

## The Reified Filipino Mode of Thinking (Fragments of Filipino Social Reality)

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**Abstract:** The overarching aim of the paper revolves around two questions: (1) Is it possible to extract a "Filipino" mode of thinking through a critical theory of the Philippine social reality? (2) