

Traditions in Philippine Literature and History: Synthesis and Analysis

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Abstract

This paper takes a different look at Philippine literature and history. By viewing the literature of a nation as an embodiment of its historical consciousness, it is able to reveal much about: Who is the Filipino today? What makes up and drives Philippine society and culture?

To answer these questions, this paper looks into five major literary traditions of Philippine literature -- Native, Islamic, Spanish, American, and Nationalist -- which in turn belong to any of the three historical periods of Philippine history: Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial. Each of these traditions is also characterized by its own set of genre and generative themes in line with the spirit of the times.

The paper concludes that all these five major literary traditions make up the Filipino today and are a driving force behind Philippine culture and society.

Key words: Philippine Literature, Philippine History

Introduction

As the title suggests, this paper is about Philippine literary history inasmuch as it is about the socio-cultural history of the Philippines. Webbing the two themes together is made possible by the correspondence between the country's historical periods and literary traditions, namely, Pre-Colonial (Native and Islamic), Colonial (Spanish and American), and Post-Colonial (Nationalist) respectively.¹ According to Northrop Frye, literature is like a looking glass through which "the whole cultural history of the nation that produced it comes into focus" and that it is possible to see "the cultural history of the nation by looking through that imagination" which is the language and realm of literature (cited in Willinsky 1998, 236). Although not exactly history, literature can be viewed as history insofar as it embodies the consciousness of a people at a certain time and mirrors the society, culture, and people that engendered it. It is very much a product and reflection of the milieu from which it can never be separated. As such, literature has the potential role of being an indicator as much as an agent of social change at the same time.

The main task of this paper is to show how these traditions interact with one another in ways that allow one to have a better understanding of Philippine society. Surveying Philippine literature is like looking at the cadastral map of Filipino socio-cultural knowledge in which not only many things are added, lost, changed, and continue over time; but also, borrowed foreign influences get indigenized and incorporated into the native fabric, with local knowledge acting each time to filter, modify, and improve on any new elements to form who the Filipino is today.

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1 As outlined by Lumbra (1982) and Hornedo (1997) respectively. This paper deploys both frameworks to survey the evolving patterns and stages of development in the history of Philippine literature while describing the socio-cultural climate that produced it in the process.

Pre-Colonial Native Tradition

Contrary to the popular notion that the first people to reach the Philippines came by boats, there is credence to the idea that they crossed land bridges via Borneo, Malaysia from the south. From there, they migrated upwards to different parts of the Philippine archipelago in groups of families. Some of them settled in communities near the sea and rivers where they fished and used water transport while others moved between plains and mountains to hunt, plant, and to forage food in the forests. They consisted of different family tribes ruled by a quasi-king. As early as that time, their society bore traces of stratification between the ruler and the ruled – the noble, the freemen, the slave – but whose boundaries were permeable to allow mobility up and down the social ladder in a lifetime. Furthermore, these in-groups were mostly centered on themselves, exclusive of others from the outside. They had the ‘We/Us vs. You/Them’ mentality which was often the source of clashes between tribes in their struggle to survive. They also believed in gods of nature and in the spirits of their ancestors as continuing to guide them in this life and whose help or blessing they could invoke through prayers and offerings, as well as in the intercession of shamans who served as the link between the natural and the spiritual worlds. In this regard, the culture of the first inhabitants of the Philippines resembled those of the peoples of Southeast Asia with Austronesian, Malay, Chinese, Arabic, and Indian influences that they got through trade and migration to the Philippine islands.

As many scholars point out, the Philippines already had its own rich literary tradition, both written and oral, long before the Spaniards came, which continues until now. However, due to reasons such as the impermanence of the leaves and barks used by the natives for writing, their burning by the Spanish friars, the introduction of the printing press and the Roman alphabet which replaced the native syllabary, and the latter’s unsuitability for recording long passages, there are only a few written pre-colonial literary works that have survived to this day. It is for this reason why knowledge of indigenous literature nowadays primarily comes from ethnic cultural minorities that have never been colonized and thus serve as windows to the past. It is the kind that is committed to memory and communicated through word of mouth across generations.

This oral literary tradition plays a crucial role in reproducing the structure of native society. It serves to teach the young members of the tribe about the values, history, worldview, as well as the legitimations for the authority of their rulers. Because oral literature is intimately linked with music, dance, ritual, and drama which are performed in rhythmically repetitive patterns, it is easy to pick up and remember. For example, epics that praise heroes or one’s ancestors are composed to be sung during funerals, feasts, and work when the whole community is present. For the most part, these lyrical poems are sung as part of religious rituals which show the different cycles of nature or in dramatization of the acts of gods. This is yet another feature of native oral literature which explains why it has lasted longer than its written counterpart: It is meant to be done, practiced or performed – narrated, sung, and danced – and not so much to be recorded (Hornedo 1988, 11-2). That it is so is also borne by the fact that much of oral literature is anonymous in authorship and in persona: It is not known nor is it important to mention who composed it – for it is most likely not by a single author but a host of them over time – as the story is passed from one person and generation to another with the resulting improvisation each time (Lumbrera 1982, 2-3). Nor are its subject and audience clearly delineated; it merely assumes that the listener is familiar with the implied situation and topic at hand as expressed in everyday language (Ibid.). It likewise bears the imprint of the community, forged by its common experience as a tribe, and is a product of the contributions of several generations in which everybody has a role in preserving and bequeathing the inherited local knowledge by means of socialization in the life of the community (Ibid.).

There are three general types of indigenous oral literature: Those which pertain to the acts of gods, of heroes, and of ordinary men (Hornedo 1988, 10). Under the first group are myths which try to explain the origin, the existence, and the end of things usually by means of divine intervention. As such, they can be considered as an early form of science insofar as they were produced by ancient people’s interaction with, ob-

serving and wondering of, and attempts to explain primeval reality. They are also a means to root themselves in time to give them a sense of continuity and belongingness amidst a harsh and changing environment.

When the Spaniards came, tribal leaders and elders were deposed from their traditional roles and became the 'folk people' in colonial society. Although some of them were eventually co-opted by the colonial government to constitute a new class of petty local rulers to aid in the pacification and administration of the natives, they continued to pass on the legends and epics about their traditional heroes who served as role models for the young. However, unlike myths, the themes of these heroic stories reflected the values and beliefs of this emerging class of new rulers, underscoring their growing difference from and influence over the native population as a result of the onset of colonization.

Last, the third kind of indigenous literature are the folk stories created by the masses. These stories contain their feelings, outlook, and aspirations in life. Included in this genre are stories which satire those in power in a humorous way as well as riddles, proverbs, and aphorisms which state self-evident truths in a didactic-moralistic tone. They all serve to impart the collective wisdom of the community in order to ensure its orderly functioning and reproduction.

Pre-Colonial Islamic Tradition

In the 13th century, Islam reached and spread to the southern part of the Philippines from the Middle East by way of Malacca, Malaysia. It is also claimed that had the Spaniards not come, the whole archipelago would have been Islamized. In fact, when the Spaniard conquistadors came to Manila, they were surprised to find Muslim traders from the south as well as several thriving Muslim communities in select parts of the city. This observation only goes to show the extent of the influence of Islam in the archipelago long before the coming of the colonizers.

As a social group, Islamic society is pretty much structured and closed. First of all, Muslims believe in only one God, Allah, and his prophet Mohammed. They follow the Koran faithfully as their guide to holiness and salvation to the extent that it is not allowed to be translated from Arabic into any other language. Once a year, they make a pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy land for Islam. They also hold religious occasions such as the Ramadan, which is a period of fasting and worship. Moreover, as sign of their ultimate obedience to the will of Allah, they are ready to die as martyrs in spreading and defending their religion against their non-Muslim 'enemies.' Due to their long history of engaging in religious battles and of being discriminated in pre-dominantly Christian countries, they are quite antagonistic and defensive towards peoples of other religions. When one of them is attacked, his brethren in the faith are ready to come to his defense. If the situation warrants it, Muslims can go strongly united against non-Muslim people.

Another feature of Muslim society is its theocratic nature. Upon the hands of the sultan rest both religious and civil powers made possible by the belief that he is a descendant of the prophets (Hornedo 1997, 187). This in turn forms the basis of his right to rule and of the privileges he enjoys. Furthermore, Muslims place great value on their honor and reputation. This kind of thinking is embodied in a code of conduct called *maratbat* that lays down certain norms and expectations on how people should deal with one another based on their position in society (Ibid., 188).

It is for these reasons Muslim literature manifests their own interpretation of history, as well as the challenges and dangers Muslims have faced over time as colored by their own emotions and analysis. It consists of stories about the sacrifices made by the martyrs of their faith and of religious legends that legitimize the authority of the sultan and of the teachings of the Koran. A typical selection of this tradition includes works that are directly related to the beliefs, customs, and rituals of Islam in which the content is much more important than the form and style of writing.

