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## Introduction

# *An Identity under Question*

ENJOYING A FOREIGN DISH means more than ingesting food; it is an acknowledgment that the Other has a value worth welcoming into one's being. During the last decades of the twentieth century, the cuisines of Thailand, Vietnam, Bali, and Singapore gained international acceptance and prestige. So have other expressions of their culture. As recently as the 1960s, Southeast Asian arts were classified as either "Farther Indian" or "Chinese"; these labels have since been dropped and the unique features of each style appreciated. May we expect that the same respect will eventually be accorded our Filipino arts, specifically those created in the Christianized, Hispanized lowlands?

In the realm of taste, as in other realms, such respect is closer now than before, but still remote. Part of the problem is presentation. Ordinary Filipino restaurants, both here and abroad, do not make their offerings visually attractive. As even Filipinos complain, "Everything looks brown!" And, because our restaurateurs skimp, they will not serve the *sawsawan* [dipping sauce] in a saucer but instead stock it in a bottle on the table. But as serious, as this lack of concern for the customer, is the question of self-respect. While Filipinos love their cuisine, when asked about its characteristics, some answer, "There really is no Filipino cooking. It's Spanish, it's Chinese." Or worse, according to a Filipina who runs a Thai restaurant, "*Kare-kare*<sup>1</sup> like the rest is bastardized cooking."

Some Filipinos' tendency to denigrate, without basis, their major cultural symbols shows in other realms, and works against us. During the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation conference held in Subic in December 1996, the participating heads of states were photographed wearing barong Tagalog made for the occasion. This should have been a glorious hour for our designers, and for the Philippines as a whole. It was not to be. Local writers repeated the legend of how the shirt came about. Supposedly the wicked Spaniards compelled Filipinos to wear their shirttails out to mark their low status, and obliged them to use a transparent fabric so as to expose their weapons (Ramos 1996, 11). Thanks to this cliché, the *Bangkok Post* trumpeted that the Filipino national shirt was a "slave shirt"

(Cunanan 1996, 6). Thanks again to this cliché, some Filipinos, like an uncle of mine, now refuse to wear the barong Tagalog.

While studying and teaching in the U.S., a frequent insinuation I met was “Oh, the Philippines? You mean tree houses/little bamboo huts/Smokey Mountain”? I countered this by showing books on our houses in wood and stone from the 1800s to the 1930s and on our baroque churches. For large, free-standing structures either in timber or stone that attempt to symbolize the cosmos and Man’s place within it indicate a sophisticated level of social development. They require a variety of highly specialized skills from masonry to mathematics, a managerial class to coordinate thousands of artisans, and speculative thinkers. Such structures first appeared in the Near East three millennia before Christ; then in India and China; and, during the first millennium after Christ, in other Asian countries. Examples are the temples of Nara and Kyoto, the sacred city of Angkor, and the vast stupa of Borobudur. However, in the lowlands of Luzon and Visayas, available data indicate that such stone structures with cosmic symbolism would appear only from the early seventeenth century onward in the form of churches.<sup>2</sup> The native artisans who built these eighteenth–nineteenth-century churches had a good knowledge of the Golden Mean, as shown by a recent, unpublished study by the Spanish architect Santiago Porras. Often, their designs and their details are exquisite. But many educated Filipinos feel alienated. They deride these designs as products of “forced labor.”<sup>3</sup> I have heard architects dismiss this stone legacy as “a colonial imposition.”

Equally downgraded are other highlights of our cultural heritage. While a tour operator agrees on the need to showcase the Philippines’ Spanish-influenced arts, he speaks of them “as bastardized Spanish.” Another friend, who conceptualized a tour for the modern art collection of the GSIS, the Central Bank collection of pre-Hispanic gold jewelry, and the museum of San Agustin, says that “Modern art and pre-Hispanic old jewelry are us Filipinos. Those baroque saints and carvings have no connection to us.” Has she ever attended processions and seen how important these baroque-garbed saints are in fostering municipal solidarity? I wonder. During one 12 June celebration at the East-West Center in Honolulu, I invited practitioners of Filipino martial arts to perform before an international audience. However, a visiting Tagalog asked me why I featured *eskrima*. “Why not Maranao martial arts?” Unconsciously he thought “eskrima,” because derived from the Spanish word *escrima*, was less authentic. He should have listened to a young German expert in martial arts explain our martial arts, which he teaches. Unlike Indian and Chinese martial arts whose center of gravity is the navel, “Your eskrima has the heart as the center.”

