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Niels Mulder



This article is part of a wider-ranging investigation into the cultural construction of the public sphere, or what and how people think about it.¹ Here we propose to reflect about the causes of why contemporary thinking about the public sphere is so negative, or, as it is popularly questioned in the Philippines, why do Filipinos indulge in "self-flagellation" and "Philippines-bashing"? While some may hold that people the world over tend to be critical about their government and the political process, and others maintain that an inner discourse of self-debasement may function as a pleasant assertion of we-feelings, the sheer frequency and quantity of negative evaluations of self and country is so baffling as to strike both foreign observers and Filipinos themselves as extraordinary. While this may be a characteristic that has especially come to the fore since the Aquino assassination of 21 August 1983, it does warrant a search for deeper reasons while tracing the evolution of the public sphere in the Philippines.

The existence of a public sphere should not be taken for granted. In noncomplex, communally-organized societies—such as the Philippine *barangay* upon Spanish contact—people distinguish between insiders, that is, those who are known and belong, and outsiders, that is, irrelevant others with whom one does not feel he shares common space or good. The world outside is a field of opportunity at best, the place where one may hunt for a prize, but where one does not carry responsibility. In other words, socially there is the "private," common sphere of familial and communal bonds that is felt to be "ours" alongside similar spheres that are "theirs" (and none of our business); territorially, there is the space surrounding the communal domain that is nobody's and everybody's land.

A public world, though, is different. One could think of it as the overarching sphere of a *Gesellschaft*, of a society-in-the-abstract that comes into being in a process of differentiation and growing complexity. In the Philippines, the first subsystem to differentiate was

constituted by the colonial state and its institutions of government, politics, and church. Subsequently, we see the differentiation of the economy, later still the developing independence of civil society and the media. This world is animated by a certain culture, and filled with the discourse that is called "public opinion," especially the opinions of the members of the educated, urban middle classes of professionals, civil servants, teachers, priests, writers, artists, labor leaders, business people, and, sometimes, military men. It is these who compose the media, who write novels and plays, who teach in school, and so spread myth, history, and other common knowledge, propagate ideologies, nationalism, self-images and religious ideas. In brief, they make public opinion, at one time preoccupied with religion, at another with independence, and at another with the rape and decline of the economy, and sometimes with the evocation of the nation and the mythicization of People Power.² How these, and the public sphere in general, are currently represented, becomes apparent in school texts and the press. To understand this representation, we should first briefly reflect on the relationship between the public sphere and middle classes.

It may be argued that these middle-classes are essential to the creation of a modern public world; that it does not exist in a two-class situation of rulers and ruled, of a monarch or an oligarchy that dominates a little differentiated populace.³ Be this as it may, in the process of societal evolution, economic and civil society assume a kind of independence both vis-a-vis the rulers and from individual and communal experience, at the same time that society also differentiates in classes, including those of the middle stratum. Henceforth, it is the institutions of state, economy, and civil society that are the subject matter of the public world. This world is mainly debated and given cultural shape by educated members of the middle classes whose discourse is essential to bring about and form the idea of the nation, of national identity, and less lofty self-images.

One of the curious features of the Philippine polity is that the political elite dominating the state hardly interferes in these debates, with the recent exception of Marcos. This relaxed attitude of a self-confident oligarchy can perhaps be best understood by their disinterest in and persistent avoidance of all forms of social mobilization, whether in the name of nation building or national development, and the relative harmlessness of the "free" intellectuals. It was only under Marcos' legal terms in office that this appeared to change, yet his attempts at development and to control the discourse while imposing

an image of his own liking were such a dismal failure as to stimulate the currently endemic self-flagellation. This negativism, though, only makes sense when we understand the public sphere historically, with an emphasis on the happenings of the current century.

Evolution of the Public Sphere

By establishing their dominion, the Spaniards gradually brought in place an overarching "public" sphere of government and religion that was at a considerable remove from the mass of the population; it definitely did not belong to the latter. Yet, in order to be effective, the colonizers depended on the cooperation of the native chieftains to whom they extended privilege in exchange for the taxes they should deliver. As an intermediate class of *principales* (*principalia*) these native chieftains found themselves in an ambiguous position, dependent as they were on Spanish favor and native compliance. This balancing act and the care for their own interests led to a certain understanding of the public sphere and to what Corpuz sees as the beginnings of a persistent political culture of artfulness, shrewdness, self-interestedness, and indifference to the common good (Corpuz 1989, xii).

It is only much later that, next to the sphere of the colonial state, a new realm of life was differentiated from indigenous existence, yet, in the nineteenth century, a separate sphere of "the economy" has come into existence upon which the class of the *principales* and the Christianized Chinese-Filipino mestizos acquired a firm purchase. It is these people, with an admixture of Spaniards, who are the traceable ancestors of an important part of the contemporary oligarchy. Because of their wealth they could invest in the advanced education of their offspring which gave rise to the so-called *ilustrados*, the Hispanicized professionals and intellectuals who began to ask uncomfortable questions about their colonial predicament. The least they desired was equality and representation within the Spanish Empire. Castilian intransigence and discrimination paved the way for their discovery of a Filipino identity, the formulation of nationalism, and then for revolution, the First Republic and a constitution.

In their violent undoing of Philippine independence, the American opponents initially stimulated the nationalism and desire for freedom that filled the public sphere during the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, by coopting the more pliable exponents

of the Philippine elite, public discourse began to focus on politics. Because of American dependence on the cooperation of the local elites, the latter acquired a good measure of political power with which they could strengthen their hold on the political economy. Soon they came to see the country as their private preserve. Culturally, things changed even more. By their massive injection of public education, the Americans succeeded in implanting the ideas of American superiority, of the United States as the fountainhead of modernity, while replacing the relevance of the past with a future orientation and the idea of progress.