Again it is important to emphasize that the indigenous literary oral tradition did not die even with the

coming of Islam. It has persisted and coexisted with the latter in such a way that the old has mixed with the new to form an amalgam called 'folk Islam' (Hornedo 1988, 14). Their common elements have merged such that the foreign influence is incorporated into the existing native fabric in a *sublimatory* fashion² behind which is the principle of continuity and change: the process of assimilating new elements in order to enrich the existing knowledge stock producing a new synthesis that is no longer foreign but native through the workings of Filipino ingenuity and creativity. This creative process of adaptive sublimation applies to all traditions as the characteristic Filipino way of making any borrowed element as its own.

Colonial Hispanic Tradition: (1521 – 1898)

The Spaniards arrived in Philippine shores in the midst of various political, economic, and social changes taking place in Europe. One of these was the scientific revolution whose technological advances in navigational instruments contributed greatly in the discovery of new lands. Modern printing also did much to propagate and secularize knowledge that led to the weakening of the power of the Church and the birth of humanism. There was also the boom in commerce and industry in various cities of Europe that pushed people to discover new shipping routes going to the East to trade and invest. At this point one can see the beginnings of Western capitalism that underwrote the impulse for imperialism by kings and evangelization by missionaries. In other words, it was a combination of business, politics, and religion that brought Spain to Philippine soil.

By virtue of what was called *recapitulacion*, the king, merchants, and conquistadors agreed to launch expeditions in the name of the first, financed by the second, and conducted by the third with each party having its own interests and expected benefits in the outcome of the voyage. Moreover, by means of the agreement called *Patronato Real* in which the Pope made the King of Spain the patron of the Church in overseas lands, not only was the cooperation between the cross and the sword effected this way, but also both Spanish missionary and soldier worked hand in hand to colonize the Philippine islands. This union between church and state became the mainstay of Spanish rule for the next three hundred years in which it was usually the churchmen who held the upper hand. In addition to being fewer in number, the Spanish civil authorities were only too aware of their dependence on the strategic role played by the missionaries in pacifying the natives on account of their knowledge of the local people's language and way of living, let alone their power to excommunicate from the church anybody who opposed them. In this sense, the missionaries' knowledge of both the native and of the church translated into a great deal of political and religious power at their disposal.

When the Spaniards came, they brought with them their Latin culture and medieval worldview that emphasized hierarchy, order, authority, and obedience (Hornedo 1988, 15). They tried to legitimize their colonial rule by way of stories narrating the lives of great Biblical characters, particularly of Jesus Christ, and of the saints whose main themes are the complete surrender to the will of God and the virtue of living a life of sacrifice, penitence, and patient suffering in this world in the hope of being rewarded in the next life. These spiritual figures serve as role models whom people should imitate in their personal and social lives. Furthermore, according to one historian, it was through the politics of translating Christian themes from Spanish into the native language that the Spanish missionaries were able to change the consciousness of the natives for their religious conversion as the first step towards their contracting colonialism and eventual subjugation (Rafael 1988, 27).

2 which occurs when:

. . . what sublates [foreign/new] goes beyond what is sublated [native/old], introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a new basis, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.*

* Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), 241.

TRADITIONS IN PHILIPPINE LITERATURE AND HISTORY (Michael N. Quiros)

There were three ways by which Philippine literature was influenced by Spanish colonization: There were things that remained (though no longer the same as before), were deleted, and got added, a process that also holds true for all other traditions whenever a new influence comes (Hornedo 1988, 16). In the first case, the native oral tradition persisted particularly in areas which either resisted or were too remote to be reached by the forces of colonialism. People continued spinning on local themes in native style though they were beginning to show traces of foreign elements. Argues Lumbreira, it was also the time when distinctions were first drawn between the literary works of those from the *villages* vs. those from the towns, the *provinces* vs. the *cities*, the *highlands* vs. the lowlands, wherein the printed works of the latter group were esteemed much more highly as proper literature (Lumbreira 1982, 31). Moreover, if one examined the written body of literature, there seemed to be little literary work done during this period. This was because most of the writers at this time were friars who owned the printing presses which were too expensive for ordinary people to make use of. Additionally, the frequent wars engaged in by the Spaniards in warding off other foreign invaders and in quelling domestic uprisings also destroyed many of the printed works. Nevertheless, the native oral tradition went on, alongside the written corpus, as the voice of the marginalized which continued to leave its mark even on writers who became hispanized. For such is the general characteristic response by Filipinos to whatever material they borrow – contextualizing it always in terms of what they already know to form an organic blend – such that the end product is no longer foreign but part of the local fiber.