When describing outstanding artifacts of their own culture, I hear educated Filipinos use adjectives such as “bastardized” and “mongrel.” Sometimes they use kinder, but still condescending, adjectives such as “imitative” or “derivative.”

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Part of the stigma attached to Filipino cooking in the U.S. derives from its supposed association with “tribalism.” While Northern Vietnamese and Southern Chinese eat dogs and cats, in Hawaii Filipinos are singled out for eating dog meat. My American-Chinese dentist, in all innocence, once remarked that “Filipinos eat raw meat; that is their diet.” He did not know that even in isolated upland hamlets, such a diet is uncommon.

Because I am a Manileño who loves adobo, the barong Tagalog, the embroidered piña, baroque art, the fiesta, jotas, and Rolando Tinio’s Tagalog poems that draw freely from the Spanish word chest, I have written this collection of essays in order to answer the following questions: Why do lowland Christian Filipinos experience an unease when reflecting on their Hispanized heritage? How has this unease been fed by current ways of reading history and culture? What might be an alternative way to read history and culture?

This unease stems from the way we (and outsiders) read our history and culture. It is partly attitudinal, partly methodological. Key major symbols fuse together native and Hispanic elements. Consider that most popular of Filipino dishes, the adobo. Chicken and/or pork is seasoned with pepper and salt, marinated in vinegar and soy sauce together with bay leaf (laurel) and plenty of garlic, and then cooked. Pickling has indigenous roots; soy sauce is Chinese-Japanese. When told that adobo comes from adobado, the Spanish for “pickled” and that the liking for bay leaf and garlic is very Mediterranean, friends react with, “Then it is not Filipino!”—instead of finding out how its taste differs from the peninsular adobado.

Their unease increases when they discover that the harana, or evening serenade, derives from the Spanish jarana, that the well-loved tinikling combines the pan-Southeast Asian bamboo dance with the beat of the jota, that our martial eskrima counts in Spanish and names its passes in Spanish,<sup>10</sup> or that a full one-fourth of Tagalog words, including well-loved ones like *pamilya*, *karinyoso*, *nobyá*, *compare*, are Spanish in origin.<sup>11</sup>

an anthropologist of American Indian background, talks of the prevalence of feuds between Kalinga villages during the early part of the twentieth century. When Dozier (1966, 60) had to go from a Kalinga village to another just 50 feet away, his boy-companion backed off. The boy feared he “might be the victim of revenge for an unsettled fight several weeks before between two youths.” One of them was his first cousin. During my extended stays in the Ilocos, I personally found the relations between the barangays to be peaceful, though at times laden with suspicions.<sup>3</sup> Other colleagues, however, paint a different picture. Raul Pertierra (1988, 66) says that teenage boys in the Ilocos municipality he studied would conduct “organized raids against other barangays.” Presumably this resulted in brawls. Minda Cabilao-Valencia (2001), a sociologist who taught at Batac, Ilocos Norte, in 1982–1985 and 1988–1990, reports that colleagues warned her not to go to particular barangays where feuds were taking place.

Are these patterns of suspicion and conflict true only of Filipinos? Accounts of peasant life in nineteenth-century France report that peasants kept pretty much to their own village. It was too expensive to go out, and many roads were muddy trails. When they would go to a town on a pilgrimage and/or to market, brawls often broke out between peasants from different villages at the slightest provocation. Besides, the men liked physical fights (Weber 1976, 383–4).

Discussions of community are often colored by assumptions regarding the “*bayanihan* spirit.” Many assume that *bayanihan* is commonly practised by farmers all over the Philippines, and that they must, therefore, have a deep sense of community.<sup>4</sup> My own observation of Ilocano farmers has been that the dyadic exchange of unpaid labor largely occurs among close kin, friends, and neighbors to favor one individual. It has nothing to do with the interests of the barrio/barangay as a corporate whole. This, too, has been the observation of the sociologist Gelia Castillo (1981, 452). Moreover, farmer-friends tell me that *bayanihan* is relevant only for particular tasks. For building a house of bamboo-and-thatch, one should indeed throw a party to compensate those who assisted with their unpaid labor. But such a compensation will not do for building a house of hollow blocks and metal roof. My farmer-friends prefer skilled labor and willingly pay for it. Similarly, they prefer to pay for farm labor when transplanting rice shoots because this task has to be done quickly. In contrast if they were to invite their relatives and friends to help them for free for, say, two days, then they would be obliged to reciprocate each of them with two days of unpaid labor away from their farm. On the other hand there are indeed other life-situations in the hamlets, where my farmer-friends willingly help their relatives and neighbors (who are often the same) with unpaid labor. Examples would be a death in the household or preparations for a wedding feast. But this warm intimacy can go hand in hand with sorcery accusations against the Outsider.