By engineering this break in cultural history, the significance of Hispanization, of Catholicism, of the self-confident claim for equality, and of nationalism were relegated to the wings while center stage became occupied by politics and American-made modernity, from jazz, movies, and consumer goods to literary writing in English, from public health and rapid transportation to massive schooling and an effective civil service. While appropriating American ideas and standards, the Filipinos became alienated from their past and historically-grown identity while beginning to view themselves as inferior. It is this complex that constitutes the so-called "colonial mentality" that is, in its simple form, thought to be expressed by a persistent preference for "stateside" consumer products.

School Texts

The contemporary school texts for the last three years of grade school and the first year of high school offer a good illustration of the above interpretation and are quite explicit in their positive and uncritical depicting of the American period. As soon as the Filipinos take over, beginning with the Commonwealth, progress is apparently frustrated and an atmosphere of pessimism and decline begins to color the narrative. The official text for the fifth grade is both representative of and explicit about all this.⁴ Summarizing, we are informed that:

The impact of Spanish culture is remolded by the Americans whose introduction of public education and health, democracy, elections, and modern communications are relevant to the present [the Filipino-American war is underexposed]. In their preparation for (self-)government, the Americans introduced new and progressive technical devices;

government began to penetrate everywhere; education became secular, health accessible; the country began to urbanize; worship was free (mentioned are the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) and the Protestants).

Progress moves into still higher gear when, as the text ingenuously states, "the purposes of American education were 1) to teach everybody to become a good citizen of a democratic country; 2) to provide elementary education for everybody; 3) to spread American culture and English; 4) to develop livelihood; 5) to develop the feeling of nationalism in everybody; 6) to enable every poor peasant to get his own land." In view of the colonial situation, points 1, 2, 5 and 6 are quite amazing, yet the text goes bravely on to mention the effects of colonial education. "So, everybody could go to school, irrespective of social place. However, education was available in English only, and emphasized things American. This resulted in the spread of a colonial mentality and a preference for white collar occupations. Thanks to general and health education, along with sports, the people gained a better physical condition. Also because of this education, the consciousness of the Filipinos became democratic and strengthened their nationalistic feelings."

The inherent contradictions between colonial tutelage along with its handmaiden, America-oriented formal education, on the one hand, and democracy, nationalism, and citizenship, on the other, escape from the authors' awareness. America equates with progress, technology, industry, and democracy, and while some criticism is allowed to surface, especially in relation to colonial land policy, the Americans are credited with introducing modern methods of agriculture and irrigation. The American period is a golden age.

When the text reaches the Commonwealth period, the representation of the country's history begins to contrast with the reporting about the American era. "The economic plans of the Commonwealth administration are doomed to failure because the economy is dominated by Americans, Chinese and Japanese. The Japanese occupation does away with democratic rights, and leads to disorder, material decay, and theft. So, the Third Republic is inaugurated in a time of poverty and devastation, yet it is inspired by the lofty purposes of modernization, development and the return of peace and order."

In almost all the textbooks, republican times are chopped up and presented by way of presidential dispensations which takes the view off cultural evolution and political continuity. "In order to achieve rehabilitation Roxas had to amend the Constitution to allow for the

parity rights that were protested by J.P. Laurel and C.M. Recto. Quirino wanted to restore peace, order and trust in government while bringing welfare to the troubled countryside; yet his government was corrupt and distrusted in a period of armed rebellion, low productivity and unemployment. Magsaysay chose for the common man and concentrated on the problems of the rural population but he could not solve the basic problems of livelihood. President Garcia tried to free the economy of American and Chinese control and did not want to rely too much on the United States. Macapagal thought that land reform was essential to remedy livelihood and peace; he needed to solve the problem of corruption in government while striving after national self-sufficiency in the provision of primary necessities. Yet, when Marcos took over, the country was in disorder and its problems persisted. Inflation, social unrest, and more and more rebellion led to the declaration of martial law at the time that the government was broke and the morality of the citizens low."

The deep roots of this situation are specified as "1) slow development; 2) slowness in establishing peaceful conditions; and 3) the lack of identity as a free nation." Be that as it may, "people were hoping for a new society; for many, however, martial law became a frightful experience comparable to Japanese times. Moreover, after some initial successes, in the late 1970s, the country was back at corruption, private armies, political feuding, killings, the absence of justice, a weak administration, absence of government service, with the people no longer respecting officials. There is rebellion, a communist party, the NPA (New People's Army), the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front), and with an expanding AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) a lot of fighting is going on. It is a time of scarcity and shortage of funds. The collapse is in 1983; the peso devalues, inflation reigns, repression increases, and women are discriminated against in law, work, and opportunity."

All the textbooks for the higher grades that I consulted evoke this same dismal picture. The public world appears as an area rife with problems in which politics dominate while government is perennially unable to ameliorate the situation. This image is different from that projected in the lower years. In the latter, wider society is imagined along the lines of the family, the government becoming a super parent showering beneficence for its nationals. The general view is hierarchical and ethically obliging. In progressing through the grades, though, the picture becomes less orderly. Whereas the little that is given about the family, its hierarchical order and obliging

relationships, conforms to the earlier teachings, subsequently citizens and government are projected as mutually dependent partners. Of course, government is still projected as important, but it can only succeed if people and officials hold the positive values that create a good society.

A structural approach is avoided. While moving into the present, from the Commonwealth period on, perennial problems crop up, yet, how they are rooted, where they originate, remains vague, and the few reasons given are unclear, such as "slow development," "absence of peaceful conditions," "lack of identity as a free nation," and "foreign dominance of the economy"; the last condition also "weakens freedom." Causes and effects remain shrouded in mystery. The government seems to be incapable and impotent. People lose confidence. Apparently, the government does not express the aspirations of the people, and the slogans about democracy and being a republic do not result in development, the self-proclaimed first task of the government. Perhaps that is why ideas such as state, citizenship, constitution, and law can only be explained in a technical-legal sense while not connected with the moral, consensual experience of everyday life.

