

MAKING FILIPINO HISTORY IN A "DAMAGED CULTURE"

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Lack of nationalism in the Philippines — traced to the historic lack of a state — is countered by a proposal for symbolic activism. The Philippines was the only country in Southeast Asia where a European colony was established preempting intensive influence of major Asian cultural traditions. National development here first requires propagating the value of the public good — the authority of the state remains to be legitimated. Legitimate authority is generated by public symbols, often dominated by elites. However, symbols are formed by community experience, so they can be appropriated to signify the popular will. Such a cultural practice is here called symbolic activism. Activism fulfilling symbols of state would be democratic as it would depend on local repertoire, established during historical time.

Nationalism — a concern of social scientists and of Filipinos — may be better understood when the terms which make a nation legitimate historically are examined. Nationalism motivates people to political action, while the nation is itself a social construct. Now, as the Philippines politically redefines itself, people are asking where the roots of the country's problems are buried. Diachronic action cannot be realized without attention to the synchronic patterns which underlie history. Why is the sense of Filipino nationalism weak? What is hindering socioeconomic development in the Philippines? In a widely circulated article, an American journalist has recently diagnosed the country's problem as "a damaged culture." While unusual in its focus on culture, Fallows' (1987) article does not offer to explain how a nationalist ethic would be authorized. This paper will use cultural concepts, particularly as developed in interpretive anthropology, to analyze "damage" to the Filipino identity. Further, history is not only constrained by culture, but created through meaningful cultural symbolism.

Reconciling pattern with process, synchronic significances and structures with their historical realizations, is a recurrent theme in the study of culture and society. It is precisely the question which confronts us here: Filipinos cannot make their own history because they lack national culture. Among developing countries worldwide, similar questions must be answered. As Part IV of his oft-cited *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz has collected a series of less-cited essays which, perhaps because the author does not identify himself as a nationalist, illuminate the inconsistencies of nationalism in new states. While most of Geertz's chapters were written as many as 20 years ago, with reference to coun-

tries other than the Philippines, their explanatory concepts have implications for here and now. Geertz identifies two competing dynamics of nationalism. *Essentialism* evokes primordial sentiments which legitimate nationalism as the natural and moral culmination of tradition and indigenous patterns. Meanwhile, *epochalism* invokes the spirit of the age, the secular, modern development which is the liberating process nationalism is supposed to provide. As one strain of conviction extols the identity and inherent unity of the people — the nation, the other strain, promotes the beneficent project of state power. A paradigmatic example of the tension between essentialism and epochalism is the politics of language in the Third World (Geertz 1973: 241-42). The underlying controversy is not grammatical or lexical development of the national language. It is the immediacy or native force of the mother tongues versus access to global, 20th century civilization (here, through English). Reconciling the two motivating yet often conflicting ideals, essentialism and epochalism, is nationalism, as conventionally defined — the belief that the nation and the state are the same thing.

In recognizing that social life occurs in both patterns and processes, note that neither one causes the other. Rather, the dynamics of group loyalties versus civil order comprise social history — where essentialist loyalties are themselves constructs of the time.

Culture and the State

The idea that lack of supralocal identity is the root of Filipino national problems has not entered the popular consciousness, if Fallows' jour-

nalistic collection of impressions is any indication. Fallows suggests that Filipino "culture itself... is the main barrier to development" (1987: 49), sustaining "a feeble sense of nationalism and a contempt for the public good" (p. 57); further, the culture is this way because of "damage" caused by colonialism (p. 58). Fallows then makes the odd psychological argument that their passive Malay culture has prevented Filipinos from overthrowing the clergy and landowners, unlike the rebellious Aztec and Indian cultures of Spanish America (p. 57). Even without considering the major differences between Philippine and Spanish American history (mainly, a small population of colonial Spaniards coopted the native elite in the Philippines, whereas a large population of Spaniards dominated and even replaced natives in the labor force in parts of America: so that rebellious Spanish Americans would either be Indians fighting foreigners, or poor Spaniards fighting Spanish oppressors — while rebellious Filipinos, up till now for the most part, would have to turn against their own principal families), Fallows' reasoning is strange. If the lack of Filipino rebelliousness stems from the inherent passivity of Malay culture, then the problem is not "a damaged culture," but the natural state of that culture. Moreover, it is a weak argument to locate major obstacles to nation building in an unspecified level of culture of inherently passive psyche.