Both nationalism and modern democracy assume the importance of the broader community, a community that transcends ties of kinship and locality, a community that is abstractly conceived yet real. Both assume the importance of the Anonymous, Faceless Stranger: the person or persons whom one will never know face-to-face but whose welfare must be considered because they are fellow citizens. In a democracy there is another key idea: that the individual, regardless of background, is a rational being capable of making decisions

on his or her behalf. Consequently even the ragpicker is an end in himself rather than a means to someone else's end. But these notions have not appeared at all times and in all places.

“Kindred” and “kindness” come from the same root according to the anthropologist Edward Tylor ([1871] 1958, 10). “Kindred” refers to those kinspersons that an individual believes he or she can rely on within a bilateral kinship system. So Bituin feels close to two paternal first cousins plus a maternal uncle and two second cousins. On the other hand Tala, her sister, is drawn to four paternal first cousins and three maternal first cousins. Though sisters, their kindreds differ in size and composition. Originally the kindred constituted the basic social organization of the Anglo-Saxons, as of other Germanic peoples up until the fifth to the sixth centuries. Thus, says Tylor, benevolence, cooperation, and nonviolence—in other words “kindness”—were reserved for the kin but not for those outside it, for the latter were potential enemies. In case of conflict with others, no other group but the kindred could be expected to help the individual. The kindred, too, has constituted the moral universe of many Filipinos, whether in the lowlands or in the uplands.

Who is regarded as the Insider in the indigenous notion of community among Filipinos? Who is the Outsider? What role might the state and the Church have played during the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in facilitating a “We” that was broader than the kin? Finally, in building a broader “We,” are we obliged to choose between the indigenous and the Western? These are the questions I wish to explore.

By “indigenous” here, I mean two peoples: (1) non-Moslem Filipinos of pre-seventeenth-century Luzon and the Visayas; and (2) non-Hispanized, non-Moslem Filipinos who, down to the middle of the twentieth century, lived in relative isolation in the uplands.

In this essay, I look at the role of the state during the late sixteenth to the nineteenth century. I am interested in the interaction between Spanish and indigenous traditions. I argue that in the non-Moslem areas of Luzon and Visayas, our first experience of living in a wider polity, the state, took place under Spanish rule. This explains why particular Spanish/Western institutions continue to play an important role in constituting our sense of community today. Contrary to what some Filipino nationalists and our Asian neighbors say, we are not “colonial-minded” in retaining these. I say this with full awareness of the ambivalent role of the state. On the one hand democracy and, to a certain extent, nationalism were conceptualized in opposition to the monarchy. On the other hand, despite itself, the pre-twentieth-century state created the conditions that made these new forms of consciousness possible by articulating the “I” and broadening the “We.” It has been both Enemy and Facilitator. I base my interpretations on both historical accounts and on field data drawn from years of living among farmers for extended periods of time.

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### *Marx on Communal Ownership*

Marx ([1846a] 1969, 22) speaks of communal ownership [*Gemeindeeigentum*] in early societies. But what did he mean by this? Furthermore, was he really so enthusiastic about it that he regretted its demise?

The first form of ownership, according to Marx, is “kin-centered ownership” [*Stammeigentum*].<sup>10</sup> Production is still undeveloped: People live by hunting and fishing, by breeding animals or, in the highest stage, by agriculture. Since the division of labor is undeveloped, the social structure merely extends the family. Above are patriarchal leaders of the kin group, below are kin members, at the bottom are the slaves who are owned. Not only does inequality occur, the communal ownership of the means of production does not even exist (Marx [1846a] 1969, 22, 29; [1846b] 1994, 142–43).