When the Spaniards introduced new things, they also replaced some old ones. One example was the native syllabary which faded out of use with the introduction of the Roman alphabet except in a handful of tribes in far-flung areas. Particularly among the young, many lost the ability to use it due to the Christianization of many natives and the social status associated with the ability to read and write in the Roman script. Neither was it fit to be used to explain the doctrines of the new faith that was being propagated in print form. For the first time, the names of authors of printed literary works started to appear under the censorship of the friars who were the patrons of literature then. This substitution of the indigenous method of writing by its Western counterpart was part of the systematic cleansing of the natives of the wrong pagan beliefs that were oftentimes the cause of native revolts usually led by millenarian charismatic figures. In Vicente Rafael's book, he maintains that the linguistic studies done on the vernacular by the Spanish missionaries with the deliberate attempt to pattern its grammar and vocabulary after Latin or Castilian were actually meant to implant the concepts of authority, obedience, exchange, and indebtedness into the native language and consciousness of the people in preparation for their baptism into the new faith and empire (Rafael 1988, 27). This loss of the ancient alphabet was one of the reasons behind the decline of indigenous literature especially of those who came under direct colonial rule by Spain such as the Tagalogs. Unlike other ethnic groups in the far north and south and on the highlands of the archipelago which produced their own epics, the lowland Tagalogs living near the colonial capital never had one (Hornedo 1988, 16). Instead, it was replaced by the Pasyon (a narrative song on the passion and death of Jesus sung during Lent) which is considered a "corrupted" form of epic or merely an extended song on the heroic acts of religious personalities (Ibid.).

Some of the new literary forms which the Spaniards introduced other than the Pasyon were lyrical songs and poems, the *comedy* (a play on Christians vs. Muslims), dramas, the *sinakulo* (Passion play), the *sarsuwela* (a musical play), the sermon, the novel, and the essay. Many of these had religious themes and were moralistic in tone. In addition, they also borrowed their subject, style, and form from Spanish works which mirrored the institutions, events, people, and customs of medieval Europe. For instance, concurrent with the religious poems of the missionaries, balladeers, and local poets giving praise to God and the saints, Tagalog poetry also dealt with topics concerning tragic romance, feudalism, and chivalry which catered to the changing taste for secular poetry by the emerging middle class. Over time these imported forms of literature had been filipinized and became part of the native tradition; stories that were originally meant to be read or narrated were sung and even performed, a characteristic sign of the Filipino mind at work in indigenizing and

sublimating foreign influences.

Colonial American Tradition: (1898 – 1946)

With the coming of the Americans, the social distinction among Filipinos acquired a new dimension. Whereas before it occurred along the fault lines of religion, this time it was by way of education and participation in public administration. The opportunities the Spaniards denied them in the political, economic, and social spheres were precisely what the Americans gave, partly as a matter of principle, and partly to win the natives to their side. From them the Philippines inherited its democratic beliefs and institutions. Influenced by their own colonial struggle for independence from Britain and by the ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, they also reinforced the liberal ideas fostered by the Philippine independence nationalist movement from Spain. Lastly, it was also from the Americans that Filipinos had their first lesson in and taste of living a consumerist-capitalist lifestyle with its focus on endless mass production, consumption and capital accumulation.

In the early decades of American occupation, Philippine literature was very much alive and full of creativity. The aborted success of the Philippine Revolution against Spain caused by the sudden entry of America into the picture in collaboration with the Philippine middle class was still fresh in the minds of many Filipinos. It was only natural that the literature of that time dealt with the issue of American imperialism and urged the people to continue their struggle for self-determination. Writers of this period drew their inspiration from the writings of the Propagandists and of the Revolutionaries, praising and repeating the patriotic and humanist ideals of the Revolution. Likewise, alongside this strand of nationalist literature endured traditional forms of literature that presented and critiqued the ills besetting Philippine society. An example was the Filipino adaptation of the Spanish musical play called *sarsuwela* which showed the pitiful condition of the Philippines under the new colonial regime. Meanwhile, in the local dailies and magazines read by ordinary people especially in the countryside, poems, novels and dramas on romance and on everyday human-interest topics were still very much widespread in the literary form of the earlier Spanish tradition though the beginnings of the experimentation by some writers on new patterns of versification, rhyme, meter, stanza following the American style could be gradually seen. Public speaking and debate as another form of literature was also born at this time.