The picture projected of the American period is one of order, progress, and modernization. From 1935 onwards that order is gradually breaking down, and Japanese times especially subvert morality. The presidents and the republic are faced with corruption, rebellion, irregularities, and failure. In spite of good intentions—and knowledge of the right values—the outer, public world appears untamable, unconstructable, and, in moving towards the present, the picture becomes increasingly confused. Continuity is lost sight of; disorder and frustration become normal. They are exacerbated by growing numbers of poor people who tend to untoward behavior. Interestingly, the problem is not poverty, but many poor individuals.

This noninstitutional approach that fails to reason on systematic relationships, naturally results in an excessive emphasis on individual morality. If individuals are good, so shall society be. For that reason people should be taught values. They learn that Filipinos have good values, but also that they should have more of them to progress, to develop, and to achieve a peaceful and orderly society. Because they are reified, becoming causes in their own right, values become very important yet appear to be unconnected to the social process. Free of context they are like loose ends dangling in the air. Because of all this, the resulting "image" of society does not cohere. There are painfully many trees that fail to compose a forest. As a result, wider

society remains vague, and identification with the public sphere encompassing private life becomes difficult and ambiguous.

Recent Evolution of Self-image

Such vagueness and difficulty of identification have not always been the case, and it is of interest to trace the evolution of the self-images the schoolbooks present. Before doing so, we should note that post-war, and post-grant-of-independence history, is one of accommodation with the Americans, at the same time that people really wanted to believe in the "special relationships" that tied the two countries.⁵ Accordingly, the first three presidencies were low in nationalism, and textbooks were still illustrated by Filipino and American flags flying at par (McCoy 1981). The national anthem was sung in English.

In those days, and up into the 1970s, the colonial part of Filipino identity was yet felt to be problematic in the textbooks then in use. On the contrary, people apparently prided themselves because of their association with western culture, its relatively highly educated population and a school system that attracted students from Thailand and Indonesia, and their "democratic" system of government. In brief, a certain smugness vis-a-vis other Asian nations and pride in the colonial past prevailed, such as readily apparent in the following school text of Leogardo and Navarro (1974, 127):

As long as we Filipinos remain Christians we shall always remain indebted to Spain. Christianity is Spain's most lasting heritage to our people. Christian virtues have elevated our way of life and our ideals. The Spaniards enriched our culture. By absorbing the best and the beautiful of Spanish culture, we have become the most socially advanced of the Asiatic peoples who have shaken off western rule. We have learned much of the sciences, arts, and letters from the Spaniards. The Spaniards also taught us an advanced system of government and laws.

Yet, the greatest blessing was to have been conquered and colonized by the Americans.

We shall always associate America with democracy. We are forever indebted to her for our democratic system of government, and laws. Because America trained us in self-government, the Philippines has become the outpost of democracy in the Orient. . . . The American

occupation brought about material prosperity never before enjoyed by our people. The standard of living was improved. The Filipinos took to the American way of life as ducks took to water. The Filipinos became Americanized and were proud of it (Leogardo and Navarro 1974, 130-32).

Under the Marcos dictatorship (since 1972), self-images begin to change drastically. With the suppression of the demands for nationalism and democratic citizenship, school education became geared to the development of human resources, to technocracy and progress rather than to the development of the human being, resulting in a vast generation of politically naive and socially unattentive martial law babies indifferent to history, nation, and citizenship. Materially motivated, they cannot get excited about the American flag on the new (1986) one-hundred-peso bill; "As long as I can pay with it, it is fine by me."⁶

The later Marcos period did more than demobilize and demotivate people in relation to questions of national identity and the common weal. The steady decline in real income and the continuous erosion of the economy reinforced a pervasive survival orientation in which caring for oneself comes first. Add to this the degeneration of the institutions of the state, such as parliament, the judiciary, the military, the constitution and the law in general, plus the abuses against ordinary and privileged citizens. It all resulted in disaffection and vague hopes—often for emigration. So, when Doronila researched the national identity orientations of school children, she found that "if these young students had their way, they would rather be citizens of another country" (Doronila 1986).

This depressing picture is reflected in the school texts of those days. According to a social studies book for economics used in the third year of high school, Filipino working habits are characterized as follows:

Do not work hard; *ningas lugon* (never finishing a project); *mañana* habit (postponing); sacrifice work just to meet social obligations; absenteeism; lack pride in work; work just to please the boss; the quality of work is inferior; spend money recklessly, then borrow (Bilasano and Abellera 1987, 62-63).

When the students advance to college, the knowledge is imparted—the book is still in use—that Filipinos are:

Irresponsible, imitative, improvident and indolent; they dislike manual labor; their government is corrupt and serves foreigners; they are not self-respecting, not self-reliant, and have an inferiority complex. Moreover, they are the laughing stock among their fellow Asians (Garcia and Militante 1986, 193-99).

To understand this evolution from a self-confident to a self-abasing picture of the collectivity and its public sphere, we should remind ourselves that the grant of independence to the Philippines in 1946 had little to do with the war and its aftermath; it was on schedule at the time the Americans were hailed as liberators. Rather than the culmination of a fight for freedom, it inaugurated a period of profound dependence on the United States, culturally, economically, and even politically. In terms of a culture of the public sphere, it signaled a malaise from which the country has still to recover. Only a few diagnosed this cultural crisis. In the late 1950s, Claro M. Recto reminded his countrymen that continuing dependence on the U.S.A. was a betrayal of their nationhood, and that the attitude of mendicancy was an insult to independence. In his newspaper columns, Soliongco also tried to contribute to awareness and spiritual independence, while it was Constantino who dug to the roots of the problem with his famous comments upon the (neo) colonial miseducation of the Filipino.⁷ While all of them stimulated the subsequent discussions about social, cultural, and nationalist reconstruction, their criticism largely fell on deaf ears because, in spite of the havoc wrought by war, rebellion and confrontational "traditional" politics, they were up against a self-congratulatory mood that considered the Philippines as the most advanced of Asian nations.

Into the 1960s, the Philippine economy appeared as one of the most robust in Asia and boasted by far the highest per capita income in the Southeast Asian region, with an entrepreneurial class exposed to American methods and privileged access to the United States' market. Culturally, people saw themselves to be part of western civilization; the third largest English-speaking country in the world; the only Christian nation in Asia; the showcase of democracy in a region ruled by strong men; the bridge between East and West. This orientation to the Occident, the emulation of the American model, and their unreflected position in Asia by its own logic became the fountainhead of bedeviling dilemmas that, at the time, were seldom recognized. And then, where to begin? How to create

consciousness of nationhood, of history, of identity? In its aimless quest for progress and future, and glorification of the American period, society at large had drifted far from any historical moral moorings.

The sham of it all, the perfidity of politics, the depth of social cleavages, and the question of identity all burst into the open during Marcos's expedient exercise of power. In 1969, the New People's Army (NPA) was established; the disillusionment caused by Marcos's fraudulence and mendacity took violent shape during the protracted protests of 1970 that became known as the First Quarter Storm. In view of the president's personality, it logically led to the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. One by one the "achievements of civilization" were destroyed; civilian control of the army gave way to the nightmare of militarization; dictatorship replaced democracy; censorship killed the free press; propaganda was substituted for information; the "independent" judiciary became a travesty of justice; the superficiality of the Christian tradition was exposed; the introduction of bilingualism in school eroded the understanding both of English and of Filipino (Tagalog) at the same time that education was made instrumental to propaganda and history-less progress, resulting in that amazingly meek and blank generation of martial law babies. Economically, the country became the sick man of Asia, and more than ever violence thrived.

The euphoria of having expelled Marcos, of People Power, of a new beginning, resulted in the widespread visibility of the I-Am-A-Proud-Filipino stickers. They had shown the world—much like the Iranians in 1978—that they were capable of driving out the dictator in a nonviolent manner. But soon the hopes for resurrection and redemption waned. Early in 1987, the talks about national reconciliation broke down and the sword of total war against the "rebels" was unsheathed, unleashing the military and vigilantes again, such as under Marcos. Peacefully-demonstrating peasants were first ignored, then massacred; all the progressive elements of the early Aquino administration were eliminated while labor leaders were simply killed or imprisoned on the most tenuous charges. When late in the year an American-written journalistic impression appeared that characterized the Philippines as "A Damaged Culture,"⁸ it made a deep impact among people who were losing hope again. By the end of the Aquino period, there were no Proud Filipinos left and the inner discourse was one of pessimism with hopes dashed, such as the following newspaper excerpts demonstrate.

"We Filipinos" in the Newspapers

Throughout December 1993 and January 1994, I put myself to the task of collecting the "we"-statements I found in the editorial and opinion pages of the *Manila Standard*, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star* and the weekly *Philippines Free Press*. These "we"-statements do not project a rounded self-image. Most of them say something about the perceived state of affairs in the outer, the public world that people experience as beyond their grasp and with which they identify to a limited degree only. Identification is, however, indicated by the use of "we," "our," "us," "this nation," "the Filipino," and so forth. During the period of collecting, the economy had begun to show signs of recovery, a moderate sense of optimism pervading the air. In spite of this, inexorable self-bashing continued juxtaposed with moralistic advice about how to do better.

Generally, the perception of the national character, or the Filipino in the public world, is negative, and so is the perception of the public world itself: "Our society has really gone to the dogs" or "What do we Filipinos have today? You answer that question and you cry" compete with "This God-forsaken country," "This vice-ridden land," "This chaotic republic," "The country's unending crisis," "Our floundering ship of state," "As a nation of underdogs, we . . ." "This country is truly one of the most murderous in the world," and "Our culture of violence/corruption/political idiocy/etc." Of course, not everybody wants to see it this way, yet the comment of a letter-writer about newspaper columnists "having . . . the unnatural wish to see us all fail" is very rare indeed.

To explain the dominant perception, or "The present crisis in our national life," the authors either blame it on the way society and states are governed, or on the negative values and traits that, if changed to their positive counterparts (say, corruption versus honesty) would augur the good life, bringing order and prosperity. Let's concentrate on the political aspects first. Positively stated, "It is our singular blessing that being such a disorganized people, we have no method in our madness; so we are still quite a distance from self-destruction." This concurs with the comment about a very confused situation, "They are running this place like our country is being run by its government." Why is this so? "Our politicians try to tear the country apart"; "Our lousy system of justice"—"It is a good thing that Justice is blind. In the Philippines she wouldn't like to see what's

really going on"; "A government that stakes our lives to the dictates of foreign creditors"; "Our businessmen bribe"; "Corruption has seeped to the top of our law enforcement system"; "Years of corruption and a tunnel vision has kept our economy in an infant state"; "Here, in this lousy, graft-ridden, incompetently governed country"; "The country's image as lawless, anti-American, anti-business"; "The eminent corruptibility of our officialdom"; "We have a crisis in leadership"; "Our beloved president, who does best when he does nothing"; "What we've got is a nation over whom nobody presides"; "Our insensitive leaders"; and finally, "Can we trust our officials to keep our [cultural] heritage intact? Of course not."

It seems that the negative perception of politics and government has a deeper cause, namely, that the people are failing in their democratic duties. "We're in a bad fix. . . . But in theory, at least, we are not helpless. In a so-called democracy like ours, the ultimate power rests in us—the people." However, "The Filipinos have developed a somewhat confused concept of this thing called democracy . . . most Filipinos believe that when you have freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of worship and periodic elections, the requirements of democracy are substantially complied with," and so, "Our problem is that we regard politics and government as a spectator sport. We simply cheer and condemn, while the politicians and officials provide the entertainment"; "What we have is a fiesta democracy," or, more to the point, "Do we have democracy? What we have is skull and bones dressed up to look like Glorietta"; "We . . . spending money on fraudulent elections and referendums, outright stealing and expensive junkets." "We Filipinos have never had the knack for organization" while "Our professed ideology is that we need to be free in order to prosper," which very much leads to giving free rein to "The Filipinos' undisciplined nature" and "The Filipino daredevil attitude."