With untamed peoples [*Wilden*] every family has its own cave or hut, just as with nomads each family has a separate tent. This separate domestic economy is made even more necessary by the increasing development of private ownership. With agricultural peoples a communal domestic economy is just as impossible as is a communal cultivation of the soil.

The second form of ownership is the “ancient communal and state ownership” that appears when several kin groups form a city either because they have come to an agreement or because one has been conquered by the other.<sup>11</sup> So widespread is communal ownership that even slaves are owned in common (Marx [1846a] 1969, 22). However, the individual economy, which cannot be separated from private property, cannot be abolished “for the simple reason that the material conditions were not present” (Marx [1846b] 1994, 143). A communal domestic economy presupposes the development of machinery and the common provision of services. Marx cites, as an example, the provision of services such as water, gas-lighting, and steam heating. Save water, all of these presuppose industrialization. Moreover, all of them, including water, are normally no longer obtained individually in a modern city. They require common ownership and management; in contrast to this, in a preindustrial city, each household procures its own water and firewood.

Through a dialectical process the ancient and communal form of ownership leads to another form, feudalism, which in Europe led to capitalism.

Philippine societies of the sixteenth-century lowlands and of the twentieth-century uplands would be seen by Marx as dominated by kin-centered or tribal ownership—*Stammeigentum*. On the other hand he probably would see the beginnings of “ancient

communal and state ownership” in the municipalities founded after 1565 where particular resources, like the municipal house, the plaza, and the ejido, are regarded as belonging to the municipality as a corporate reality. Finally, it would be in contemporary cities of semi-industrialized Philippines that he would see the potential growth of common ownership and management, for here basic services, such as water and electricity, despite water pumps and generators, are generally not obtained individually by each household. The management of water in Metro Manila has shifted from government control to capitalist enterprise under the Lopezes, back to government control; while the management of electricity has been a capitalist enterprise, also under the Lopezes. For Marx, the de facto socialization of these basic services indicates that, for rationality, these should eventually be run by all the beneficiaries acting together as a corporate body.

Did Marx eulogize the tribal mode of production? Consistent with his dialectical approach, he looks at both its costs and the benefits. True, he extols the advantages of a society where little or no full-time occupational specialization occurs. It is possible to shift from one interest to the other, “to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, breed cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner.” In contrast, the emergence of the division of labor locks a man into a calling for the rest of his life, and intensifies the division of society into classes. Nonetheless, this has benefits. Marx ([1846b] 1994, 118, 117) says that under tribal ownership, the individual’s consciousness of himself as an individual different from his group and from nature is limited. “It is the mere consciousness of being a member of a flock, and the only difference between sheep and man is that man possesses consciousness instead of instinct.”

What then enables man to transcend this “sheeplike” or tribal consciousness [*Hammel-oder Stammbewusstsein*]? None other than increased productivity, increased needs, increased population, and the division of labor into mental versus manual labor. Thus the separation between mental and manual labor has no doubt divided society into nonproducers and producers and has oppressed the impoverished majority, for “the division of labor and private ownership are really identical expressions.” Nonetheless, it has been the necessary basis for the emergence of “pure theory” such as philosophy, theology, ethics, all of which have increased man’s understanding of himself and the world (ibid., 117, 32, 118).

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### *Filipino Genius*

“Local genius,” too, asserted itself in the encounter between Spanish and indigenous culture, and resulted in what we now call “Filipino culture,” more accurately the culture of lowland Christian Filipinos. The creators of this new culture came from the different ethnic groups of the islands: the indigenous peoples of the lowlands; the mestizos, whether Chinese or Spanish; and the creoles, or island-born European settlers. The “we” I discuss is thus broader and more inclusive than the “we” of doctrinaire, reductionist nationalism which would confine the “we” to the native and the indigenous which supposedly are “not tainted” by outside influences. My model for nationalism is the French which revolves around sentiment rather than blood, and which regards as “French” anything excellent created on French soil even if by foreigners. Thus Scholasticism, which was created in Paris by Abelard (French), Aquinas (Italian), and Albert the Great (German) is French. So is Modern Art: Matisse, Braque (French); Picasso, Gris, (Spaniards); Modigliani (Italian); and Chagall (Russian). My other model is the Mexican which, in spite of reaction against colonialism, resembles the French in its generous definition of the “national.” This I discuss in the next essay.

