

A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Philippine History and for Filipino Nation Building

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This is a plan and design for the study of Philippine history and for building the Filipino nation which I have been toying with in my mind for the past years now during my stint at the University of Tsukuba first as a visiting foreign professor and since 1 April 2004 as a regular professor.

I am grateful to the Graduate School of Area Studies of Tsukuba for providing me with the proper atmosphere for the pursuit of the life of the mind. It is a pleasure for me to present this conceptual framework formally and publicly to the Japanese academic community in order to ventilate my views, and to invite constructive comments, suggestions and alternatives from the readers of "Area Studies Tsukuba" journal so as to improve and fine-tune the proposed framework.

My conceptual framework is based on the view of history as the dynamic and cumulative development of Philippine society and the lifestyle of its people. The Philippines is a product of its past; in other words, the past has influenced our present. Thus, in my Philippine history classes at the University of the Philippines and Southeast Asian history classes at the University of Tsukuba, I always begin the semester by discussing what the present realities are in Philippine society. It is well-known that in 1998 the Philippines observed the centenary of the proclamation of Philippine independence from Spain on 12 June 1898. The Republic of the Philippines fittingly and joyously observed on the 12th of June 1998 this centennial event. I was one of the five million or so ecstatic Filipinos jamming the Rizal Park that day. It was over a hundred years ago in Kawit, Cavite, when the revolutionary general, Emilio Aguinaldo, proclaimed the Filipinos free from nearly three and a half centuries of oppressive Spanish colonialism, and proceeded to establish the First Philippine Republic, the first in Asia.

Under international law, that de facto Filipino government under Aguinaldo fulfilled the basic criteria for nationhood. The First Philippine Republic proved to be shortlived though because it soon found itself embarrassed by American colonial sovereignty. The triumphant United States annexed the Philippines by virtue of the Treaty of Paris which America concluded with Spain on 10 December 1898 in the wake of the Spanish-American War (1896-1898). America exercised colonial sovereignty over the Filipino people for about half a century until she withdrew and restored Philippine independence on 4 July 1946, thereby paving the way for the Filipinos to enjoy political freedom since then.

As an independent Southeast Asian nation, one of the basic goals of the Filipino people is the

attainment and preservation of national unity. The unity of the nation is essential toward political stability, which in turn is a vital prerequisite to economic progress and prosperity. Ideally, all the citizens should be doing their part to make society tick and to push the economy together in the same forward direction, instead of pushing each other to the brink of disaster on account of politically disintegrative tendencies based on cultural, social and economic differences.

Unfortunately, this ideal has remained elusive. The Filipino nation-state remains weak and there is no full national unity. It is inaccurate to say that the Philippines is a strong republic, although in fairness the incumbent administration is exerting an effort to strengthen the fiber of the nation.

The affirmed reality in its historical and contemporary aspects is that flagrant inequalities and disparities in income exist in Filipino society.

This is not to mention the real division between the dominant Christian lowland population on the one hand, and the non-dominant non-Christian population on the other. This dichotomy between the Christians and the non-Christians is an unfortunate but real fact of life in the Philippine nation. What is important to bear in mind is that the Filipino nation-state at present is confronted with two major obstacles toward the realization of genuine national unity. These obstacles are related to the iniquitous nature of the Philippine social structure as well as to the existing dichotomy between the dominant Christianized population and the non-Christian cultural communities.

In the context of the Filipino nation-state today, the Christianization of the Philippines by the Spaniards during their long colonial rule would have a direct bearing on the affirmed reality of the absolute and real social division between the dominant Christian lowland population on the one hand, and the non-dominant non-Christian minority population on the other. This dichotomy between the Christians and the non-Christians is an unfortunate but a real fact of life in the Philippine nation. As previously stated, the existing dichotomy between the dominant Christianized population and the non-Christian cultural communities would be a major obstacle toward the realization of genuine national unity, and this social division is traceable to the Christian missionary enterprise in the Philippines under Spanish colonial rule. It is the character of modern Filipino society to be divided into what I would call the dominant Christianized majority and the non-dominant cultural minorities.

