

**PUTANG INANG BAYAN?
(AN ACCURSED MOTHERLAND?)**

HARDLY.

**A LOVE LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE
PHILIPPINE ARCHIPELAGO**

In little over a decade from now, in the year 2021 to be exact, the Philippine archipelago, besides being visited upon by Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese navigator in the service of the Spanish Empire, and who was the first to circumnavigate the world, will have encountered 500 years of Western civilization.

Of the two impacts, the latter is critical. Why? Because it begs the question: are we going to celebrate this landmark date? Or denigrate it.

Some will argue that this isn't quite correct and that Magellan perhaps wasn't the first European, or in the more political correct term these days, "white man", to touch our shores. That honor should go to Marco Polo, the Venetian trader, who at the request of the Emperor of China, Kublai Khan, stayed on and reported on his realm for an indefinite period of time before returning to Venice in the 1300s. Research has shown that Polo has visited the archipelago in the emperor's stead.

Who came here first isn't the point. What matters is the impact. I can't speak for the experiences of other countries that have been colonized, particularly our neighbors. For the Philippines, however, the mindset, consciousness, ways of thinking, acting, being, and for lack of a better word, "intercoursing" with ourselves and others, clearly puts us in the camp belonging to the West.

I bring this up also because, I've come across postings on the web asking this question: Are Filipinos Asian? The arguments runs across as follows: Yes, we are because we look Asian and we're of Indo Malay racial stock; we can't tell the difference between a Cambodian and a Filipino even if we tried, etc. On the other side of that argument, No, we aren't attached to the continent and besides, the influence of Spain and America clearly runs in all of us. But this doesn't seem like much of a rejoinder.

Both, however, are right.

For me the debate ought not run along the same line as whether Jose Rizal or Andres Bonifacio ought to be the National Hero, even though that debate is considered over.

Both the yes and no sides of the argument bring a lot to the table of our consciousness and identity. And we shouldn't be ashamed of it.

Speaking of shame: a little about myself, my father is an American of Italian descent, my mother is a Filipina from Biliran province, and an ethnic Waray-Waray. If my mother were of Cambodian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Indonesian, Malaysian or of Laotian stock (whew!) I would be the product of something shameful, tantamount to a sin or taboo. Why? Simply because I am an offspring of one who mated with the "gaijin", or barbarian, in Japanese. In the Philippines, it would only go as far as to call me a "batang PX", although my father wasn't in the service and my mom wasn't a bargirl. And, to be called batang PX is "no biggie", or "no worries" as far as current slang goes. (I won't even get into the cult of the "tisoy" or mestizo, for that is another thing altogether.)

The Philipinian (more on this term later) embrace of the both hemispheres – East AND West - of our society allows me to circulate amongst her society quite freely, with a certain cachet, at that. In any land neighboring us I'd be an outcast.

For this, I have eternal gratitude to our "inang bayan" (Motherland).

And while we may be encountering the blessings and curses of the Overseas Contract Worker (OCW) phenomenon, likewise the emigrant who leaves for other lands, this, too is owed to our exposure to the West. We speak English, the language of business, trade, diplomacy, ideas and education.

And we have faith. Whether that faith reside in God or Allah, we can connect on a spiritual level with many of the lands that hosts us whether as their worker bees or citizens of their respective lands.

What if some of us didn't leave, hadn't sought to live, work and study in other shores to pursue our ambitions and dreams, and had simply stayed behind instead. Or, what if we were annexed with mainland Asia?

Well, we might have experienced a cultural revolution like China in the 1960s, where her youth shamed and killed off their elders; we might have been cleansed of teachers and intellectuals in Cambodia's "killing fields" in the 1970s; we might have had a civil war like the Koreas and Vietnam, in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, (with foreign interlopers to boot!); and we would have experienced ethnic cleansing of a sort we have never perpetuated on the ethnic Chinese residents living in places such as Malaysia in the 1960s (Singapore was kicked out of the Malaysian Federation in the 1960s because of their Chinese majority) and Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in the late 1990s. We've

had our fair share of this kind of irrational and exuberatic orgy of the damned and disgraced. But nothing on the scale or magnitude of our neighbors.

Look at our revolutions instead. Unlike Fidel Castro, who lives, breathes the revolution until his dying day, now having bequeathed it to his brother Raul, and his ideological soul-mate Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, our revolutions have been short-lived and co-opted.