From all this logically follows "This God-forsaken country's near-terminal case of poverty, population boom, environmental decay, agricultural and business failures, and vanishing social values." "In our country where justice is selective and where law-enforcers are involved in crimes . . .," "most Filipinos cater to mediocrity and sensationalism and succumb to their baser instincts." This balances with "We seem unable to attain class" and "We aren't taken seriously by foreign investors," also because of "Our national notoriety for being always dependent on foreign aid." Yes, "As a nation of underdogs"

"we are outclassed" by "others, who take their politics and religion seriously, and who have a certain degree of commitment beyond our nature to make" while "we unknowingly show a 'poverty' consciousness by our excusing, blaming, begging."

Looking at this picture from the lighter side is Raffy Recto. He "slams those critics who keep describing the Philippines as the sick man of Asia. On the contrary, he says, we have developed a land vehicle which has six wheels and flies. . . . A garbage truck without a canvas cover." Or, "The Philippines will rise . . . but we will rise into becoming Asia's biggest Smokey Mountain [a notorious garbage dump]. A Mt. Everest of discarded speeches and minimum wage laws." Are such "jokes" told "Because we have become such hide-bound cynics in self-defense against all the lies we know we're bein'?" Probably, if the questioning of the Ramos slogan "The Philippines can" is "jokingly" answered with "Garbage can."

Naturally, not everything is bad, and I also found a few positive statements, such as "Our police authorities have shown competence"; "We complacently conclude that certain of our officials do exercise a measure of vigilance"; "After all, isn't it time we regained some trust in our country's judiciary?"; "There is still hope for the Filipino (upon observing that not all public utility vehicle drivers are traffic rule violators)." Also, "Filipinos are known to be intuitive problem-solvers"; "We are all one and the same race of peaceful Filipinos"; and "No one beats the Pinoy in adapting to anything. Try to stop him from coming up with his own version of any popular song." More deeply insightful is the observation, "There is a part of our nature that draws us powerfully to examples of self-denial that may be beyond us; the part that finds nobility where weakness and solitariness have combined with courage," which agrees with "Filipinos are great hero-worshippers." Then, in spite of "Our hospitality" (often abused by foreigners), a trip to Hong Kong, since "Inveterate shoppers that we Filipinos are," brings into contact with a place where "Filipina' is the equivalent of maid . . . it does not mean that we have to perpetuate the lowly jobs. We have self-worth"; moreover, "The Philippines has much to offer the global community; the world takes much inspiration from (the names of artists thought to be at par with other internationally known names then follow)," and so, Ruffa Gutierrez, "a Filipina [second runner-up in the Miss World contest], was proving once and for all, that we are not a country of domestics."

The opinion of foreigners, or the image of the country abroad, inspires many writers. "Many Filipinos abroad have given their countrymen a bad name," and many of them are supposedly domestics. Not everybody agrees; in protesting "The 'negative image' that domestic helpers, mail-order brides and entertainers are supposed to have given the Philippines abroad," the writer asserts that "It is these incarnations of cartoon characters that we have for public officials . . . that give us a bad name abroad." This jibes with the observation that "When members of Congress show unabashed contempt for our President, to the point of insulting the office he holds, we should not be surprised if foreigners look down on him and the people he represents."

According to many, culture seems to be the culprit. "The Filipino is talented but wanting in many other virtues," which can be illustrated at "Our *walang paki* (do not involve yourself where you have no business), *maka sarili* (care for yourself only) populace"; "Honesty, it seems, is lacking in the Filipino character"; "Filipinos are indeed stubborn . . . They only think of what feels good at the moment. They only think about the present. . . . Their unconcern makes them more stubborn"; "We do not have the right values" yet, "we are too frightened to change." So, is it that "The Filipino needs to shake him out of his lethargy, his complacency, his smugness"? Max Soliven seems to agree, "Our problem is not to restructure or even "re-invent" our government. It is to re-invent our approach to life and politics. What I see all about me is disunity, name-calling, pomposity, selfishness, greed and overweening ambition, Truly, *kaya natin ito*. We can do it. But we won't progress until we overcome ourselves."

According to a columnist, it would be beautiful if we could "Turn back the hands of time to those years when values ruled the roost in Philippine society," but alas, they do not seem to rule now because of "The weakness in our culture" and "the malaise of Philippine society." Ours is "A culture more concerned with how we look to Washington than to ourselves," "an impotent culture" where "our idea of originality is to follow the ways of a stranger" so making us "the mental colony that we are." "How advanced is the decay of our culture?" from which "social values have vanished." Even "Intelligence is undervalued in our society. The measure of smart is what you get away with." And so, "Do we have a damaged culture? Yes, we have." "We're a country in which there is too much mischief and malice, and too little discipline and consideration for others."

The last quoted observation implies a remedy: there should be less of the first and more of the latter; people should look at themselves critically, and turn negative traits into positive ones. Easier said than done. In one column, the historian Agoncillo was quoted as having said that "Self-deception is the worst tragedy of the Filipino as a people." This agrees with other opinions, "Why is the plain truth so difficult to establish in this country? Is it because we Filipinos are such gulls to believe every rumor we hear?" and "the Filipino is afraid. We stay away from the religion issue. We are victimized because we soft-pedal, because we do not dare unsettle hurt feelings." This type of beating around the bush was also shown by "The Filipino lawmakers, unaccustomed to tough and fearless talk from national leaders [Mahathir] on such sensitive issues (domination by and relations with western countries), who were stunned." Dodging the real questions and problem seems to be endemic, "Ah, we Filipinos! How easily are we duped!," which is corroborated by "many Filipinos believe or want to believe we are a land of miracles (expelling Marcos in 1986; Marian apparitions; faith healing). Well, hope for miracles combined with "The deterioration of our moral values" may lead to "the Filipinos' propensity to put down each other" which may be the result of "the Filipino male's psyche of machismo and self-centeredness" from which naturally follows "our lack of unity as a people" and the "sense of community service that is also so rare in Filipinos today." Indifference to each other and recklessness created "What folly this is that we have now made New Year's Eve too dangerous even to go to Mass." Apparently there is more than a problem of firecrackers in keeping the outer, public world in order, "How can people respect our policemen when we have misfits in the service?" It is almost as if wider society reflects "Our prisons (that) are run as vice dens."