The Dominant Christianized Majority

Within the context of the dominant Christianized sector of the Philippine nation and society, we find all kinds of political, economic and social dilemmas besetting the people. There is the dilemma and problem of the imbalance in the distribution of political power. The incumbent power structure is controlled by rural warlords and family dynasties in towns and provinces throughout the Philippine archipelago. For the most part, they are the ones who manage to get elected to public office because the country's electoral system is such that only the rich can expect to be elected to elective public offices or appointed to high government posts. Moreover, the country's administration of justice is

often tilted in favor of the politically powerful and those with connections to the powers that be, while the poor people are the ones languishing in jail because they cannot afford to hire lawyers to defend their legal and human rights. This is known as the compartmentalized administration of justice: one for the affluent, and one for the impoverished.

In the economic sphere, there is the dilemma of widespread rural and urban poverty, at the heart of which would be landlessness, wherein land is owned by so few people while so many do not have titles of ownership to even a parcel of land. During the Spanish colonial period up to the present time, the Church would own substantial landholdings while the bulk of the peasantry would have none. This problem of landlessness is aggravated by the persistence of usurious moneylending practices, because bank loans, even the ones called the character loans, are still generally inaccessible to rural and urban dwellers. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program that is currently in place is hardly making a difference in the lives of the landless tillers of the soil because of obstacles like landlord opposition, lack of funding, bureaucratic inefficiency and venality, and the absence of a political will to reduce if not eradicate inequities in land distribution.

And in the social sphere, there is inequality and class division into Upper, Middle and Lower classes, between the “Haves” and the “Have-Nots” in society, and this stratification is reflected in words like “baknang” for the rich and “agrigrigat” for the poor in Ilocano; “eggegga” for the rich and “mariga” for the poor in Ibanag; “macualta” for the rich and “calulu” for the poor in Kapampangan; “mayaman” for the rich and “mahirap” for the poor in Tagalog; “dakulang tao” and “sagit na tao” in Bicolano; “maysarang” for the rich and “mapiut” for the poor in Ilongo; and “dato” for the rich and “pobre” for the poor in Cebuano and widely Bisayanized Mindanao. In other words, this social class division is nationwide. This is the modern character of Filipino society, and the Roman Catholic Church during the Spanish colonial period, despite the basic goodness of some of the missionary personnel, contributed to this stratification by siding with the elite in society and by becoming itself a landlord and a moneylender to accumulate wealth in violation of the clerical vow of material poverty. Given this situation of injustice, oppression, and inequality in the majority society, a situation that persists due to the Church’s preaching that the poor must accept their condition patiently because they will be rewarded in heaven, popular protest forms have arisen to become stable phenomena in contemporary Philippine society, thereby preventing the attainment of national unity, stability and progress. These popular protest forms include banditry, religious millenarianism and revolution.

Impoverishment prevents the poor people from availing of opportunities for basic and quality education, and thereby be liberated from illiteracy. In fact there are villages in many parts of the Philippines without schoolhouses for primary education. It also prevents them from having adequate nutritional support to keep them able and strong physically to be engaged in productive labor. Furthermore, it prevents them from availing of medical care to protect their health and that of the

members of their families. These sunburnt and rain-drenched impoverished people face desperate choices while being in the margins of existence everyday. Given this situation within the context of the dominant Christianized sector of society, the unjust, oppressive and iniquitous conditions as well as structures have bred popular forms of protest, such as outright banditry, millenarianism and revolution. These protest forms have become stable phenomena in contemporary Philippine society because injustices, iniquitous social and political institutions, and gruelling poverty remain intractable problems crying for action by authorities controlling the incumbent power structure in the country.