Against Fallows, this paper will argue that Filipino national problems are rooted in social structure, not psychology. Sociologists have in the past documented that Filipinos appear to be mired in the bilateral kindred. That Filipinos lack a supralocal identity should be an obvious argument. But it is not the point here to resuscitate an old (and complacently descriptive, rather than explanatory) sociological theme. Rather, I wish to restate the problem in terms of the state: that multilevelled political structure which authorizes the law of the land and holds the monopoly on legitimate violence. Unlike other Asian countries, the Philippines had no state prior to the colonial period. Now, as neighboring countries proceed admirably toward industrialization, Philippine social structure does not afford development at that level. The authority of the Philippine republic — the public good — remains to be legitimated in its local constituencies. The crux of Filipino national problem here is state formation — or the tortu-

ous development of the nation-state — not traditional kinship.

More interestingly, the state formation approach ramifies in the second half of this paper into the proposal that nation building can most creatively be attempted at the symbolic level. Public authority is legitimated through cultural patterns, fashions, or tastes — so authority comes to reside in those symbols themselves. Thus, manipulation of symbols, a readily available cultural activity, becomes an arena of political activism. Such "symbolic activism" is the crucial remedy for a culture lacking in nationalism.

Stateless among Asian Civilizations

Before the arrival of the Spaniards in the Philippines there was apparently no state, nor was there a structure of national unity throughout the archipelago.¹ Rather, the dominant level of political organization was the chiefdom, where datu led their followers by dyadic patronage ties. Power was thus authorized personally and locally, not by official sanction. Optimistically, this prehistory may be interpreted as a lack of traditional obstacles to social mobility. At the same time, prehistory provides the Philippines with no indigenous pattern of higher, that is, supralocal, authority — no sense of the public interest. Thus, Fallows (1987: 57) could say of his brief, recent travels: "And because of this fragmentation — this lack of nationalism — people treat each other worse in the Philippines than in any other Asian country I have seen."

As the year 2000 approaches, many Asian countries are being heralded as leaders of the Pacific Century, when Japan, China, Korea, and others will wield economic and political clout globally. Usually the Philippines is left off the list of exemplary industrializing countries. I suggest that a crucial difference between the Philippines and its illustrious neighbors is that only here was there no state prior to a colonial period. As Weightman (1970: 25) states:

The Philippines was the only nation in Southeast Asia subjected to Western colonialism before it had developed a central state structure or had been intensively influenced by any of the great Asian traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam). ...In the pre-Spanish period no political system had

matured to the level of a political state in the usual sense of the term except in the far south (Sulu) where Islam had introduced the notion of sultan and rajah, had begun the stratification of local chieftains (*datus*), and had established the notion of a territorial state.

There was never a time when the authority system developed so as to unite the population's sentiments under the common identity of a civil government, nor was the Philippines greatly influenced by a major cultural tradition such as the Sinitic, Hindu, or Buddhist — only Islam made minor inroads into the islands. The Philippines was not one of the "organically evolving civilizations" (Geertz 1973: 244) like its neighbors: no homogeneous dominant culture or language unified the people, no institutions coerced country-wide cooperation. Although different ethnolinguistic groups comprised mainland China, for example, a single written language encoded all speech, and one of the world's first states enforced coordinated behavior.

Regarding Indonesia — which differs crucially from the Philippines in extensive influence of major Indic traditions — Geertz (1973: 317) says: "The classical problem of legitimacy — how do some men come to be credited with the right to rule over others — is peculiarly acute in a country in which long-term colonial domination created a political system that was national in scope but not in complexion." The colonial government represented a country-wide state which was not congruent with the population's sense of unity, and therefore lacked the legitimacy of nationalism. The source of power was not the will of the people but the imperial crown. The problem would be compounded in the Philippines, where the population as a whole had no unifying forms. The implication is that local politicians would incur no shame in collaborating with the colonizers; rather, collaboration was the way to legitimate local authority. Chiefs do not cooperate — they enhance themselves by competing for supralocal power. Until now, establishment of legitimate authority remains to be improvised.

A Republic Yet in the Making

An undoubtedly well-informed perspective of the Philippine political system is formulated

by the American C.I.A. (Central Intelligence Agency 1965). Elections and access to government depend not on principles but principals: personalistic ties of kinship and custom — controlled at the local level by landlords — take precedence over the state. The political structure of the prehistoric chiefdom is reproduced in the patronage system of modern politics. Compare the pre-Spanish social structure: "Political institutions were essentially an extension of kinship groups usually in small numbers. These groups (or *barangay*) included economic dependents as well as the major kindred. In the absence of other political structures, its leaders (*datus*) functioned as political leaders in a specific area" (Weightman 1970: 25). Even if it is speculative to argue on the basis of prehistoric patronage, it is useful to recognize that current politics is structured similarly. Public life is manipulated by powerful personalities without benefit of official sanction; instead, political patrons are the ones to grace the country-wide government with their cooperation. The landlord derives authority from his wealth and power, and does not contribute to the legitimacy of the supralocal state.

Local sentiments do not comprehend the far-reaching government. I quote at length (Geertz 1973: 318):

Even without the factor of colonial rule, however, the modern state would seem alien to local tradition in a country like Indonesia [such as the Philippines], if only because the state's conception of itself as a specialized instrument for the coordination of all aspects of public life has no real counterpart in such a tradition. Traditional rulers, and not only in Indonesia, may have been, when they could manage it and were so inclined, despotic, arbitrary, selfish, unresponsive, exploitative, or merely cruel (though, under the influence of the Cecil B. DeMille view of history, the degree to which they were has commonly been exaggerated); but they never imagined themselves, nor did their subjects imagine them, to be executives of an omniscient state. Mostly they governed to proclaim their status, protect (or, where possible, enlarge) their privileges, and exercise their style of life; and insofar as they regulated matters beyond their immediate reach — which was commonly very little — they did so only derivatively, as a reflex of concerns more stratificatory than properly political. The notion that a state is a machine whose function is to organize the general interest comes into such a context as something of a strange idea.

When the traditional cultural repertoire provides little by way of legitimate supralocal authority, then there is no choice but to make history.

Legitimizing the authority of the Philippine republic in the convictions of its local constituents is the central argument here. Making the pattern of traditional patronage politics give way to the current process of civil administration challenges the cultural imagination. For the dilemma of developing countries is how to command loyalty of all citizens, when certain loyalties — for Filipinos, the bilateral kinship network — seem to be more natural than citizenship: "This congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves" (p. 259). Whereas the state, by definition, ought to have the monopoly on legitimate coercive force. In order to establish its authority, the state must accommodate personality as identified by primordial loyalties.

Generating Loyalty

The customary delegation of authority by wealthy patrons must be domesticated in the realm of the state. While conflict between primordial loyalties — to tribe, religion, or race — and the public interest as represented by the new state motivates Geertz's argument about the dilemma of development, note that the Philippines lack major traditions which would evoke moralistic essentialism. While Malaysia must harness the clashing fervor of Muslims, Hindus and Chinese to energize public works, the Philippines does not even have fervor of that magnitude. The significant loyalty group here is the bilateral kindred, and that, being ego-defined, fails to mobilize great numbers of people. Not only must the Philippine republic reconcile competing family interests in defining its official morality, but it must also mobilize social resources in the public domain — beyond the jurisdiction of the kinship group. Thus, symbolizing the moral order of the state must come before displaying its coercive force. In the Philippines, loyalty to the larger society remains to be propagated, or construed through propaganda.

Consider the cleverness of the wide-ranging Marcos-era propaganda: a multi-volume Filipino

heritage,² murals portraying the president and first lady as historical or Biblical images, ethnological displays — all calculated to transfer the apparently intrinsic sentiments of the public to allegiance to the government. Marcos, recognizing the demagogic potential of such primordial loyalties, attempted to manipulate subjects into obedience to martial rule. Generally, officials of developing countries must recognize persons' deep-seated loyalties and values which give them self-worth. Yet states must not allow the small group of loyalty, such as the patronage network, to take precedence over the collective interest they are supposed to uphold: "They must reconcile them with the unfolding civil order by divesting them of their legitimizing force with respect to governmental authority, by neutralizing the apparatus of the state in relationship to them, and by channeling discontent arising out of their dislocation into properly political rather than parapolitical forms of expression" (Geertz 1973: 277). To serve the people, the state ought to provide the process by which sentiments and opinions can be publicly expressed. Otherwise, local politics will not disappear but will take some other cultural form, such as those patterns provided by ritual, religion, or tribal practices. Failure of the state to comprehend the public's needs will result in fragmentation according to available patterns and loyalties.

Fragmentation is characteristic of developing societies. As the economic situation changes, old social groups break up and new ones jostle for newly created power positions. The Philippine term "sector" usefully labels such ad hoc coalitions defined by overlapping criteria: fisherfolk, students, religious people are all sectors experimenting with their roles when wealth and power are not merely being redistributed but regenerated from new sources. Over this changing situation, the state must admit competing claims for sectoral rights while representing a collective morale. Meanwhile, certain sectors try to coopt state machinery for their own interests.

Typical in the careers of Philippine public officials are incidents such as this recent one: "Another commissioner... now faces graft charges for allegedly using his influence to win government contracts for an equipment supply company owned by his family."³ Compelling loyalty lies with the small kindred rather than the state, or even a larger group of primordial

identification. Without the legitimating pattern of collective morale, the government cannot proceed on the path of development.

Elites and National Culture

Embodying the collective morale would be the leaders who command people's loyalty — but making this loyalty allegiance to the nation is where the Philippine elites have evidently failed. From the history of authority, it is apparent that Philippine leaders have represented no more than their own patronage. From the native *datus* the Spanish colonial period brought forth the *principalia*. Only in the economic development of the late 19th century did the *ilustrados* emerge with interests distinct from those of the landlords and nascent mercantile class (Weightman 1970: 26). It was the *ilustrados*, later superseded in this role by the 20th century intelligentsia, who would propagate the idea of a national culture. Yet even today, Philippine elites are preoccupied with establishing their own status at the expense of nationalism.

Because of its ambiguous social position, today's intelligentsia is weak. It has inherited the style of the *ilustrados*, but earn little as teachers and writers: "... the Philippine intellectual elite is essentially a middle class grouping of limited funds and with acute status anxieties" (p. 30). The intelligentsia's legitimacy depends solely on its transcendent ideas, without wealth to support loyal followers. Thus it is conflicted: "Many of these young men and women combine anti-Americanism with an almost embarrassing aping of some of the worst aspects of crass materialism" (p. 31). Legitimizing social ideals independently of wealth is a challenge to tradition.

Consider the unexpected, suicide of former finance minister Jaime Ongpin, the illustrious technocrat. While upper class himself, Ongpin represented "the Filipino urban middle class passion for order and rationality" (Rocamora 1988: 13). Ongpin embodied the ideals of developing sectors including businessmen and bureaucrats — Manila's emerging petit bourgeoisie in what was once a semi-feudal, colonial outpost. Ongpin symbolized the professionally articulated interest of the state, the ideal government operating outside of traditional patronage.

For the administration of Ongpin, 'legitimacy derived more from its promise of moral orderliness' (*ibid.*) than from promises of material results. The Aquino government, especially as it was spontaneously conceived in February 1986, reflected — at least in part — the popular desire for political expression outside of the traditional favors of wealthy patrons. It was a triumph for the entrepreneurial spirit. The pressure was on managers like Ongpin to administer those desires. But the technocrats' task comprised an enormous contradiction: they were to implement development programs (in a country where rationality and bureaucracy exist, but separately) where rational bureaucracy does not exist. Well-reasoned plans could have little impact on a pattern where power flows from magnanimous *padrinos*. The efficient capitalist ethic, imported from Harvard Business School, was blocked by entrenched structures, just as the democratic ideology of voters is thwarted at election time (C.I.A. 1065: 126) — note, however, the persistence of ideology or patterns of belief even when the process cannot carry through. Perhaps it is not so surprising, sociologically, that Ongpin ended his own career.

Taste and the *Burgis*

For to be *burgis* in the Philippines is not to represent the ideals of the nation. Fallows (1987: 58) quotes a foreign banker: "There is not necessarily a commitment by the upper class to making the Philippine successful as a nation. If things get dicey, they're off, with their money." The islands are merely a local base to sustain family wealth and power. In a port city such as Manila, which historically grew as an entrepot for early world trade, the imported is the sign of high status. Foreign brand names adorn the bodies of elite Filipinos.⁴

Access to supralocal wealth enhances local prestige, if wealth is legitimated in the form of fashion or taste. The French social anthropologist Bourdieu exposes the difference between local and imported products as cultural consecration (1979: 7);

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile — in a word, natural — enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an

affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimation of social differences.

Through taste, wealth is authorized as social domination. Bourdieu's cultural distinction of socioeconomic classes (specifically those in contemporary France) further reveals politics to be "a 'theatre' whose rules are not understood and which leaves ordinary taste with a sense of helplessness" (p. 464). Those well-dressed, English-speaking⁵ — and if mestizo, good-looking, with high-bridged noses, fair complexions, and honey-colored hair — Filipinos who have the potential to mobilize social resources do so for their own aggrandisement. Cultural patterns are for them reduced to taste, merely legitimate forms for wealth — a source of their power — not traditions of loyalty to a larger entity. Rather than using their wealth to serve the public, the *burgis* has historically taken advantage of the people to make itself wealthy.