The Causes of Self-flagellation

The stringing together of the above 120 "we"-statements was a depressing exercise. Besides, I would not like to subscribe to any single one of them. Yet, what are the possible reasons for this "Philippines-bashing" and "self-flagellation"? Why this exasperating image of the collectivity?

The statements about being Filipino were taken from that segment of the English language press that excludes the largest newspaper

by far, namely, the *Manila Bulletin*. This daily that had no difficulty in appearing throughout the Marcos period, is pro-business, gives the best financial and market analyses, and carries a very sizeable quantity of advertizing. It does not, like virtually all the others, attempt to attract readers by way of saucy columns. On the contrary, its rightist commentary is conventional and dull.

The discourse in the segment of the press from which I quoted goes on among a more socially attentive membership of the middle classes in the capital region. If we go by the frequency of their commentary, they do have a concern for the image of the nation, the question of national identity and desirable values yet, what they express most of the time is a sense of desperation. Both in the press and in interviews, many see the Chinese as superior "because they have Confucianism," or show envy of the Thais "who have a King" and the Indonesians "who have the Pancasila," all apparently thought to inspire right values and national direction.

Such pointed reference to the Southeast Asian neighbors is revealing of many things and partly explains why self-flagellation and Philippines-bashing can be so freely expressed. When the neocolonial successor elite took over from the Americans they had long forgotten their fathers' ideas about nationalism while there has never been any attempt at nation-building. This agrees with their non-emancipatory way of coming to power and with their hold on the political economy that both discourage all forms of popular mobilization. Indeed, the Philippines is a country without a national or nationalistic doctrine and so, whereas in Thailand the accusation of *lèse-majesté* is to be avoided, and whereas in Indonesia the Pancasila is beyond discussion, the Philippines is without such personifications of statist nationhood, and questions of identity and the state of the nation are free to be discussed.⁹

What came in place of nationalism or a doctrine was a set of rootless assumptions about Filipino superiority in Asia and "optimistic inferiority" vis-à-vis the United States. After all, the Americans had been astonishingly successful in weaning the Filipinos from their history while imposing themselves as essentially superior, modern, and future-directed. So, while the establishing of "colonial democracy"¹⁰ resulted in devaluing the spirit of the nationalism that had fired the imagination of those who first fought the Revolution, then the United States of America, to mere political sloganeering, a new generation of Filipinos was effectively indoctrinated with the exemplariness of

American civilization; gradually, they started to measure themselves at its—idealized—standards.

To clarify the consequences of appreciating oneself with alien norms, it may be useful to briefly reflect on the Filipino culture that had come into being toward the later part of the nineteenth century. After more than 300 years of Spanish domination, a distinct lowland Christian civilization had evolved around the central institution of Catholicism that had, in the process of establishing itself, been unselfconsciously filipinized (see Mulder 1992, 240–54). Accepted and understood in local terms, it had become an unquestionable part of the culture. At the same time a Europe-oriented intellectual tradition was developing among the *ilustrados*. Among these intellectuals one finds a few who had begun to search for the Philippine roots of their being, such as Pedro Paterno, Isabelo de los Reyes and, of course, Jose Rizal.¹¹ This quest for a meaningful past—and the critique of colonialism it entailed—came to an abrupt end when Filipino history was invalidated, not just by the advent of the Americans, but especially by their massive effort at education and indoctrination.

Apart from imposing their language while closing the door to the past, the Americans were able to inspire pride in being associated with that wellspring of modernity and progress, and Filipinos took to things American as ducks to water. The avalanche of modern gadgets introduced—movies, automobiles, railroads, jazz music, radio—made it appear as if the process of modernization had no history either, and so even the ideas about ordering the public world were seen as unprecedented and new.

Although it must be granted that the latter ideas and their institutions were the greatest real contribution of the Americans, the introduction of democratic representation, constitutionalism, rule of law, separate branches of government, a disciplined civil service, and so forth, may not have been as original as they appeared.¹² Besides, and more importantly, these ideas and institutions were imposed, and had great difficulty in finding a matrix in the local culture. As normative ideas and institutions, they were dissonant with local practice, and are at the root of the cultural confusion caused by seeing the nation as a representative of western civilization in the East.

Such a self-imposed half-truth that is in permanent contradiction with how life is lived, understood and experienced, bewilders identity and pride.¹³ Especially the American ideas about good government and the majesty of the law have become irritating measuring

rods that can only serve to demonstrate the shortcomings of the country, the system, "the Filipino," and so on, and thus it is thought by some that Filipinos should measure themselves by standards of their own, or at least, develop such norms. Already in 1960, Corpuz argued that in Filipino politics nepotism is ethically normal and that party loyalty is subject to family-based interests. That is why "We do [should] not judge ourselves by the irrelevant idiosyncracies, eccentricities, and even wishes, of alien nations (Corpuz 1969, 6-18). Similarly, in the field of literary criticism, Lumbera argued that Filipino literature should be judged by Filipino standards and measured at its relevance for life in the Philippines (Lumbera 1984, 91-101). Since the early 1980s the search for such standards is vigorously pursued in the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of the Philippines (UP) where the various branches of *pilipinolohiya* try to bring a we-centered view (*ang pantayong pananaw*) to life that does not need explaining to outsiders; logically, they prefer to express themselves in Filipino.

However this may be, the outer, wider world of shared space offers little to wholeheartedly identify with, and governments have done little to change this. Of course, in the early days of martial law "the problem of nationhood" was recognized, and schoolbooks were supposed to be designed to do something about it. Yet the government that aspired to represent a nation-state and stimulate identification with it, did almost everything it could do to devalue itself in the eyes of its repressed subjects by making a sham of the "achievements of civilization." And although the expulsion of Marcos in 1986 led to brief expectations of nation and solidarity, soon public space was filled again with cynicism, hopelessness, hypocrisy, injustice, confrontation, violence, and traditional politicians. "I do not deserve this country" is what a disappointed UP professor told me. Another described the country as a cruel place, devouring the sincerity and dedication of its people, while a third observed that there was no longer honor to be gained from having opposed Marcos.

With so much in the way of positive identification, people may develop a kind of a hate-love relationship with what is, after all, their native country.¹⁴ At the time of the international recognition of a beauty queen or a boxing champ, they are overjoyed. The nonviolent toppling of the durable dictator in 1986 attracted the admiring attention of the world, and that still sparks some pride. But then, so many are the bad things happening, the country apparently forsaken by God in spite of its prayerful population: the killer typhoons of

1987, 1990, and 1993; then sinking of the *Dorña Paz*, the greatest civilian maritime disaster ever, in 1987; the devastating earthquake of 1989 and the Pinatubo eruption of 1991 that laid waste to most of Central Luzon; the flash floods that killed thousands at Ormoc in 1991; the brownouts, the stalling traffic, the civil wars, the coups d'état, the confrontational political process, the crushing national debt . . . The country, it seems, is too vast and too catastrophe-prone to master, to be beyond redemption. Willy-nilly, one is part of it, yet ambivalent about identification.

In their quest for a positive identification with the collectivity, many people believe that they can travel up the course of history, to times before colonialism inflicted insult and injury, to the paradise of pristine nobility, such as certain ilustrados were already doing a little over a century ago. That is where they hold that the real Filipino values are located; they should be traced, dug up, and brought to life again. This naive trust in values as a *deus ex machina*—at the expense of structural, systemic forces—is endemic (see Mulder 1994a, 80–90) and surfaces in all the social studies school texts, in the official Moral Recovery Program,¹⁵ in newspaper columns and letters to the editor. It is the individual, that is, his morality, who appears to be responsible for the good order of society.

Since the individual is the product of his family of origin, the family should be built and strengthened, because it is believed that if the family is whole, so will society be. Yet this promotion of values that essentially belong to family and community life, cannot be expected to develop national pride in self as a Filipino citizen, because the image of the public sphere remains one of moral decay if measured by those very values. In the absence of localized positive ethics of wider society, there merely remain the dull rules—pay your taxes, respect the flag, honor the Constitution, obey the law, vote—taught in school, and it takes little observation or newspaper-reading to come to the conclusion that taxes, flags, constitutions, laws, and polls are not precisely awe-inspiring.

Wider society is a disorderly, an unsatisfactory place going by the rules of political and economic expediency with which it is difficult to identify. Because of the negative self-image propagated in school and fastidious commentary in the newspaper it appears even more disorderly than it really is. All this can be related to the colonialism-imposed syndrome that makes many Filipinos see themselves in the comparative perspective of the eternal underdog who feel they have to explain themselves, to apologize vis-à-vis outsiders. These days

this is aggravated by measuring the Philippines as the "sickman of Asia" against the burgeoning economic success of the Southeast and East Asian neighbors.

Conclusion

The peculiar image of the nation we find among contemporary educated Filipinos derives from a unique historical experience and a social perspective of the public world that grounds in the moral, private sphere of the family. By tracing the evolution of the public sphere we note its colonial origin and so, its low degree of legitimacy; the surrender of that sphere to a mercenary oligarchy; and the imposition of American ideas and standards that denigrated the Hispanic heritage to a kind of protocivilization while depicting the period of independence as one of perennial failure. It is most remarkable that all this is blatantly propagated in the schools at the same time that the students are neither given the tools nor the ideology to come to grips with the public world. Positively they are being taught values that properly belong to the moral, private sphere and imbued with the message that the desirable order of society follows from individual good conduct. The idea behind this values education is that such—reified—values have regulatory power all by themselves.

The current negative image of the nation is the outcome of decolonization and the cultural destruction inflicted by Marcos. Although the periods of the Pacific War and early independence offered little to be proud of, and are depicted as periods of moral decay in the textbooks currently in use, a positive image persisted into the Marcos dictatorship, then to be destroyed and exposed as baseless pretence. From that time on, Philippines-bashing and self-flagellation have become an inveterate feature of the discourse among those who aspire to a more positive image. Interestingly, they feel addressed by values education and the moral recovery program, and their social imagination sets on moralistic rather than structural melioration. Within the academic community we note the *pilipinolohistas* who want to construct an image that is at the same time positive and natively-based. The population at large is not part of all this, except from being exposed to school and media negativism. They may be indifferent to discussions about "the Filipino"; feel secure in their regional and local identity; simply aspire to emigration; or are plainly sur-

vival oriented in an impoverished environment leaving the luxury of seeking for and debating national images to the few who care about such things.

Those concerned with constructing a positive image of the nation have to start from scratch because of the weakness and distortions of the collective memory; the absence of a positive imagination of the public world; the cultural destruction of the Marcos period; the disinterest of the central government in nation-building; and the clumsiness of the social studies curriculum. Besides, most people feel secure in their particularistic bonds of family, community, friendships, ethnicity and religion, a type of bonds that seems to be strengthening in an increasing open, globalizing world. Multi-ethnic nationalism, call it nation-statism, is on its way out; in the Philippines it had its heyday a hundred years ago.

Notes

1. For some early results, see Niels Mulder (1996, chapters 4-8); "Philippine Public Space and Public Sphere," Working Paper No. 210, University of Bielefeld: Sociology of Development Research Centre, Southeast Asia Programme, 1994; "The public sphere and its legitimacy in the culture of the new urban middle classes in the Philippines," in *Emerging classes and growing inequalities in Southeast Asia*, eds. Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, Niels Fold and Jacques Hersh (forthcoming).

2. The mainly middle class masses who stopped Marcos' armed might with their physical presence on EDSA ringroad in February 1986 became known as People Power. It has often been observed that this is different from people's power; so far ordinary people have very little political power, unless they start shooting back, such as in the New People's Army (NPA), that is, the armed branch of the National Democratic Front (NDF).