This is a good thing.

We had fought Spain in the late 19th century and America entered the fray (America had their own beef with Spain on their side of the Atlantic Ocean to begin with, particularly after the blowing up of the USS Maine off the shores of Cuba). We then fought them but wound up taking to them. Our modern institutions are American: democracy, mass education i.e. literacy, governance, even entertainment, anti-intellectualism, materialism, pursuit of the American dream (which, for most Filipinos, means moving and living stateside..of which I am one).

Say what you will of America, she had at least sent us her best and brightest. William Howard Taft as Governor General (future president of the U.S), the MacArthurs *pere et fils* (father and son Arthur and Douglas), the Thomasites, etc. You cannot make the same argument for what America sent to Cuba: there they made a mess of things by sending mostly gangsters and people of questionable motives to which the Cuban people to this day are suffering for.

Getting back to revolutions, however. EDSA I and II? Short and sweet. Just like us, in the physical and temperamental guise.

For this we should be eternally grateful to "Inang Bayan". Because even if we are held together by so thin a rope, that rope is made of stuff tougher and stronger than our one-time dominant export, abaca. And that is saying much, for abaca was the stuff shipping rope was made of, to which world domination by Western dominance rested on, whether Pax España, Pax Britannica or Pax Americana. (God forbid a Pax Sina (China) down the road).

Speaking of abaca, this again brings me back to Western civilization: international trade. It has been the West's hallmark. Galleon trade with Mexico, abaca trade, sugar trade, lumber trade, copra trade, labor trade sans the bondage. Yes, we've traded with our neighbors pre-Magellan times and have picked up where we left off since independence in the 1940s. Nevertheless, it pales in comparison, whether in impact, importance or consequence.

We should not be fooled by the gloating our neighbors have had over us with their nouveau riche attitude toward these past number of years over our abject poverty and anemic state of affairs. I'll take what we have any day over a lifetime of what they have

to offer. Whether we sell ourselves for a peso or a billion, our souls will always be priceless. Besides, we've tasted being the number one economy in the region (actually, number two after Japan prior to the onset of World War II) and there is no doubt in my mind we can reclaim this mantle again.

Our political instability and myopia, which makes for great drama, is something we all have partaken in. It is our national sport. And it is something we revel in. This participation is a strength not a weakness. It is the system that needs fixing not the people.

But of course, this very thing scares away investors, just like the Japanese in the mid-1980s.

In the summer of 1985, the U.S. and Japan agreed to what was termed the "Central Park accord". In it, Japan would devalue its yen, so as to make the dollar stronger. This was done for two reasons, it would make Japanese exports to the U.S. more expensive and U.S. exports to Japan cheaper. The logic behind it being this: its outcome would make for a level economic playing field between the two countries and reduce America's trade deficit with Japan. At the time, Japan was held as the bogeyman, much like the way the U.S. looks at China these days: in fear, suspicion, a mix of envy at its heady growth and complains about the latter's inherent unfairness trade practices in its participation of the global marketplace.

Japan had to look offshore to lower its production costs, chiefly labor. And bypass quotas. It was like killing two birds with one stone.

Well, much as we've always re-enacted the New Testament story of the Passion of the Christ, this time (1983 to 1986) we were re-enacting a story in the Old Testament: David versus Goliath (the opposition contra Ferdinand Marcos).

Japan was putting money in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and we lost out to the great sweepstakes of investment booty. Of course, the Japanese have been to these places before....as in having colonized them 40 years earlier. And the Japanese have been here before, too, except their experience here in World War II left a bitter taste in their mouth. Why? We fought back. We weren't docile little lambs like our neighbors. We were promised independence by the Americans, and there was no indication in the 40 plus years of her colonization of a change of in that plan.

To be so close to a freedom for and by ourselves, to finally have a chance for a run at own own affairs only for it to be yanked away by the "Co-Prosperity Economic Sphere" of the Empire of Japan was like being promised and teased for sex and then having to wait....again (some other time Philippines, Japan basically said). No way, Jose. we want our piece of that cherry pie now, dammit. So we never, ever bought into it. And while our neighbors dreaded the thought of England and France coming back to take over their possessions after World War II was over, meaning they would be rule by them

again all over again, we knew we'd have our apple pie: independence, liberty, freedom and a chance to run our country like hell. If we didn't like it, the argument went, we could always change it. And our former President Manuel Luis Quezon has been proven right; it has been run like hell AND we have changed it. The saying, nevertheless, rings true: practice makes perfect. The question remains, however: What are we trying to perfect?