Cultural products can be symbolically transmuted into legitimators of authority for members of the dominant class, in Bourdieu's analysis. Consider the U.S. media's exploitation of Imelda Marcos' buying habits. Although lavish displays of wealth have served to legitimate authority many times throughout the world (Goldstein 1987: 237 cites the crown jewels of ancient dynasties), Mrs. Marcos' acquisition took the opposite effect. The sheer volume of her buying apparently altered the value of the products: pretentious effort to acquire the most distinctive properties vulgarizes them (Bourdieu 1979: 251). Such pretensions characterize the *petit bourgeois*: "Their desire for social recognition and their proleptic identification with the dominant class are revealed in the nature of their demands, which give priority to the symbolic aspects of existence..." (p. 456). While Bourdieu here refers to education, specifically university degree, as an index of worth for middle class Parisians, for Mrs. Marcos the symbolic aspects of existence were shoes and perfumes — purchases and gifts. Her manipulation of wealth was potlatch too crudely disguised, revealing her concern with the venalities of consumption instead of sublimation to pleasure. While

wealth is ultimately the source of power, properly refined ladies ought to graciously conceal greed.

Yet focus on Mrs. Marcos' fetishes was in part the voyeurism of a press captured by racist and sexist images (like "dragon lady," Goldstein 1987: 243), which displaces analysis of political corruption to fascination with a woman's compulsion — and capacity — to buy (p. 244). Mrs. Marcos' shopping sprees were not ludicrous to everyone. To members of the lower classes, those most appreciative of gifts, the Marcos wealth was legitimate. To Ilocanos, beneficiaries as provincemates of the Marcoses, their wealth was legitimate. To bidders at a 1987 New York City auction of Marcos wealth, the items for sale were already pieces of history (p. 247). Therefore, what is now referred to as ill-gotten comprised holdings which could themselves symbolize legitimate authority, depending on local meanings.

Legitimate authority for Makati and for the landowning elite across the country was exemplified by Corazon Aquino, Fallows (1987: 52) quotes Carmen Navarro Pedrosa: "Her jewels were truly heirlooms, not recent purchases from Van Cleff and Arpels. She was a true blue stocking, educated in the United States, and fluent in French. She represented all that Imelda had ever aspired to." But heirlooms only attain such cultural status through "a sort of ontological promotion" (Bourdieu 1979: 6) which is itself an historical process. That is, cultural patterns which authorize domination do change and can be changed. Francisco and Arriola (1987) graphically catalog the changing composition and tastes of the *burgis*: from early Dons with shirttails hanging out to homeowners with furniture in Bauhaus design to *colegialas* modeling fashions on the society pages. What is creative about the *History of the Burgis* is the emphasis on the fashions, tastes and social patterns which inform the chronological process. For authority is not inherent but is created in history (p. 105):

Most important, the true *burgis* jealously guards his ability to discriminate as his exclusive purview. To make available to all the sundry the refinements he has cultivated would negate his "class". Heaven forbid that his taste be shared by the hoi-polloi! Taste, after all, like the proverbial silver spoon, is something one is born with or is without.

The wealthy elite transmutes its properties into objects of refined taste, then guards that taste, as it distinguishes the dominant class. For the *burgis* knows that refined taste is cultivated, an invented cultural pattern that is subject not only to obsolescence in the wake of the *avant garde*, but to uprooting through history. The inherence of good breeding is contradicted by jealous exclusiveness of training. Distinguished taste, a symbol of elite status, is an invention — as is elite status itself. Legitimate authority is an invention, too.

Symbol of State

The historical role of elites in commanding the loyalties of the population shows that the pattern of authority which enables the political process, mobilization of social resources, and so on, is itself established through time — at the symbolic level of taste. The structure which now obtains is patronage usually aligned with the bilateral kindred. Primordial loyalties not only tie members of the lower class through cultural debts of gratitude to their privileged benefactors, but detract from any loyalty to the public interest. The problem is not only class inequality, which is internalized through values of patronage. The problem is loyalty to the patronage network which pre-empts larger, collective interest. Even if radical, structural transformation attacks class exploitation, traditional family values linking ritual and non-ritual kin will persist — these are the enduring, essential human ties in Philippine culture. Authority of the collective will or democratic state would still have to be established. Since ties of loyalty and gratitude are cultural, not structural — note that the *burgis* defends his discriminating taste, not his class position itself — the establishment of legitimate authority must be done in the symbolic arena.

