality, respect for authority, reliability, creativity, cooperation, compassion, etc. Whereas other pavilions are crowded with objects and displays, the Philippine pavilion has an air of luxuriant emptiness. The Centennial Exposition is the Philippine State's attempt to mask its practical failures by projecting fanciful representations of itself.

*Culture as Vicarious Experience.* A major newspaper recently published a list of 100 Filipinos who have contributed significantly to national culture. It included writers, artists, respected politicians, scholars, entrepreneurs, scientists and others who have enriched Filipino culture. They are all extraordinary achievers in contrast to most Filipinos who participate but do not contribute as significantly to public life. National culture is embodied in exceptional individuals such as Jose Rizal, President Manuel Quezon, Cardinal Sin or Nora Aunor or in anti-heroes like Flor Contemplacion, Ferdinand Marcos and Leo Echegaray. All of them are in some way exemplary. A national culture is a model of exemplariness. We may identify with it, but only vicariously. In contrast, a local culture is a lived experience. The importance of the vicarious explains the significance of representations for national culture and its need for expositions.

*The Past and the Future in the Present.* While culture evolves and transforms, it usually retains an orientation to the past. Since culture is experienced as pre-given, it is often conflated with tradition and seen

as the accumulation or sedimentation of experience. This view of culture is increasingly challenged as society becomes future — rather than past-oriented. While the past was seen as shaping the present, postmodern society now sees the future as present constitutive. Rather than seeing tradition as a reason for the present, postmodernists see it mainly as an excuse for conformity. Hence, the need to deconstruct tradition and replace it with new visions of the future.

In this sense, Filipinos have a limited notion of culture. We prefer to anchor our identities in the recent or primordial past rather than seek new visions for the future. In a postmodern world, it is increasingly the capacity to imagine new futures which will shape the present. So far this Filipino imagination is overdetermined by its colonial past as well as constrained by its understanding of culture.

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Filipino culture is often represented by ethnic crafts such as Ifugao carving and T'boli weaving or in skills used in making jeepneys, cigars and guitars. These are often superimposed by images of smiling or dancing Filipinas wearing 19<sup>th</sup> century costumes in a festive setting before an imposing church facade. A more exotic and untrue representation of Filipino society is scarcely imaginable. In fact, the Philippines' major exports are electronic or computer parts and its largest source of foreign currency is remittances from overseas workers engaged in a broad range of employment. This global and postmodern reality is mystified by cozy pictures of local communities engaged in handicraft or celebrating fiestas. While these caricatures are largely meant for tourists, they also express the limitations of our conception of culture.

*Cultural Representations and Metaphors.* Images of a forward-looking, vibrant society whose members scour the globe in search of opportunities denied them at home, are sadly lacking. Instead, middle-class Filipinos are embarrassed and apologetic about their image overseas. The sight of thousands of Filipino maids camping in Hong Kong's public areas on their day off is a positive assertion of identity, particu-

larly in the context of having to be obsequious at work. When a wealthy Filipina expressed indignation at being mistaken for a maid, she was quickly disabused by her poorer compatriots, who instructed her to stay home on a day that belonged to them.

Conceptions and usage of culture do indeed shape the way we experience and perceive the world. An example is provided by Filomeno Aguilar (1997) in a discussion of the metaphors, images and idioms Filipinos used in the recent GATT debate. The Philippines is portrayed as a weak, vulnerable woman (*Inang Bayan*), easily seduced, if not forcibly raped, by powerful male predators. Should she seek protection in the international world or prevent abuse by isolating herself? The nation is gendered in a discourse of disease and enchantment. The same metaphors and idioms are employed by the advocates and opponents of GATT, showing that they draw from a common cultural pool. Aguilar shows that the recurrence of these metaphors prevents Filipinos from exploring alternatives more suited to contemporary conditions. He has done us all a favor by pointing out the limited and constraining usages of this representation. Another example of a constraining trope is the common description of the Philippines as Asia's only Christian nation. What does this say about Muslim and other non-Christian Filipinos?

*A Damaged Culture.* Some years ago, a noted journalist (Fallows 1987) described the Philippines as a damaged culture. By this, he meant that Philippine society and, in particular, the institutions of the state had largely failed. Many informed and sensitive Filipinos were at a loss on how to reply to such a charge. Fallows had described too well what most Filipinos were painfully aware of. And yet they objected strongly to his conclusions.

What Fallows had observed, given his short visit and unfamiliarity with the Philippines, were instances of public behavior. This often appears rude and uncaring to outsiders. But this is only one aspect, however important, of Filipino culture. Moreover, the reverse can also be readily observed. Sharing food with strangers, sympathizing and offering them advice and assistance are also readily observed. Filipinos act this way because the responsible structures of government often fail them. Rather than a damaged culture, one should point out the ineffi-



cient, corrupt or non-existent structures of government. Most Filipinos have adjusted culturally to such difficulties.

However dissatisfied Filipinos are with their government and its associated structures, they seldom express this as a loss of identity. Even while seeking overseas work and permanent residence, Filipinos usually insist in maintaining local ties. In talking with Filipinos abroad, one is impressed by their frequent expressions of nostalgia and their longing to return. This is evidence of a strong sense of a civil and local culture.

Fallows is correct in pointing out the limitations of a Filipino national culture, particularly in its instrumental aspects. But Filipinos have other cultural resources. Local and regional identities are well-developed, kinship networks are operative and civil culture is strong. Fallows' narrow understanding of culture as expressed in the public sphere explains his pessimistic assessments.

#### CONCLUSION

SINCE culture shapes our perception of the world, it also affects our response to and our location in it. If we imagine culture as frozen in the past, it prevents our adjustment to a quickly changing future. Too many of our cultural images and conceptions are rooted in the past. An extreme example is the portrayal of cultural minorities trapped in their ethnic pasts. Instead, what is needed are images celebrating possible but not yet realized futures.

If we see culture as presenting limited choices, we deny ourselves new opportunities. Views of the colonial past (e.g. anti-Hispanic) often set the limits rather than provide the openings for new futures. If national authorities are too culturally prescriptive, assent replaces consent and social opposition increases. If touristic or economic interests represent it, we are exoticized and alienated from ourselves. Portrayals of Filipino amiability are often euphemisms for sex tours or used as the rationale for hiring Filipino maids.

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If culture is seen as highly cultivated, poorer people are further marginalized. Cultural capital becomes another basis for exclusion and exploitation. If culture is seen as rooted in a landscape or associated with biology, it can justify brutal discrimination. Moros, Sepoys and Chinese have been frequent victims of this ideology.

If culture becomes too comfortable, it can hide domination and serve as an excuse for conformity. Feminists, queer theorists and others are only now exploring the excesses and pains of such conformity.

Despite all these dangers of misunderstanding and misusing culture, it remains part of our human world orientation. Culture allows us to aspire toward an ideal of a better world. The problem is how to use culture as a quest for emancipation while also accepting to be morally constrained within it.

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