Now back to Japan's occupation. Yes, we've collaborated with them. At least some of us did. But as is always the case, those who have most to lose, will either fight back or bow and then bend over and get it in the you-know-where to protect the family jewels.

Those in the countryside, who preferred to use their family jewels on the Japanese, rather than simply protect them, and with nothing really to lose save castration, formed Hukbalahap - "Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon". The fact that their work and their voice wasn't accorded the respect and inclusion in the aftermath of the war is sad.

Of course, renegades of the Huks and their assassination of a beloved and revered figure like Doña Aurora Quezon, wife and widow of Manuel L. Quezon, the man most responsible for our independence's manifestation, and at an inauguration of a hospital, no less, speaks volumes of the political instability making for great sport I earlier mentioned.

My point is that even if we were to be the docile-type that Japan would have wanted in order to invest, it won't happen because of our schizophrenia: Are we East or West? And our proclivity and propensity is to chose sides rather than embrace both. It's like asking a guy whether he's an "ass man" or a "tit man", or asking a woman whether she prefers "length or width". It makes for great discussion, but pointless nevertheless, because it is pleasurable either way.

We will soon reach the half millennial mark of 500 years of Western civilization touching our shores. We've coasted on what this means, perhaps ignorant of its meaning altogether.

Western civilization dates back to the time of ancient Greece, some 3,000 years ago. Greece, particularly Athens, from which the form of government known as democracy was once practiced (*from Wikipedia.org: the word democracy derives from the ancient Greek *dēmokratia* (δημοκρατία) (literally, rule by the people) formed from the roots *dēmos* (δημος), "people," "the mob, the many" and *kratos* (κρατος) "rule" or "power"*)

The ancient Greeks also excelled in the arts such as pottery, sculpture and drama plays; the sciences, philosophy, mathematics and above all, prized reason. The Greeks were then colonized by the Macedonians in the fourth century A.D., but took a liking to the Greeks' way of doing things. King Phillip the II had his son Alexander the Great taught by Aristotle, the great philosopher who founded a school called the Lyceum. Alexander went on to defeat their enemy, the Persian Empire, colonize them, expanded his realm

reaching as far east as India and introduced "Hellenism" or the "Greek way" to his domain. He died not long after and his realm was partitioned amongst his generals. Rome, a rising superpower, soon after colonized and incorporated the subsequent dynasties of these men's domain and likewise adopted Hellenism wholesale. You see it in the gods worshipped, the attire, the arts and culture.

One area of Roman occupation was Judea, and one resident there bequeathed a movement called Christianity. Christianity became the empire's state religion in the 300s by Emperor Constantine. To put the impact of this decision in perspective: the Emperor himself was considered a god, one of many in polytheistic Rome at the time. All was dropped for one: Christianity. (In the pantheon building in Rome, one of her greatest monuments, all the statues of the gods in the building were thereafter replaced by statues of saints. Pantheon means, "Pan" for all, "theon or theo" for god. I'm surprised the building itself wasn't renamed the "Monotheon")

Christianity spread far and wide to the likes of the empire, the New World (North and South America), Europe, the East and Africa.

Christianity, over time, also went through many schisms, the Orthodox versus the gnostic, the Latin versus the Greek, the Catholic versus the Protestant, the mainstream versus the evangelical.

The story of the West is endless..I haven't mentioned the impact of the movable type by Gutenberg in the late 1400s, even though movable type was created by the Chinese centuries earlier; or gunpowder, again invented by the Chinese, but adopted wholesale and used to a level and scale unseen before; the Renaissance; the Enlightenment; the Counter-reformation; the impact of the Treaty of Westphalia (which gave birth to the concept of the nation-state, which thereafter meant that borders recognized, were now to be respected, and considered inviolate - although not necessarily practiced). Nor have I mentioned the impact of the Industrial Revolution, brought on because we figured out how to harness the power of a certain state water becomes when heated: steam.

This is the tradition that we are a part of, however belated in its arrival to our shores. We may be latecomers to the party, and we may not have been players, not even spectators to these events, but that underpinning is in us, whether we know it, and whether we like it or not.