A novel ethnological argument will be instructive here. Geertz argues that the traditional Balinese state was defined by the metaphysical doctrine of the exemplary center.⁶ Toward this "faultless image of civilized existence", Balinese lords orchestrated spectacular ceremonies which dramatized their public authority. The difference is that the rituals themselves fulfilled the authority of the state — they were not merely legitimating forms: "The stupendous crema-

tions, teeth-fillings, temple dedications, the pilgrimages and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds, even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means to political ends, they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for" (Geertz 1973: 335). Legitimate authority was generated by the symbols of state themselves.

Symbols are authority. Legitimacy of power, — a cultural notion, resides in the symbols themselves which give it form. Cultural patterns are the sources of authority; political organization merely shapes it. This is the argument about Bali (p. 339): "More specifically, it makes it possible to distinguish the ideological contribution to a contemporary state of the cultural traditions to which it is their heir from the organizational contribution to such a state of the systems of government which preceded it, and to see that the former, the ideological contribution, is, with some exceptions, of much greater significance than the latter." Cultural patterns are more significant because they evoke essentialist loyalty, they command people's hearts. Culture — not structure — is the problem to the attacked.

Political Significance

However, cultures and symbols are themselves social constructs. That is, culture is selected or defined by historical agents to justify past events and to facilitate future efforts. Just as distinction or taste is the crystallized disposition of elites — a guarded, intangible possession which promotes their properties into indices of legitimacy — symbols of authority publicly sanctions the political will of people. Notice that political will or the wealth of elites has no legitimacy until symbolized. The signifier of power has no authority until it takes on meaning independent of its inherent value. The connection between signifier and signified is by definition arbitrary. That is how Gucci leather handbags can signify a woman's wealth. The connection between a sign or a concept and the piece of reality it represents is also arbitrary. That is how tasteful accessories can indicate social dominance. Two levels of arbitrariness relate any symbol to the world. Those two levels of arbitrariness are socially fulfilled — they are space for rearranging cultural order.

Cultural patterns give order to the experienced world. Manipulation of symbols at the cultural level can alter society: "Culture, here, is not cults and customs, but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experiences; and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which structures publicly unfold" (p. 312). Symbolic action is political action. Not only do symbols give meaning to people's experience, but people invest meaning in symbols through historical experiences and political processes.

Politics is realized as symbols in the lives of people. Formation and transformation of cultural patterns or symbols is a process integral to Philippine history. Lack of recognition of such sociological or semiotic events is a failure of historians (Perterra 1983: 221). The long chronology of local protests, millenarian revolts and revitalization movements shows that rebellious populations find a way to resist even under repressive political regimes. This means of resistance is usually the transcendent symbolic authority appropriated from religious repertoire. When secular politics is inaccessible to people either because of repression or alienation of discourse, transformed ritual symbols give moral significance to people's rebellion. The EDSA revolt of 1986 is a spectacular example. Because of arbitrariness of signs or polysemia, religious icons are easily invested with political significance in public (p. 229).

The success of religious recruitment, such as that of the contemporary Iglesia ni Cristo, ought to give political activists a clue. Religious evangelists are expert in arousing people's moral identity; they know how to capture these local sentiments through icons and native signs. A glance at Iglesia architecture reveals large size, which iconizes power to mobilize resources and workers, and uniform design of each church, which indicates overall coordination of building. Legitimate authority is built into the Iglesia's appearance. If political activists were to open their movements to the signification of popular moral experience, they would benefit from the essentialist allegiance which not only mobilizes mass action but which provides a basis for legitimate authority. This is not an argument about the rectitude of certain religious or political ideologies. It is a recognition that separation of an orthodox worship from a restrictively secular

politics does not accord with the public morality which generates local meaning.