In what used to be a privilege reserved to the middle class, the public educational system established by the Americans gave many Filipinos the chance to go to school. Not only did the literacy rate increase dramatically, but also a new intelligentsia which represented a broader spectrum of social classes and sectors was born in the universities. With English becoming the official language of instruction and of government and the opening up of opportunities to study in America for Filipino scholars, the Filipino intellectual became much more cosmopolitan and Americanized. In the university classrooms of literature was born a new generation of writers in English trained in the Anglo-American tradition. From them came the modernist influence in Philippine literature while branding themselves as rebels with the cause of making a new start by breaking away from all kinds of traditional literature that preceded them, particularly with the native-Spanish lyrical tradition that was meant to be performed. As a result, fewer and fewer writers wrote about national independence, a theme which was almost forgotten in the heyday of the occupation. Instead, they got attracted to the glamour associated with the modern style and aimed to produce an avant garde Filipino literature in English comparable to that of the West.

Also during this time, Hollywood came to the Philippines in the form of movies and vaudeville shows which in turn pushed to the countryside the earlier forms of entertainment and stage performances from the Spanish period. In this way, the urban theatres of yesterday became the rural theatres of today. One-act plays began to be performed in university campuses and the technique of writing short stories and free verse poems

were mastered by Filipino writers in English although it took a while to remake the novel from Spanish to English. On the sideline, some of these university-educated writers and social scientists also started recording the oral literary tradition of ethnic groups which otherwise would have been lost with the advent of a powerful modernizing literary and cultural influence.

On balance, American colonization was a boon and bane both in the field of literature and in the overall cultural flourishing of the country. Nonetheless, the Filipino creative spirit deep inside kept on interpreting and reinterpreting whatever foreign ingredients that it came across with including those that were brought in during this period.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Nationalist Tradition

As already suggested above, there were actually two nationalist moments in Philippine history. The first occurred during the closing decades of Spanish colonization in the late 19th century which started as an assimilation and then an independence movement from Spain, and the second after gaining independence from America in the post-war de-colonization period.

1872-98: Independence Movement from Spain

As a form of devotion to national independence and unity, nationalism is the most important ingredient in the formation of national consciousness and identity. There has been no successful struggle for freedom in history without it. Among the many ways it can be defined, it is a sentiment and imagination among a group of people living in one place or even in different locations forged by a common experience of history, language, literature, traditions and customs, and even religion (Anderson 1983, *passim*). Similar to a sense of national identity, it can be felt and observed and is not merely an empty rational concept. As a historical event, it was a product of the widespread reaction against imperialism, political upheavals in Europe, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in the 18th century whose liberal principles of fraternity, equality, liberty, and brotherhood were spread to other countries by way of Napoleonic wars, trade, and conquest (Hornedo 1997, 196-7/cf. Hornedo 2001, 53-80).

Before the 19th century, there was as yet no such form of nationalist consciousness among Filipinos. What is called the Philippine republic today was actually a conglomeration of different ethnic groups separated by physical barriers, regionalism, and by the divide and conquer colonial policy of the Spaniards. Hence, the birth of Philippine nationalism from 1872 was the result of a long history of abusive and inept practices of the Spanish colonial government and of the church and of the racial discrimination of Filipinos by the Spaniards. Moreover, the opening of Manila to world trade gave birth to a new middle class of Filipinos who were both landed and moneyed. They sought for greater social status, acceptance, and privileges at par with those enjoyed by the Spaniards. Many of them attended elite colleges in Manila and in Europe, a rare opportunity for Filipinos at that time. From them as well as from the influx of books containing liberal ideas, the Filipinos got to know the progressive and revolutionary changes happening in Europe which they used in turn to critique the friars' abuses and the corruption of government leaders and to advocate for social change.