We are so fortunate that "inang bayan" belonged to no one prior to the voyage of the "Trinidad", "San Antonio", "Concepción", "Victoria", and "Santiago" (the ships Magellan commanded when he began his voyage departing from Spain in 1519).

While we may have come from, and have traded with, what is known today as Indochina, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, etc, prior to the arrival of the "Castila" the impact was no where near as cataclysmic nor consequential.

We were surrounded by empires. But the one that took us was at the other side of the globe from another ocean. For instance, we weren't colonized by the Sri Vijayan empire of Java (some speculate that this is the origin of the name which gave us the Visayas); neither by the imperial dynasties of China whether Qin, Han, Jin, Sui, Tang, Ming dynasties (although, who knows, we may be one day...look at the brush off they gave off to their part in the National Broadband Network scandal or their aggression in claiming and encasing the Spratley Islands for themselves); neither were we colonized by Ashoka of India, or the Khmers or Siamese of Indochina.

All of them could have had us if they really wanted to. But we weren't of any worth to them. We had no high civilization to speak of that would put us on notice by them. Where were our gold and silver craftworks? Our monuments? Our great literature? None. None. None. We had better things to do with our time: like build rice terraces and engage in who could outdrink the other in tuba or bahalina (coconut wine).

Like our great Patroness herself, Mother Mary, mother of Jesus the Christ, we, too, were a bunch of virgins when Spain showed up. Having no silver or gold mines of any size to speak of, we weren't enslaved like the Mexicans or Peruvians to mine for it. Having no fallout from that outcome as well, we were spared in any kind of trafficking in human bondage. That is not to say that it didn't happen. But slave-trafficking was the handiwork of Muslim raiders. (Are you aware that in some countries with a Muslim majority, *Visaya*, or *Visayaq*, means slave? Here we get all righteous when the word *Filipino* is placed in dictionaries whether in England or Greece to mean maid, largely because they are Westerners, but because it is amongst our Eastern neighbors, hardly a peep).

What we are experiencing in the here and now are the consequence of the growing pains of a society that the West had already solved some 600 years ago: Feudalism. Feudalism was supplanted by the Industrial Revolution, which transformed the West to a degree that hasn't brought an overhaul in our society like theirs. We've simply inherited these forms and institutions. Just because we carry the West's baton, it doesn't mean we're automatic Westerners and won't experience any discomfort. They've figured out what their society ought be, and we should likewise do so with ours.

In America, the most ambitious and enterprising were the peasant class: Cornelius Vanderbilt, a farm boy who built railroads (if you've ever been to New York and travelled on the Metro North train system and been to Grand Central Station, that's his work); John D. Rockefeller, a poor boy who created and built the Standard Oil Trust, the largest corporation of its time and, through its descendants the ExxonMobile Corporation, the largest corporation in America today; Henry Ford, an apprentice smith who founded the Ford Motor Corporation, and brought the mass manufacturing assembly line to new heights which made mass consumption of material goods possible.

In the Philippines, those who rose from nothing are the immigrant Chinese: Henry Sy, Lucio Tan, John Gokongwei. Our peasants are still that: peasants. The immigrants weren't held back, but our lowly have been for the most part. And by us, no less.

There is too much vested in the current system: the padrino and the serf. The question is this: to whose example must we look upon to solve this thing that vexes us? The concept of ownership of land dates back to Roman times; by concept, I mean the thereafter practice of surveying a given property, and the subsequent submission and/or charter/bequeathment of its deed from an authority..whether by emperor, governor, king, queen, church or state. Prior to that, land was used communally.

One can only engage in "ningas cogon" or slash and burn type agriculture if the land isn't owned by someone; that is, unless expressly told not to by the auspices of the "owner", whether state, church or individual.

In other words whereas in the past we practiced stewardship/ custodianship of the land, we have thereafter practiced ownership. Likewise, the nature and dynamics of the relationship between the leader and the led changes as well.

So we have to ask ourselves what kind of relationship are we to have amongst ourselves? Yes, we have an elite. Yes, we have an underclass. Yes, we have a professional and intellectual and working class, the only difference between us and the rest of the world are in the percentages and pace in moving from one into the other, in blending, so to speak.

The question also is how do we resolve this and make flexible what looks inflexible. What should be our guiding philosophy. Our methodology.