Banditry may be interpreted as a form of social and popular protest, and as a form of individual resistance to the imposition by the ruling elites of their world view. This form of popular protest is usually local in scope and is oftentimes undertaken not in coordination with other elements of society on a nationwide basis. The immediate and underlying causes of banditry are the wrongs in society such as the failure of the courts to administer justice fairly; the accumulation of vast fortunes by owners of landed estates while their workers and tenants remain landless and receive meager incomes; and the lack of any hope on the part of the poor masses to have any meaningful participation in the governmental process.

In the Philippines, bandits may be classified as being of the mercenary type or of the Robin Hood type. The mercenary type bandit robs people simply because they are robbable, and enjoys the loot from such act purely for his personal gain. This type of banditry is rampant around the country, and gives peace-loving people a sense of insecurity and fear for their safety.

On the other hand, the Robin Hood type of banditry also exists in Philippine society. He is also known in the academic literature as a social bandit. The social bandit is often perceived to be endowed with special or supernatural qualities. He often articulates the needs and desires of ordinary people.

Consequently, the peasantry often support, admire and protect him. When killed during armed clashes with lawmen, the peasant mourns his death. Statues are often erected in his honor and he is looked up to as a local culture hero.

As to religious millenarianism in the Philippines, it is usually given rise to when the desperate members of the humbler classes resort to it as a way of expressing their dissatisfaction with existing conditions. Their leaders are oftentimes charismatic individuals claiming supernatural qualities and dependent upon charms or amulets to protect them from harm's way. Religious millenarian members are recruited from the agricultural laboring population; and they often operate independently from other groups. Religious millenarianism is a form of protest availed of by the humble classes for the purpose of challenging the iniquitous institutions and injustices obtaining in society. However, the religious millenarian groups do not believe in taking direct human and political action to change their condition into a more joyful existence and a better life. Their tendency is to withdraw from the larger society. They establish their "ideal communities" in isolated mountains or remote islands, examples being Mt. Olivete in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija, where we can find the "Sambahan ng Amang

Kaama-amahan at Inang Kaina-inahan" ("Church of the Most High Father and the Most High Mother"); Mt. Banahaw in Dolores, Quezon, where we can find 200 millenarian groups, the most well-known of which being the "Tatlong Persona Solo Dios" ("Three Persons One God") in Kinabuhayan; "Ang Suprema de la Iglesia del Ciudad Mistica de Dios" ("Supreme Church of the Mystical City of God") in Santa Lucia; the Alaph Divine Temple in Divina Colonia, Sagay, Negros Occidental; the Salvatorri in Siaton, Negros Oriental; the "Dios na Amahan" ("God the Father") in Marintob, Quezon, Southern Palawan; the Alpha and Omega in Mt. Apo, Makilala, North Cotabato; and the Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association in San Jose, Dinagat Island, Surigao del Norte. However, there are also religious millenarian groups that flourish in urban poor communities such Father SQUUPQUZ Holy Catholic Church in Pasig City, Metro Manila, with known branches in Cavite City, Tiaong, Quezon and Puerto Princesa City; and the Church of Yahweh, Father of God based in Parang, Marikina City. This is not to mention the Wisdom of the World Church in Paranaque City, Metro Manila. There are many others which cannot be mentioned here for lack of space and time.

The point to remember is that religious millenarianism is a form of protest, a manifestation of the dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the humbler classes with existing conditions in Filipino society, including the failure of the mainstream Christian churches like the Roman Catholic Church to take a more vigorous stand in favor of the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed. When big numbers of people withdraw from mainstream areas to isolated and remote places -- there to hope and pray for deliverance from their dismal state in the form of divine intervention -- that hoping and praying mean hopelessness with leaders who think only of getting elected in the next elections rather than thinking of the next generation, and with prevalent social and political institutions or structures, including the Christian churches, that are unresponsive to the miserable plight and felt needs of the poor and the impoverished. Even if there is prophetic disconfirmation especially with regard to the occurrence of the end of the world and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, religious millenarian followers cling to their faith and still express their hope that their messiahs, redeemers, divine masters and popes will remain true to their promises of having a better life within the egalitarian communities in which they have nurtured and engendered a deep sense of belonging. We must study and understand such religious millenarian movements according to their own terms and plane of reference instead of dismissing them outright as "aberrant."