It is only natural then that the literature of this time reflected the interests, aspirations, and thoughts of its writers who were mostly propagandists and revolutionaries. The Madrid-based student propagandists launched a campaign for peaceful and legal reforms with the goal of assimilating the Philippines as a province of Spain that would give equal rights to Filipinos like those of Spanish citizens. Although mostly from the middle class whose wealth would certainly be compromised in the event of a bloody revolution, the propagandists were able to call attention to the problems in the Philippines and the grievances of the vast majority of Filipinos under Spanish rule. While it failed in its overall aim, the movement aroused the people's

consciousness and sentiment to unite against one common enemy. The most important representative works of this tradition were the two political novels by Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero, who aside from describing the mores and mode of living by the natives, also vividly portrayed the social cancer afflicting Philippine society at that time. According to Lumbraera, for the first time, not only was the novel transformed to an instrument of social critic, but also realism as a literary concept was employed in Philippine literature (Lumbraera 1982, 37). It was a complete shift from the melo-dramas of the earlier Spanish tradition whose borrowed European themes and medieval settings were completely alien to the hearts and minds of the audience. This time, the social realities of the here and now could no longer be ignored and largely determined the content of what was written.

The essay, which like the novel came from Spain, was another literary genre that was very much harnessed and developed in the fight for reforms and freedom. It was used by both propagandists and revolutionaries to clarify national issues, to refute the racist stereotypes hurled by the friars against the Filipino natives, and to espouse liberal ideas as a means to promote social progress while fighting all forms of reaction. They also wrote satirical essays that parodied the preachings of the friars who for them symbolized oppression, conservatism, and fanaticism. On the other hand, the revolutionaries who were mostly from the lower plebian classes expounded on the universal principles of a free democratic republic based on equality, brotherhood, freedom, dignity, and human rights. They wrote with a moralistic tone – teaching on what should be the ideal and the proper conduct of each member of the revolutionary movement and thus indirectly implied the decadence of and the need to change actual society. What was more, the revolutionaries also began to write from Spanish into the vernacular. This meant that not only did the writers change, but so did their intended audience and goal. In the aftermath of the failure of the reform movement, the propagandists were replaced by or became revolutionaries themselves. They were no longer speaking to the Spanish authorities but to the Filipino masses in preparation for armed struggle to restore the dignity of the people. Since then, Tagalog became the official language of the revolutionary movement, and that was how the association between the local language and nationalism was forged.

In sum, the late 19th century Philippine literature consisted of the religious and of the secular, though there arose a third kind marked by an evolving sense of national identity and nationhood against colonialism.

1940-70: Post-War Independence

When the Pacific War ended, the country was in disarray. The economy was down and many lives and property were lost. There were the issues of collaboration with the Japanese, the promise of independence by America, as well as the many deep social ills which had their roots in the Spanish colonial period. Many Filipinos were still suffering from dire poverty, the unequal distribution of wealth in the country, government corruption, and the traditional status quo and social structure. It was at this point that the second wave of nationalism was born. But unlike the liberal-democratic nationalism of 1872-98, this one was militant being influenced by Marxism along Maoist lines. Its objective was to conscientize and to organize the oppressed masses against the exploitation of the upper classes in line with the ideology that took hold of the consciousness of the writers at this time.

In the 1950's, many writers were also influenced by the philosophy of existentialism brought about by the climate of pessimism that pervaded the post-war period. Many theatrical performances, for instance, had as their theme the lack of hope and the absurdity of life which only showed the low morale felt by many as regards the grim future of the country. As a result, writers of this period, especially those educated in the West of the earlier American tradition, also experienced a legitimation and identity crisis. Given the stark social realities facing them, they had to redefine the nature of literature and decide whether it existed for its own sake or for the sake of society. It was a time of reexamination of one's values and choices as a writer:

arts or politics, elitism or popularism, cosmopolitanism or nationalism. Their experimentation with pure form gradually gave way to the call of the times. Such change in orientation could be seen in how their writing began to combine modernist elements with native material and the use of both Filipino and English due to the inherent inadequacy of the latter language to express national aspirations and historical themes. Albeit modernism had indeed blossomed in Philippine literature, it could never ignore nor outweigh the realities of Philippine society.

The decade of the 1960's witnessed the militant demonstrations, rallies, and mass action by student activists who concluded that the country was saddled with the four problems of "feudalism, imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and fascism" (Ibid. 249). What used to be the church during Spanish times and the classroom during the American period, the school of this new generation were the streets where they acquired and practiced their knowledge. In literature, after finally getting over their identity crisis, many writers focused their attention on how to end America's neo-colonial control of the country in collaboration with the Philippine ruling class. Their former interest in modernist themes and style of writing was now replaced with ideology and the subject of imperialism. Many more young writers wrote in Filipino than in English in order to be understood by a wider readership, particularly by the Filipino masses. It became necessary and fashionable for them to write about national issues as sign of their nationalist commitment in protest of the unjust social structures that they lived in.