I propose seeing these different ethnic groups in the Philippines as taking into account, consciously or unconsciously, the natural environment, the existing social structure, and the local economy in their response. In brief they made use of available local knowledge. Another factor should be considered: There were Peninsular Spaniards, like the priests, who came over to stay. When, for instance, they had to commission a building or to organize rituals, they had to take into account not only Spanish conditions, but the Philippine as well. Meanwhile the Filipino also received influences from China, India, and Islam. But this was not a matter of blind acceptance. In real life, many Filipinos have not been like Rizal’s Doña Victorina who aped foreign ways. Brumfiel (1992) has shown how the cultural ecological approach can be enriched if we look at the relationships between people as a continuous negotiation where social class, gender, and membership in a faction exert influence. What we regard as the culture of a society is really the outcome of this negotiation. I would like to look at the relations involving Filipinos and Spaniards from the same angle. In this case, I would use gender, social class, and ethnicity as influential factors. The text below is an outline that, I hope, opens doors for future research in cooking, costume, architecture, and religion.

Local cooking styles at the advent of the Spanish centered on boiling, steaming, broiling, roasting meats, fish, and vegetables, or on steeping raw fish in souring agents. Flavoring was with salt, *patis*, bagoong, and souring agents like green tamarinds. It is not

clear whether pepper was used, despite our proximity to the Spice Islands. The local term is Spanish in origin: *paminta* from the Spanish *pimienta*. Mediterranean influence brought in new ways of cooking. One important method was sautéing [*guisa*] with garlic, onions, and tomatoes. However, local taste created a new flavor. Local sautéing, according to Doreen Fernandez,<sup>6</sup> differs from the Spanish in its liberal use of shrimps and patis, both products of a riverine environment, and that Chinese condiment, soy sauce. This is evident, for instance, in the Filipino version of Chinese noodles, *pansit bihon guisado*. The Spanish form of beef stew, *mechado*, is flavored locally by combining tomato paste with soy sauce. Pre-Hispanic Filipinos most likely pickled their foods in vinegar, as in *paksiw*. So did the Spaniards, using peppercorn and plenty of garlic, as in *adobado*. The two traditions met together with Chinese soy sauce to form the highly popular *adobo*.

Relations of power may not seem obvious in cooking. But taste preferences have been used to advertise class and ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> Some Filipinos of European descent proudly proclaim that they do not care for bagoong. In Hawaii Filipinos' fondness for bagoong is mocked. However, in the Philippines, the cooking style that did triumph, both at home and at banquets, fuses together the Spanish, the Chinese, and the indigenous.

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## *As yet an Asian Flavor does not Exist*

The Philippines constitutes the only true end-point of the world.

—Pierre Chaunu 1960, *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques*

JAVANESE DIP DEEP-FRIED and roasted foods either in sambal—a paste made from red chili peppers, garlic, salt, and sugar—or in *terasi*, a fermented shrimp/fish paste that may be studded with chopped red chilies. Tagalogs prefer dipping sauces with a sour base: palm vinegar with a lone crushed chili pepper pod; vinegar with slivers of onion with mashed garlic and pepper; chopped green camias and tomatoes; or small raw pickled mangoes mixed with tomatoes and coriander. Though the Javanese use some tamarind juice in their dishes, they complain that the Tagalog's sour dishes, especially those cooked in vinegar, upset their system. On the other hand while the Tagalogs use some chili pepper, many of them claim that sambal burns their stomach. Which taste is more authentically “Asian”: the Javanese or the Tagalog?

Many assume that an identifiable pan-Asian sensibility exists in all domains, from philosophy to literature to music to cooking; and that while Javanese culture is authentic, because it conforms to this ideal norm, Tagalog culture is inauthentic because submission to Spanish colonization has alienated it from this norm. Thus, the writer Mariles Vitug (interview 1997) asked the culinary expert Doreen Fernandez, “The Philippines has been colonized twice. Did this confuse the country's cuisine?” Note the loaded word “confuse.” In an interview for the *Philippine Star*, Lorrie Reynoso, a chef-instructor at the prestigious New York Restaurant School, says that the consensus of Filipinos and American food editors and critics is that when Westerners think of Asian cuisine, “whether it is Thai, Burmese, Indonesian,” they always associate it with indigenous spices “which Philippine cuisine does not have” (Martel 1997).