An even greater obstacle toward the attainment of unity and stability of the Filipino nation-state is revolution. Revolution occurs when people simply get tired of their government because it is not responding to the society's felt needs. The government has become callous, the wielders of its powers have become abusive, power-hungry, self-centered, and absolutely corrupt.

The corruption of the prevalent power structure is compounded by the iniquitous distribution of wealth, the failure of the courts to provide impartial justice, the grinding poverty of the inhabitants, and the inability and even intransigence of key institutions like the Christian Church to take a

leading role in solving such social dilemmas so as not to rock the status quo. Therefore, revolution involves the overturning of society and the implementation of fundamental changes. In the context of the Filipino nation-state and society, revolution as an option and path for the poor to effect fundamental change breaks out when the impoverished and the miserably poor do not wish to wait for divine intervention, and simply decide to take direct political and human action to overthrow the existing order. This existing order is controlled by the ruling social, economic and political elite unable to reconcile their interests with those of the lower layers of society. This elite is furthermore unable to capture the humbler people's views, sentiments, and aspirations. Consequently, the state controlled by the ruling elite responds by using violent military repression, without understanding why the peasants and the urban poor are protesting and why they have been compelled to take protest actions. The elite-dominated state then becomes preoccupied with the outward manifestation of peasant unrest, but being invincibly parochial, it does not make an effort to grasp the peasant world view, and it does not bother to ask why people are rebelling. The ruling elite does not try to understand the root causes of peasant unrest. This is the tragedy of it all.

As a result, the powers that be in the prevalent social structure and government do not, cannot muster the political will, and is even unwilling to undertake the unequivocal and drastic reforms designed to redress the fundamental imbalances with regard to the distribution of economic and political power in society. The elites do not make a serious effort to bridge the gap between their own world view, thought system, and perceptions and those of the peasants. They do not recognize that it is incumbent upon them to rise up to the challenge of statesmanship and try to transcend their manipulative egoism as well as their personal and class interests, and to reconcile these interests with those of the lower layers of the populations. To avert being swept away in a massive social upheaval, it is incumbent upon the elites in society, including the Church, to bridge the gap between their own world view, thought system, and perceptions and those of the peasants and urban poor. For the Christian churches in particular they must stop telling their poor followers to patiently wait for their reward in heaven, and instead, take effective and meaningful deeds to promote and create an open and loving community, because community is the foundation of God's interaction with the world. The Christian religion contains the vision that for us to be created in God's own image is to live in community with others -- community that understands partnership, mutuality, and a self-giving nature to lie at the heart of its calling, community where men and women live without privilege or subjection to each other, where standards of nurturance, responsibility and care are not only proclaimed but maintained. Understood in this way, the Christian religion must set forth a radical ethic of justice and care to see to it that the self and the other would be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, there is a place for each; that every member would be included and no one needs to be left alone. The Christian religion must see morality as a problem of inclusion rather than a balancing of claims.

I see two major examples of revolution in contemporary Filipino society taking place in the context of the dominant Christianized population. One seriously occurred in 1947-1954, and nearly

resulted in the overthrow of the democratically constituted government at that time. I am referring to the Huk revolution -- even if it failed I would still classify it as a revolution since it aimed at fundamental social change -- led by Ka Luis M. Taruc who commanded at his peak over 150,000 fighters, and who is now considered by Time Magazine in the United States as one of the 100 most influential Asians in the 20th century. The Huk revolution stemmed from the age-old problem of caciquism or landlordism in the Central Plain of Luzon, from the deterioration of tenancy conditions, from usurious moneylending practices that reduced the landless tenants to debt peonage, and from the impoverishment that tenant farmers wanted to do away with.