When President Marcos declared martial law in 1972, it ushered in what was called *The First Quarter Storm: Days of Rage and Nights of Disquiet*,³ a time of systematic government repression and resistance to its authority. Many nationalist writers banded together to form political organizations. With the might of their pen, they did a great deal of social analyzing and called for social mobilization to change the oppressive social system. Despite government censorship and curtailment of free speech, there was a great deal of underground activity that went on to convey the suffering of the Filipino worker caused by foreign and domestic capitalists with the view of raising their ideological consciousness for mass action. It also became trendy then for the Filipino middle-class intellectual to be identified with the culture of the masses and to speak their language as statement of one's political commitment. Lastly, due to the nationalist orientation of this period to delineate what was only Filipino as against what was foreign, it gave a strong impetus to a field of study called Philippine studies and folkloristics as well as to the on-going documentation of the literary oral tradition (Hornedo 1988, 21).

In the main, the neo-nationalist tradition in Philippine literature was a product of a confused era in Philippine history dotted by the many social problems faced by the country in the post-war period. Consequently, the way people wrote changed in the light of what was happening around them: from a love for style and sophistication to a socially aware and culturally relevant literature.

Conclusion

What do the foregoing literary-historical traditions say about Philippine society and the Filipino people today?

The first general conclusion is that all these traditions make up Philippine culture. It is a mix of everything, both Asian and Western, indigenous and foreign. They all constitute the differentiated cognitional structure of present day Filipinos. Anybody who wishes to understand the dynamics of this country and people would be well advised to study these traditions. It is also good to bear in mind what one leading scholar on the Philip-

3 The latter is actually the title of a popular book by Jose F. Lacaba (Manila: Salinlahi, 1982) that captured the spirit of the times, consisting of on-the-spot journalistic coverage of the protest movement that occurred during the first three months or quarter of 1970.

pinos said about this matter: The Filipino of today is the visitor of yesterday; what is considered native now is what has been accepted by most Filipinos as their own by virtue of being transformed and sublimed by history (Frank Lynch cited in Hornedo 1997, 86-7). In this regard, it is wrong to suppose that there is such a thing as pure Filipino, 100 percent native, or Philippine homegrown only. For that matter, in the case of literature, any work that is made in the Philippines or about the Philippines, written in Filipino or in a foreign language either by a Filipino or by a foreigner at home or abroad who has identified him/herself with the country can be considered as belonging to the whole world of Philippine literature (Ibid.).

Another generalization is that all five traditions are made possible by the indigenous tradition at the foundation. It is after all the cornerstone on which all other traditions are built and determines whether any subsequent addition will work out or not. The Islamic, Spanish, American and nationalist strands have become part of the overall Philippine literary and historical tradition because they have managed to root themselves in it over time no matter how two of them (Spanish, American) were imposed at the start and another (nationalist) was in reaction to (neo) colonialism and dictatorship. For Islam, it is not difficult to see how its social structure resembles that of indigenous society revolving around the persona and authority of the tribal chieftain or its Muslim equivalent, the sultan. The only big difference between them is religion; ethnically, they are essentially the same and have many things in common in terms of language, work, community organization, and local knowledge. They all used to be natives who got converted to one religion or another which subsequently padded a layer of difference between them.

The confluence between the Spanish and the native traditions took root in the realm of spirituality and culture. The new faith grafted itself into the local culture and language, partly by displacing old things such as the native syllabary, but largely by adapting itself into and repackaging traditional knowledge. To illustrate, the nativist gods had been easily absorbed by the proliferation of saints in the Catholic faith, if ever they had been truly dislodged at all from the minds of the natives. In addition, many of the church's religious practices such as the celebration of the Mass, image processions, feasts of saints, and Passion plays in the lyrical format sat well with the emphasis of the native oral tradition on performances – singing, dancing, narrating – that involved the whole community. It is no surprise then why the Spanish tradition lasted for more than three hundred years with its legacy still being felt in Philippine society today.