3. The two-class model, that is, elite, or oligarchy, versus the common people, or mass, has a great deal of appeal, not only to the ideologues of the NDF, but also to the rabid nationalists of the University of the Philippines (UP). Whereas the first propagate, and practise, class struggle, the latter propose the fusion of elite and masses in a deep-seated feeling of nationalism. Both these ideologues and nationalists are firmly members of the middle classes, yet they have to struggle very hard to influence public opinion, and so far they have to struggle very hard to influence public opinion, and so far they have difficulty in creating something like a national discourse in which the opinions of the leading intellectuals are discussed rationally.

A simple bipartition is also attractive to all those who reason in the popular oppositions of colonizer (to be blamed) versus colonized (to be exploited), and similarly, foreigners versus natives, or the United States of America versus the Philippines.

4. For the purposes of my research, I made a thorough analysis of the following officially and privately-authored textbooks: Kagawaran ng Edukasyon, Kultura at Isports, *Pilipinas: Heograpiya at Kasaysayan* (1986; reprinted 1990) (The Philippines:

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Geography and History); *Ang Pilipinas sa Iba't Ibang Panahon* (1987; reprinted 1992) (The Philippines in Various Periods); *Ang Pilipino sa Pagbuo ng Bansa* (1988) (The Filipino in the Formation of the Nation), Quezon City: Instructional Materials Corporation; E.D. Antonio, L. L. Oriondo, A.S. Flora, R.R. Belarde, E. L. Banlaygas, *Pilipinas: Ang Bansa Natin IV, V, VI* (The Philippines: Our Country), Manila: Rex Book Store, 1989-91. Kagawaran ng Edukasyon, Kultura at Isports, *Araling Panlipunan I (Pagtatag ng Bansang Pilipino): Batayang Aklat para sa Unang Taon ng Mataas na Paaralan* (Social Studies [The establishment of the Philippine Nation], Basic Book for the First Year of High School), Quezon City: Instructional Materials Corporation, 1989; Bro. Andrew Gonzalez, FSC, L. Sta. Ana-Rankin, A. N. Hukom, *Kasaysayan at Pamahalaang Pilipino: Unang Antas, Araling Panlipunan para sa Mataas na Paaralan* (Philippine History and Government: First Level, Social Studies for High School), N.p.: Phoenix Publishing House, 1989.

5. Trust in and dependence on the United States was successfully instilled. In 1943, Quezon wrote to President Roosevelt, "that the Filipinos, 'spiritually' speaking, had an "Occidental way of life" that could be preserved only through continued association with America and the western world." In his biography we find, "I swore to myself and to the God of my ancestors that as long as I lived I would stand by America regardless of the consequences to my people or to myself" (Corpuz, 1989 II: 566 and 568). Also his protegee and later president, Roxas, can be quoted again and again for his absolute reliance on America and identification with its culture.

6. The bill depicts the ceremony inaugurating Philippine independence; the flag of the Republic of the Philippines goes up while the conspicuous Stars and Stripes is hauled down. Such a picture on the banknotes of a former colony strikes as weird, because normally colonizers are seen as illegitimate oppressors. The picture here may be interpreted as a recognition of the legitimacy of the American occupation while symbolizing the blessing of the Americans to the perennial ruling class that was their steady collaborator.

7. About Recto, see Constantino (1971); about Soliongco, Constantino (1981); about (neo)colonial education, Constantino (1966).

8. Fallows (1987). The author's thesis was "that culture can make a naturally rich country poor," and that the damaged culture roots in "a failure of nationalism." While the Left could easily dismiss such thinking, and others admitted it as "blaming the victim," many people who hold center stage in the cultural scene took it seriously and began to discuss about "Undamaging Filipino Culture" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 March 1988, 16).

9. American style, democratic freedom of expression is a long-standing feature of the Philippine press that often considers itself as a controlling "fourth estate." This may be too much honor; very often its licentiousness has more to do with political confrontations among factions of the oligarchy who own and control most newspapers, and who use them as political weapons.

10. For elaboration of the contradictions between being a colony, native ideas about leadership and democracy, see Paredes (1988).

11. Pedro Paterno's essayistic fantasizing about original Filipino religion and culture may be considered as an extreme demonstration of *ang pangkamang pananaw*, that is, explaining oneself to foreigners (see *ang pantayong pananaw* below), and the earliest manifestation of the "we-had-a-civilization-of-our-own" syndrome, of which the Gonzalez textbook is a good contemporary example (note 4; for a discussion, see Mulder [1994b, 475-508]). Because of his pioneering publications on popular culture,

Isabelo delos Reyes, Sr., is now remembered as the father of Philippine folklore studies. The same motive of uncovering the original past drove the scholar Jose Rizal to study and annotate one of the old Spanish sources, namely, Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas*, Mexico, 1607.

12. According to Veneracion (1988, chapters 4 and 5) many of these ideas and institutions were introduced by the Spaniards during the last three decades of their dominion.

13. Such colonially-imposed confusion in facing the wide world is nicely demonstrated in the quip about national identity, "A Filipino is an English-speaking, Roman Catholic Malay with a Spanish name eating Chinese food."

14. The weakness of nationalism as identification with a transcendent community of fellow Filipinos is compensated by the more tangible feelings attached to the motherland, or rather, Mother Land (*Inang Bayan*) representing the native soil. People identify with Heimat rather than with nation.

15. Creating morally aware individuals as the mainstay of a good society is the purpose of the compulsory study of the Constitution in school; it emphasizes the noble intentions of the Filipino as a people, plus the rights and duties of the citizen. Next to this, values education is an integral, and important, part of social studies in school. Aiming at the populace in general is the moral recovery program proposed by Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani in 1988; it was officially inaugurated by her brother, the incumbent president, in 1993. See, *Building a People, Building a Nation: A Moral Recovery Program* (Quezon City: Instructional Materials Corporation, 1988). This document, mainly composed by wellknown social scientists from UP and the Ateneo de Manila, lists seven strengths and seven weaknesses, or values, of the Filipino character, or way of life; it proposes cultural measures, that is, values propagation, to remedy the negative traits.

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