Should we give up the concept of egalitarianism and follow the East like India and adopt the caste system? likewise its attendant religion Hinduism, which is its guiding principle? There are traces of the Indian influence in our lives starting with the ancient script of Baybayin and terms such as guru.

Or should we adopt the Confucian patriarchal system of the East instead? The latter is the mantra by which Lee Kwan Yew, founder of modern Singapore and world emeritus, speaks of when he says "modernity without Westernization". His adherents have been Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, etc. For a while, we tried our hand at it, too. And, its been quite unsuccessful. I'm speaking of Ferdinand Marcos. At least the latter can be forgiven because he readily admitted to being a descendant of Limahon, the Chinese pirate. If he wants to play up his Chinese ancestry to the hilt, then it goes without saying that he will look to its systems as well.

This is, in no way, a belittling of the East. But we Philipinians have to make decisions, rather than always coast on the works of others, and then cry victim when it doesn't go as we had hoped. Prayer or "Bahala na" is not an option. It is a desperation.

Why, for instance, do we not adopt a society based along the lines Taoism? Its from the East, from China, from which springs the concept of the Yin and Yang, of male and female, a sort of non-dominance of the dichotomies, of working in harmony. This may work for us, we've had a good number of female leaders as well: Madame Corazon Aquino and now, Madame Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Had there been no EDSA revolution, Madame Imelda Marcos would have ascended the throne. Also, look at the founder of a newspaper in the Philippine that has altered her history and given it a new voice: Madame Eugenia Apostol, of the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

The West isn't an end all and be all. Capitalism, while a great engine for prosperity, and by its very nature an engine of change, brings about social disorder and dislocation, and it has created problems as much as solved them. Communism, totalitarianism and fascism, and its attendant philosophy of the new man experiencing the utopian heaven on earth, hasn't worked because we, by nature, long to express and question reality, something these forms of ideologies suppresses harshly.

Returning to what choice ought we Philippinians must make, and likewise our attunement to the feminine in our society, one must remember we took to the bible very recently. As a consequence our view of women in our society is quite different from others.

In the bible's Genesis, Eve was borne out of Adam's rib rather than from dust like Adam. And, thereafter Eve was blamed for tempting Adam to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge introduced by the serpent. After partaking of the fruit, they realized that they were naked and covered themselves, they subsequently hid from God and banished from Eden. Humanity's price? Eve was forced to suffer henceforth: she was to do the birthing of offspring, and the process of delivery was to be painfully endured. Consequently we live and contend with what all humanity must now suffer as a result of their act: original sin.

This is far removed from our creation story of man and woman, Malakas and Maganda. The Bible has one supreme God, but we have three: Bathala (god); Aman Sinaya (goddess); and Amihan (the wind god who served as mediator between the two). The turf war between Bathala and Aman Sinaya over dominion was allayed by the intercession of Amihan, of which Malakas and Maganda (our version of Adam and Eve) sprouted from the inside of a bamboo grove. That is as Yin and Yang as one can speak of.

To give you the idea of the respect we have for women here: unlike in the West, we are in awe and in fear of the "wak wak" and "aswang" (witch), but we haven't gone so far as to burn women for being their accomplices. The Philippines may be a male dominated society but we pray the rosary to Mother Mary. I don't think the Lord's prayer was ever invoked in any of our uprisings.

We have a high regard for the “manghilots” (healers), and folk medicine practitioners in our barrios, all invariably led by women. These were the very people, who in the West, were burned alive at the stake by both the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the 1500 to 1700s encouraged and sanctioned by the medical profession at the time, who viewed them as a threat to their livelihood. For the latter, those who invoked the Hippocratic oath, the “do no harm”, they certainly were hypocritical.

A woman who lead an army to victory, like Joan of Arc in the 1400s, burned, not for defeating the enemy (she was captured by the enemy), but for heresy.

Our experience with a woman warrior? When the Spaniards captured Gabriela Silang, they simply hung her for taking up the cudgels of her husband Diego in their uprising in the Ilocos region in the 1700s.

And the right of women to vote was fairly recent in the U.S. was only in 1920, almost 150 years after the founding of America.