I question, however, whether a pan-Asian sensibility has ever existed—especially one that favors burning spices. For their dipping sauce, the North Vietnamese favor *nuoc mam*,

which, like our *patis*, is an amber-colored fish sauce. On this they sprinkle a few slices of chili. Cantonese food, which has influenced Filipino sensibility, uses ginger, pepper, and soy sauce but not the variety of spices one finds in Java, certainly not the chili pepper that Szechwanese love. While Koreans love plenty of chilis and garlic, Japanese abhor their taste and their smell as low class. They prefer mustard (wasabi) and soy sauce. Who is more Asian: the Japanese who hate garlic and chili or the Szechwanese and Koreans who love these?

I also question whether indigenous pre-Hispanic, pre-Islamic Philippine societies participated in a pan-Asian passion for piquancy. According to my anthropology students, who have lived in the uplands of Mindanao, both the hitherto animist upland Bukidnon and Manobo only use salt for flavoring, and sometimes not even that because of the cost of transport from the coast. The town centers of Ilocos Norte were exposed to Hispanization from the late sixteenth century onward. But Ilocano farmers, among whom I stayed while doing field research, generally use only bagoong to flavor their everyday vegetables and occasional meats. Peppers appear when they fry and sauté [*guisa*], usually for feasts. Their term for black pepper is *paminta*, from the Spanish *pimienta*. It is hard to believe that their ancestors enjoyed spicy meals before the coming of the Spaniards. Or that contemporary Ilocano farmer taste is “confused.”

As far back as the early seventeenth century, the missionary Alcina ([1668a] n.d., 3, 351) observed of the Visayans that “many times [they take] their roots or rice alone or with a little salt and not all have this always.” The Boxer Codex ([1590] 1960, 364) said of the Visayans that “their ordinary food is a little rice boiled solely in water and some sun-dried fish.” Neither author mentioned pepper and other spices. Just because we are close to the Spice Islands does not mean that a taste for black pepper was widespread here before Legazpi. Or that cardamom, cloves, cumin, and nutmeg were regular seasoning agents of Visayan and Tagalog food. Westernization supposedly resulted in the loss of piquancy. And yet the descendants of the Mexican Indians, who domesticated the chili before Columbus (Sabau 1992), came here during the galleon trade, bringing with them new plants, cooking styles, and the fiery fruit. In the rest of Asia, Portuguese traders introduced the chili.<sup>1</sup> That a taste for it spread like fire in other Southeast Asian countries, whereas it merely simmers among us, says something about the intensity of the Filipino sensibility.

I propose questioning a concept that is over two millennia old, namely, “Asia.” Simplistic notions of what Asia is and should be in relation to the West have succeeded in marginalizing, on the international scene, the achievements of lowland Christian Filipinos, not only in cuisine, but in the other arts as well. They have also succeeded in making many educated lowland Christian Filipinos apologetic about their culture *when they reflect on it and have to articulate it before outsiders*. Often they assume that since the costume, the music, the architecture, and the literature of lowland Christian Filipinos have an obvious Hispanic component, they cannot be Asian, for to be Asian means to be non-Western. Therefore, they cannot be “authentic” either, for to be in Asia means thinking and behaving like a true Asian. Thus the anguish in defining the Christian Filipino’s identity. The maps indicate that his country is in Asia but both fellow-Asians and Western authors (generally non-Latin) question his credentials as an “Asian.” On the other hand, though Hispanic

elements continue to be vivid in the Filipino's culture, Spanish as a spoken language has practically disappeared from his home, office, and school. This is a situation shared by the Filipino with the Guamanian. Hence, despite interest in the Philippines among educated Spaniards and Spanish Americans, and despite invitations to join their group activities, non-Spanish-speaking Filipinos shun such activities whether these be informal get-togethers or formal conferences. And while the educated Filipino is fluent in English, he cannot join either that club of English-speaking former colonials, the British Commonwealth, simply because he was colonized by the Americans rather than the British. He does not play cricket. In which gathering of nations is the lowland Christian Filipino fully accepted for what he is, given his unique history? This dilemma galls especially if we consider that in Filipino culture, one has to belong to a *barkada*—to a peer group. Who are our likely barkada mates in the assembly of nations?