The second example is the ongoing revolution being waged by the New People's Army (NPA) as the military arm of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF). The New People's Army reached its peak strength during the years of martial law under the late dictator, Ferdinand E. Marcos. With his authoritarian abuses, greed, corruption, and monopolistic policies favoring crony capitalists, Marcos himself became the number one recruiter for the NPA, although some of those joining the rebel army were not necessarily communists but were simply tired of dictatorial rule and wanted to restore democratic rule in the country.

At present there is a peace process -- although stalled due to unresolved issues such as the venue for the negotiations -- being pursued by the government of the Republic of the Philippines with the CPP-NPA-NDF. Let us hope for the success of this process for the sake of national unity, political stability, and economic prosperity and progress. The government should not feel satisfied with a mere military solution to the conflict with the communist rebels. It should demonstrate the capacity and the political determination to make the ruling elite of the country share their privileged status with those in the underprivileged and economically deprived classes before it is too late. The country could be faced with a far more serious case of social upheaval if the inequalities that engendered two social revolutions within the past half a century are not remedied to everybody's satisfaction.

The Non-Dominant Cultural Minorities

While the conditions and realities in the dominant Christianized society are such that centrifugal forces are weakening the Filipino nation-state and preventing it from attaining and maintaining national unity, thereby making it difficult to build a stable nation-state so essential toward economic progress, it is well-known that ethnic cultural diversity has been and continues to be a historical fact of life in the Philippines. This situation is unlikely to change in the future years, although the rapid advances made by globalization in recent years are mercilessly impacting on indigenous culture, sometimes leading to the near-extinction of some ethnolinguistic groups.

The social division existing between the dominant Christianized majority and the non-dominant cultural minorities is directly traceable to the Spanish Christianization of the Philippines. The

indigenous upland inhabitants, not to mention the Muslims, have come to be considered as outsiders by those claiming ethnic and cultural dominance in the Christianized lowlands and coastal areas. This utter social segmentation is reflected in the disparaging words used by the dominant Christianized majority in describing those in the minority communities.

Thus in the Philippines, we hear the Christians of the Central Plain of Luzon referring to the Aetas as "Balugas," a term of derision and condescension. Worse than this, a prominent Filipino diplomat and educator, the late Carlos P. Romulo, branded the Igorots of the Northern Luzon Cordillera mountains as "non-Filipinos," even as the Christian lowlanders use the label "Igorot" condescendingly to mean the inferiority and cultural puerility of these Cordillera highlanders. In the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao, the Christian inhabitants there display their own biases toward the island's highlanders, known across Mindanao as the "lumads" or "sons of the soil." There is one "lumad" group in Northeastern Mindanao, especially in the Surigao and Agusan provinces, known as the Mamanua or "people of the forest." The Christianized Surigaonon and Agusanon lowlanders have a term for the Mamanua: "Kong King" which is a play of "King Kong" the gorilla! The implication is that the Mamanua are no better than monkeys dwelling in trees up in the Eastern Cordillera ranges of Mindanao.

With regard to the Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao, I know that Christianized lowlanders all around the Philippine archipelago have typecast them as fearsome, warlike, treacherous, filthy and inferior. We call them "Moro" disparagingly, and this label itself connotes all the negative meanings carried by the words fearsome, warlike, treacherous, filthy and inferior which I have just mentioned. This is the reason why Muslim Filipinos are deeply resentful toward the Christians even up to this day. There is empirical basis for the resentment of Muslim Filipinos because some years ago, during the mid-1970s, the Filipino sociologist Rodolfo Bulatao did a study nationwide, the finding of which indicated the prejudice and discriminatory attitude of Christian Filipinos toward the Muslims. For example, the majority of those surveyed responded by saying they would not want to have a Muslim for a neighbor, a Muslim for a superior or boss in office, a Muslim for a son-in-law, and so on. This prejudice is prevalent even in today's media. It is common in a daily newspaper with a wide circulation like the Philippine Star to say "Muslim bandits" being responsible for this or that criminal activity in Mindanao, but it does not say "Christian bandits" for those committing similar crimes in Metro Manila and elsewhere in the Christianized areas of the country. The same with some of the anchor persons and reporters of the leading television stations.