Because we haven't experienced these traumas, even though we are of the West's influence, we are, in many respects, a blank slate, free to write our own destiny, beholden to no ideology or civilization. We don't have much at stake as, let's say, the United States or the Catholic Church, were either to fall. Our stake in the outcome, although serious, wouldn't be as catastrophic as we may imagine it to be. We've largely been bystanders to all this to begin with.

Take our constitution, for example: it is American-derived. We've had so much practice with revolutions and forms of governance and “bagong lipunans”, that if all else fails, we simply redraft a new one. Take our majority religion, Christianity, for example: if say, the second coming were to arrive tomorrow, and judgment were at hand to determine who enters the kingdom and who does not, well since we're the poorest of the lot, we get to enter Heaven first. Yipee! (Or Hell. Groan).

We have much to draw from, and our recent experiences is like a fresh wound, still so raw. Once it heals, however, we can get on with the task of determining our fate. What does the East offer that we can use? What does the West offer that we can use? We does the indigenous offer that we can use?

This ought to be our sport.

Fighting over titular positions whether congressmen, mayor, counselor, governor, whereby assassinations, kidnappings of the rich (typically Chinese) to finance campaigns, the employment of goons, guns and gold to achieve power, while the norm, are inconsequential in comparison to what truly ought to matter: what kind of land and people should we to become?

One must start with this basic premise: What does it mean to be a Filipino, or my preferred term, Philippinian? One must remember that this identity did not start with its residents of the archipelago in mind. It was reserved for the Spaniards, whether insulares (born in the Philippines) or peninsulares (born in Spain). The likes of you and me would be Indio (native), Sangley (Chinese) or Mestizo (the amalgamated). One must also remember that the name of the country was named after a Spanish King. Should we continue with this? Should we likewise continue to practice nationalism? Remember that this, too, is a recent Western concept. Empire has always been the *modus operandi* in both East and West.

Thus far, we have good reason to celebrate who we are as a people inspite of what we see is glaringly lacking. For one thing, while we have inherited from Spain the anti-Moro attitude amongst the people of Mindanao (Spain herself was a colony of the Moros for almost 800 years), and continue to do battle with the movement to separate and form a new country, we have been spared what could be even worse: a war between the Tagalogs and the Visayans.

Think of it for a minute, in the 1930s Manuel L. Quezon, himself a Tagalog from Baler, Quezon declared after a committee finding, that Tagalog will be the root upon which the National Language, or “Wikang Pambansa” would be based on, to be henceforth known as Pilipino. At the time, Tagalog was a language spoken by a minority people that, at best, covered a handful of provinces. Visayan covered the central and the southern lands of the archipelago. And had many more speakers. This act, proclaimed in 1939, mind you, was an executive order, not a referendum.

Some democracy, eh? It wasn't put up for a vote by the populace. Granted, Manila was the capital, the headquarters for the Philippine enterprise, and through Tagalog, the spread of Christianity was made possible, and with the employment of the modern media whether television, radio, movies or print (all Western technologies), Tagalog become the *lingua franca* in practice and in number.

This is truly amazing. Look at Tanzania and Kenya in Africa. They are racked by tribal feuds. Tagalogs can make fun of the Visayan accent, but it isn't considered fighting words by the latter (I am of Waray-waray extraction, a language, while in the Visayas, has elements of the Tagalog language in it. When we ask a question about a thing, we say “ano” instead of “unsa”. Waray, by the way, in English means nothing. Think of us as the “Wala Walas”).

There is no war between the Ilocanos vis a vis the Tagalogs. Or look at the Pampanguenos. Although they stamped downed the rebellion in the Ilocos region in the 1700s commandeered by the Spaniards, they aren't suffering for it by their victims, the neighboring Ilocano speakers.

This is reason for joy. There is a spillover of Ilocanos from their homeland in the northwest spread out to the nearby provinces, the capital and as far south as Mindanao

(even as far as Hawaii and California in the U.S.) and yet like water off a duck's back, hardly noticed or envied or cause for endyring hatred.

Or take, for example, my province of Biliran, home of my mother, in Central East Visayas north of the island of Leyte. We're about 80 percent Cebuano-Visayan speaking (considered the purest form of Visayan) and remaining 20 percent is Waray Waray speaking (and our Waray is closer to the Samareño Waray spoken, unlike the Leyteño Waray, even those we are closer to the latter province. When we ask a question of identity we say "sino" instead of "hino"). Scratch the surface anywhere here in the archipelago and we have a blending without a sense of hereditary occupation or grievance (again, unlike the Moros).