Symbolic Activism

Patterns give meaning to process; culture informs agents of change in history. To establish the authority of the state and the collective will it represents, historical actors or political activists must provide a meaningful, that is, symbolic, framework for local knowledge and experience. The arbitrariness of signs makes such propaganda possible. If people do not deliberately provide signification, cultural patterns or signs will inform spontaneous local responses and meanings for world-historical events (Ileto 1985: 8). Since it is the activists' avowed aim to alter world history, they would be well advised to do so on the symbolic level. It would be activism no less effective. It would be symbolic activism.⁷

In order to represent authentically the interests of the local people, propagandists, must recognize "the masses' creative appropriation" of prescribed texts such as the Pasyon (p. 7), for texts must be interpreted for a heterogeneity of possibilities — local meaning may be a reversal of or a resistance to prescription. While some activists use the image of the masses as makers of history, "the masses are not allowed to speak" in their texts (p. 6). Specifically, self-proclaimed nationalist writers and activists, by subscribing to the dominant, idealized, linear construction of history, "not surprisingly participate in the discourse of the liberal nationalists they condemn" (*ibid.*). They use the masses instead of listening to them. Symbolic activism would appreciate local meanings.

Perhaps the historical failure to propagate Filipino nationalism stems, in part, from a lack of symbolic capacity in activism. For example, the school system, which is charged with spreading a single consciousness throughout the archipelago, has since its installation operated by rote learning. Such didacticism would be definitely alienating as it leaves no room for native significance. Alienation would explain its lack of effect. Similarly, a doctrine which imposes itself on people's experience as "scientific," like scientific socialism, is alienating because it declares one interpretation of people's lives to be correct without regard to local mean-

ings. Such doctrine, like the prescribed texts of the Spanish Catholic Church, are subject to popular appropriation according to local sign systems.

By symbolic activism I mean that a repertoire of nationalist cultural patterns has to be constructed. A sense of pride in a loyalty to a national entity can only come when that nation is defined or symbolized. The "bitter theorists" (Geertz 1973:240) of nationalism have failed to signify that unity, creating a negative nationalism, defined only in opposition to the imperialist (p. 239): "Indeed, the very success of the independence movements in rousing the enthusiasm of the masses and directing it against foreign domination tended to obscure the frailty and narrowness of the cultural foundations upon which those movements rested, because it led to the notion that anticolonialism and collective redefinition are the same thing." Such bitter nationalism has failed to evoke essentialist allegiance in the Philippines once the unity of opposition is gone. Symbols of collective redefinition need to be offered.

A metaphorical argument taking off from the creative work of Zialcita and Tinio (1980) will be instructive here. *Philippine Ancestral Houses* illustrating the evolution of residential architecture in Luzon and the Visayas, reveals that what is classified as Spanish-style, the *bahay-na-bato*, is actually distinctively Filipino. Because of the local environment, particularly the danger of earthquakes, ground-level stone walls had to be made thinner, and the whole frame of the house supported by wooden posts (p. 66). In fact, in most post-1880s *bahay-na-bato*, the stone wall is not load-bearing at all — it is merely decorative. Its thinness poses little danger in an earthquake, when the rooms on the second floor can sway in their wooden frame without pulling down the roof. Thus, the *bahay-na-bato* is a direct descendant of the *bahay kubo*: it is actually a frame house on stilts, but the stone wall disguises the stilts — note that the first floor, a damp ground in the tropics — usually does not house residential space. This is a semiotic example of nationalist history. Filipino architecture has appropriated the appearance of the *bahay-na-bato* on stilts.⁹ Although a symbol may be appropriated from Spanish colonial heritage, in order to have meaning locally, it must be redefined according to Filipino conditions and patterns. Creative

(and often spontaneous) appropriation of signifiers for nationalist signifieds is symbolic activism (if yet unconscious) — creation of nationalist meaning.

Historical Democracy

Earlier, this essay cited the great Asian traditions which unite large populations in almost every other country in the region. The Philippines' lack of such public essentialisms could at best be viewed as lack of obstacles to social levelling. But it means that a repertoire of nationalist symbols must be constructed. It will not have the divine authorization of Buddhist kings or the timeless centrality of the Balinese state. Filipino nationalist symbols must be explicitly historical, created by persons for the state, signifying the popular will. For this reason, Filipino nationalist symbols must be democratic: responsive to the collective interest. Nor will this make symbolic activism any less authoritative or effective. Consider the patriotic signs of the United States which was founded as a republic in historical time, officially following the sovereign will of the people: the Liberty Bell, Constitution, Statue of Liberty. The claim of the United States to be a democratic republic is not the issue. The point is that patriotic symbols, designed deliberately for that purpose, can evoke the allegiance of the population not essentially loyal to each other.