Spanish missionary biases and prejudices, not to mention American Protestant missionary biases and prejudices, were transferred by them to their lowland Filipino converts to Christianity.

In other words, there is a wide gulf separating the cultures of those in the majority and those in the minority, even if the latter are living within the borders of the nation-state where the dominant Christianized society lives. No congruency of interests, obligations, in other words, identity, has taken place or is taking place between the majority group and the minority groups, mainly

because the prejudices of the majority society are so deep-seated that it has been difficult to arrive at a common consensus about how to reconcile the interests of the majority-controlled state and the indigenous peoples. In the absence of social and economic equality in lowland-upland as well as in majority-minority relationships, and in view furthermore of the absence of such a belief in social and economic equality pervading the governmental process, it comes as no sudden wonder or astonishment that the liberationist movements and wars have become a fact of life in the Philippines. From this perspective, the problems of multiculturalism in the Philippines are significant because they have a bearing on national unity and stability. For example, there have been, and there continues to be, armed liberationist movements in the Philippines.

It is for this reason that ethnohistorical studies are needed to foster our greater knowledge and understanding of the rich cultures and creativity of the ethnic groups comprising the Philippine population, and thus recognize them as a precious part of our cultural heritage.

The examples of liberationism in the non-dominant cultural communities include the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which waged a fierce armed struggle for the establishment of an independent Moro homeland in Mindanao, and thus dismember the territory of the present Philippine nation-state, during the 1970s. The fighting tapered off after the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1977 and subsequent establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) comprised of the four provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi where the Muslims are in the majority. Both sides observed an uneasy ceasefire until a peace process mediated by Indonesia came about which culminated in the signing of the peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF in September 1996. Consequently, Nur Misuari won as governor of ARMM and concurrently served as chair of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). There were problems that faced the implementation of the GRP-MNLF peace agreement, such as the integration of the MNLF fighters into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the release of funds to finance the livelihood activities and the infrastructure projects in ARMM. These difficulties frustrated Chairman Nur Misuari, who was in turn accused by the government of malversing the ARMM funds and living a luxurious lifestyle in Manila. Misuari decided to take up arms again against the government in late 2001. After some fighting in which more than 100 MNLF soldiers died, Misuari fled to Malaysia where he has taken into custody by the Malaysian government, and then extradited to Manila in early 2002. He is now in detention in a Philippine National Police facility in Laguna province while facing court trial for rebellion. Parouk Hussin succeeded Misuari as governor of ARMM.

The reality remains though that the Muslims are themselves divided along ethnolinguistic lines, and while the flawed GRP-MNLF peace agreement is being implemented under Misuari's successor Parouk Hussin, a breakaway faction of the Tausug-led MNLF known as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the leaders and members of which are Maguindanao Muslims, is presently waging a guerrilla war against the Philippine military. There is currently a ceasefire while a peace process

mediated this time by Malaysia is also being put in place. However, this peace process was stalled for a long time over the issue of territories. The MILF wanted the government to recognize certain areas in Mindanao under MILF control as legitimate territories already of the said rebel Muslim group. Naturally, the GRP panel refused to accede to this MILF demand, as recognizing the territories will be tantamount to giving the MILF a status of belligerency under international law. Another sticking point had to do with the MILF applying the Sharia court on criminals, and executing these criminals by firing squad, thereby defying the jurisdiction of the Philippine police authorities and the country's judicial system in dealing with such matters. Again for the sake of national unity and harmony among Filipinos, it is hoped that progress will be attained in the current peace process with MILF while keeping the peace with MNLF forces that did not side with Misuari during his rebellion in late 2001. But even if peace is eventually achieved with the MILF and maintained with the MNLF, there is still the Abu Sayyaf, a militant and hardline Muslim rebel group that has been engaged in high-profile kidnappings and killings and that is against any peace agreement with the GRP, and will not stop its armed struggle until a separate and independent Moro Nation is achieved.