We've never spoken of the master race. Or of a master civilization. Our mouth's haven't been "cleansed" by soap and water like in the U.S. when the natives spoke in their respective Indian tongues (they happen to be our brothers, by the way, since we, too, are Indios..remember Rizal's "Indios Bravos", and in his signing of his death warrant: he wrote Indio as his identity).

There is so much in us with which we can appreciate. Our hospitality is unequalled. We don't fear the foreigner. Whether that foreigner comes to us or we go to their lands we've embraced them and have been emraced by them.

We are a spirited people because we embrace the revelation of a truth that began with the humble: a boy born in the manger who was the son of a carpenter who did not live up to the expectations of his own people although acknowledged by wise men of his importance and consequence.

We can relate to that on so many levels. Our strategic value in location, in resources, for example, it is an acknowledged paeon (song) to our promise as a land. So is our lowly beginnings. Or our seeking out of other lands for opportunity where our talents would be better used and appreciated. We love mother Mary just as much as Jesus Christ did his own mama. She neither left his side in his hour of loss nor has she in ours. And let's not forget our martyrdom for a truly righteous cause called liberty and freedom: Rizal, Aquino, Gomburza, Bonifacio et al. All worth dying and striving for.

Feeling this good about ourselves, however, doesn't absolve us of the choice we must make at this critical juncture at the crossroad in front of us: who are we, what are we, what are we to be.

If we fail to ask these questions, let alone answer them. Others will gladly do so for us.

So, when 2021 arrives, are we going to celebrate, denigrate.....or investigate?

Let's write that thesis together.

It's no accident that Rizal called us a pearl. A pearl is formed in the mouth of an oyster through the introduction of a foreign element that causes it agitation. This agitation grows and grows and grows. But look at the result: it becomes a jewel of such sublime beauty. Just like us.

The reason why I prefer the term Philippinian is largely semantic and syntax. Let's be consistent and adopt the proper word: when using the Spanish language, let's call ourselves Filipino. In Tagalog: Pilipino or Pinoy. In English, Philippinian. People of Palestine are Palestinian, not Palestinos. If that is a far removed identity, try this: people of Argentina are not Argentinos, but Argentinians. Perhaps they themselves call each other Argentinos, but internationally, the -ian is adopted. Go down the line: the Carolinas, Carolinian not Carolino. Florida? Not Floridos, Floridians.

It may be okay to adopt and appropriate the Philippine name for ourselves, in both name of country and in identity, but let's at least make a concession to the proper form when using a language we have likewise adopted and appropriated for ourselves.

Filipino. R.I.P.
Its resurrection: Philippinian.

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<p>Bluk baluc/ka</p>

9 March, 2008
9:36 p.m.
at my computer desk in San Diego, California

THE REASON WHY GOD IS A PHILIPPINIAN*

We always see her from
the point of view from above
Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao,
an archipelagic string of islands

But if you've ever
traveled by boat
You will see her not as a map of
blue for ocean, green or brown for land

But as teardrops planted and
solidified at the sea

big teardrops
little teardrops
long teardrops
high teardrops
all

Frozen in time for all of us to see
Because when God was done with his creation
He could not bear to part with his masterpiece:

us
our islands
his islands
his teardrops
his pearl of the orient sea

See how we're given to crying?
Over any and all occasions

when his servant, santo papa visited us,
see how we cried

when we fought one another,
see how we cried

when we teased each other,
see how we cried

when we were accused of a crime,
see how we cried

when we sung our songs,
see how we cried

when we lost our love,
see how we cried

when we left her to work abroad,
see how we cried

when we returned for a visit,
see how we cried

While our teardrops can be easily wiped away
The ones left from our father are still with us today

*It is improper syntax to refer to inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago as Filipinos when the language used is English. This would be deemed correct if the language used is in Spanish. Inhabitants of Palestine are not Palestinos but Palestinians, likewise those of the Carolinas and Argentina. This has been an oversight clear in need of correction, which may in part explain the dismal state of identity currently being experienced by all both residing on the archipelago and her sizable diaspora at the far corners of the globe.

THE REASON WHY GOD IS A PHILIPPINIAN

June 4, 2005

Saturday

2:00 p.m.

baluc/ka