Reconciling pattern with process has been the theme of this essay. How do we bring primordial loyalties to kin to bear on the epoch of national independence and democracy? Filipinos cannot deny an embarrassing lack of national pride among the population: Fallows was just the latest, and perhaps most direct, of many American journalists to point out shameful contradictions in our public life. While his observations do not offer an insightful solution, recognize that as single persons, Filipinos do not feel the shame, or accept the blame, for lack of nationalism. That would be because Filipinos generally do not identify their personalities with the public interest. Rather, the Filipino is essentially a member of a family defined in opposition to other kindreds. We cannot even distinguish the public interest — no cultural sign indicates where it is. Historically, the elite has failed to

unite the public — although the ideology of democracy or collective morale has flickered. Since the ideals are available in the social repertoire, a popular symbolism can ignite their significance. Cultural meanings must be patterned through political process. After all, culture is itself always, and only realized, in process.

The essential cultural process proposed here is symbolic activism. By this I suggest that organizers of current political movements would be well advised to pay more attention to the cultural aspect of politics — for this implies a more democratic practice. Symbolic activism will not necessarily arise from more research similar to *Philippine Ancestral Houses*, although publications like this, and the *History of the Burgis*, certainly document national history at the cultural or social level. Rather, the historical act of designing *bahay-na-bato* on the framework of the *bahay-kubo* exemplifies nationalist requirements in what is not normally considered a nationalist activity. Symbols are formed by the daily patterns in the lives of both common people and elites. (Earlier, I explained how elites bear symbols which indicate social dominance among the general population.) Because their significance is publicly constructed, symbols have great political potential. They define the meaning of people's activities. If properly

manipulated, symbols can signify the common good.⁹ Revival of traditional art forms or ethnic music will not necessarily instill more awareness of the public program. Resurgence of tradition and ethnicity ought to be interest, especially if tradition and ethnicity are dispossessed of local authenticity as instruments of an exoticizing aesthetic or an alien political comprehended spontaneously, as community experience. Signification of spontaneous, local, cultural repertoire demands democratic understanding. Symbolic activism means taking advantage of the arbitrary levels of cultural practice to indicate the national interest: religious icons were invested with nationalist political meaning, and political symbols took on transcendent significance at the February 1986 EDSA revolt, for example. Parishes throughout the country, schools, barrio organizations and other public institutions have many occasions on which to display symbols of church and state creatively: processions, graduations, demonstrations, etc. Specific instructions on symbolic activism, tied as it is to local meanings, lie beyond the scope of this paper. Let the suggestion suffice that a resolution (taken from a definition of interpretive anthropology) lies in consciousness of the meaningful activity of symbols — symbolic activism — which is culture.

NOTES

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¹For a discussion of nationalism, it seems appropriate to follow the standard account of the prehistoric archipelago. While specific anthropological evidence on statehood and nationhood remains to be documented, theoretical issues, such as those raised by Geertz (1973:317), can already be framed.

²Ileto (1985: 5) critiques the romanticization of pre-Hispanic society and the linear idealization of history which is supposed to justify nationalism — without articulating the popular role of the nonliterate.

³*Newsweek*, March 7, 1988, p. 48.

⁴My students at the Ateneo de Manila have informed me that the following, best purchased in Hong Kong or the U.S.A., are names of distinction: for clothing — Benetton, Forenza, Guess, Fiorucci, Reno, Esprit; for rubber shoes — Reebok, Tretorn, Dragonfly, Tiger, Nike, Espadrilles; for cars — Lancer, Laser, MBW, Opel, Mercedes, Stanza, Telstar, Town Ace, Sentra. See Francisco & Arriola (1987:148) for a list of Filipino brand names replaced by imports earlier in this century.

⁵Better yet, Castilian-speaking: the code of finesse "in the stuffiest reaches of the upper class" (Fallows 1987:52).

⁶Although Geertz has elaborated on this argument in a recent monograph, *Negara: The Theatre-state in 19th Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980), here I refer to "Politics Past, Politics Present: Some Notes on the Uses of Anthropology in Understanding the New States" (1967), reprinted as Ch. 12 of *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), esp. pp. 331-37.

Take off from Bourdieu, who has invested ordinary socio-political terms with new meaning by the *symbolic*: symbolic capital, symbolic violence.

Zialcita (1980: 225-31) discusses this question in detail in the chapter "Why 'Antillan'?"

The author has just given me a reprint of José Mario C. Francisco, S.J. (1988) "Two Currents in Filipino Christianity," *Landas* 11:1:25-64 which isolates religious processions as vehicles for maintaining or establishing class inequality, while also noting the revolutionary potential of the traditional form of faith to liberate from historical oppression. In themselves, rituals or symbols are ambiguous or arbitrary. Thus, their political potential is heightened.

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