For me, the point to bear in mind with regard to the non-dominant cultural minorities is that they wish to preserve their customs and traditions in the face of the assimilative processes they have been subjected to in the course of the Spanish and American colonization, and the onslaughts of globalization in the late 20th century and early 21st century Philippine society. Their ethnic cultures are revered by them because these are rooted in their own experiences over the centuries, and seem to have satisfactorily provided their essential needs for subsistence and survival. Their cultures are based on their common tongues, legacies, values and appurtenances for confronting the tasks of everyday existence. The feelings of togetherness and belonging draw inspiration from their tradition-based cultures.

Their unwritten epic literatures mirror these feelings. Their indigenous cultures and religion gave them self-sufficiency, defined their relationships, gave them a sense of unity and social cohesion, and instilled in them a feeling of oneness with the land or forests in which they live.

Being sons and daughters of the soil, they "ate the forest" that served as the source of their nutritional requirements. What is foremost in their minds is then the preservation of their own precious cultural heritage because it has been tested by tradition and time to be sufficient in enabling them to satisfy their essential requirements for living. The tragedy is that the Christianized lowland Filipinos have stereotyped them as inferior and relegated them to the margins of existence and the underclass of Philippine society. As a result they have been branded even as non-Filipinos. Is it any surprise then that they have taken the countervailing option of struggling for their liberation from the Philippine nation-state and aspiring for their independence?

Multiculturalism in the Philippine Nation-State

I advocate reversing the assimilationist policy that has been pursued in the past 400 years or so in favor of the policy of cultural pluralism.

Assimilation has only brought war and ethnic conflict in the Philippines.

Multiculturalism recognizes no majority-minority dichotomies. There is no absolute social division existing between the different ethnic groups, which means there are no marginalized underclasses in the nation, because all ethnic groups are accorded equal treatment, based on mutual respect and tolerance of each other's religious beliefs, values, customs, practices and contributions toward the weaving of the national tapestry. All are members of the nation according to the principle of equality. Therefore, all have a stake in pushing the economy together and enjoying equally the fruits of national development. There is only one nation, and the ethnic groups are loyally bound to the preservation of national unity, but the rich diversity of cultures is allowed to flourish. It goes without saying that multiculturalism also involves plurilingualism, which means respecting and preserving the rich heritage of the multiplicity of languages as the thumbprint of identity of each ethnic group comprising the nation. No single language is permitted to be dominant to the point of resulting in internal colonization by the native speakers of that dominant language. In the sphere of the dominant Christianized majority, there is political pluralism, not to mention freedom of ideas in the academic marketplace, in order to allow those espousing the socialist and community ideology to come out into the open and compete freely for the hearts and minds of the electorate in the political arena. Let the general public judge what is the best political platform based on the unfettered discussion and presentation of these platforms of government. Nobody has the monopoly of knowledge, and let no one impose his will and views on others through intimidation or authoritarian methods. The nation-state will be noisy with political debate, but the bottom line is that no group is higher than the nation-state, and when it comes to the preservation and the upholding of national unity, then everybody knows what is good for the country. They will close ranks and transcend their partisan interests to preserve the very freedom that allows them to engage in lively political discourse openly. As for Christianity in the Philippines, it must foster the idea that God's own existence is rooted in dynamic community with man. Christianity must seek to heal, reconcile and invite the world freely and fully into the divine life, and must continually witness to God's saving community, and rekindle the flame of love within us.

There are so many images of brokenness not only of our own individual lives as Filipinos, but of a nation and a society that cries out for healing. I reiterate my hope and trust that Christianity will contribute toward creating the Philippines into a better national community that understands partnership, mutuality, and a self-giving nature to lie at the heart of its calling, and will help build a national community where men and women from all ethnic groups will live without privilege or subjection to each other; where everyone is treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, there is a place for each; that every member should be included and no one needs to be left alone or marginalized and pushed to the underside of society. In other words, Christianity must set

forth a radical ethic of justice and care in order to ensure harmony, peace, and understanding in the Philippines.