The American tradition, on the other hand, is rather unique in the way it got ultimately embedded into the native fabric. Backed by its display of superior military power and an industrial economy, it presented itself as a benevolent, liberating, and modernizing influence both from Spanish oppression and native backwardness. It promised to transform the native in its own image in keeping with the white man's mission to civilize. In so doing, it set its heel high above native society imbued with the responsibility to educate the natives whom it now displayed as the primitive savage. Drawing upon its own experience of educating its immigrant population for purposes of assimilation, citizenship, and democratization, the same system was exported to the colony for testing and modification to serve the colonial objectives of pacification, cooptation, and the transmission of a secular egalitarian culture. In this way, not only did it make Filipinos forget about their frustrated aspiration for liberation, but also it drew them away from the Church, a powerful remnant institution of the previous colonial regime. The public school system was put up with English as the new medium of instruction to compete with the religious private schools, to highlight itself against the former colonial master by filling in the educational void left by Spain, and to hasten the formation of an English-speaking, Americanized, and pro-American middle class that would cooperate with the colonizing power in the administration of the country. And so when the locals began to perceive that there was some meaning to this promise of change for the better – the American dream of modernization and success for all through schooling and public participation – that gave them an idea of where they were going and a reason for relinquishing their freedom, that was when the American tradition became part of the Philippine literary-historical tradition.

The connection between the native and the nationalist traditions is a dialectical one. The Philippines did

not become a nation-state and appeared in the annals of recorded history and Western geography until after Spanish colonization. Still there are a few things that can be said about it. First, inasmuch as the native tradition had accommodated several foreign influences, the nationalist tradition in turn drew from it and used the same borrowed wellsprings to subvert the colonial and state governments in crisis. The same literary and intellectual resources were fashioned into the ‘weapons of resistance’ (Scott 1985, *passim*.) wielded by the oppressed Filipino masses. The reason behind this was the failure of the state and the narratives of colonialism, republicanism, and even of dictatorship to improve the lot of the average Filipino. Led by the economic and intellectual middle class, they rose against what they perceived to be the repressive and inefficient practices of the Spanish and of the new republican governments while shifting their attachments and reconfiguring their identities: from being a colony or province of Spain to an independent nation; and from being mere onlookers to socially involved activists and writers. Both of these movements for social change during Spanish colonial and post-colonial times were done through the mediation of the middle class who decided that not only it was time and there was enough reason to change, but also it was their social responsibility to lead and manage the whole process. In the end, the nationalist tradition’s link with the baseline native tradition came in the form of the heightened identification with/of what was solely Filipino in exclusion of and in contradistinction with anything foreign. Likewise, the practice of referring to the culture and speaking in the language of the masses by the nationalists of both periods in pursuing their social reform agenda signaled a return to the basics and to the people.

Finally, how can all these traditions be summed up? One way of conceptualizing them is to imagine how they are like the members of a household living under one roof helping and fighting with one another who cooperate and at other times do not. After all, that is what ordinary Filipino family life is like, topsy-turvy yet happy and functional. That is the way it goes too with these traditions – how they interface with or oppose one another and how they unite and divide the country and people. They have their distinct ways of working for the better or for the worse, resurfacing in different forms and situations, either in an integrated or disintegrated manner that provide many insights into the workings of Philippine society.

For example, unlike other homogenous societies in Asia, one negative effect of having heterogeneous traditions like those of the Philippines is that it has fostered in Filipinos a colonial mentality – a feeling of inferiority and a double standard toward anything foreign especially Western. This kind of thinking is very much a sign and consequence of the lack of integration and right balance among these traditions leading to the downgrading of the native in favor of the foreign, precisely the mindset which the nationalists tried to counter by going to the opposite extreme of elevating the native at the expense of all other traditions. On the other hand, one shining instance in Philippine history in which all these traditions worked together for the good of the country was the People Power EDSA Revolution of 1986 that united the country even for one brief glorious moment. It was essentially a nationalist movement against the excesses of the Marcos dictatorship that culminated in the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983. It was also in line with the American tradition as it was a campaign for the restoration of democracy as for economic progress driven by the growing expectation of the urban middle class for change in leadership. Then again there was the leading banner of the Church, not only calling all the faithful to join the anti-Marcos movement, but also deploying all her familiar resources drawn from the Spanish tradition – the Mass, icons, rosary, Bible, Cross, priests and nuns, and Cory Aquino portrayed as the personification of the weeping and prayerful Virgin Mary – to organize the people against the soldiers, guns, and tanks of the military. The collective acts of singing, dancing, storytelling, stage shows by celebrities, cheering, marching, and human barricading by people from all walks of life talking in the same local language on the streets in a fiesta mood during those momentous days were all reminiscent of the communal celebrations of the native tradition and society in which all members of the tribe participated and cooperated. For such is the genius of the Filipino that however he plays out these traditions and vice-versa, they are the source of her strength as much as his/her weakness, versatility and parochialism,

joy and sorrow, victory as well as agony.

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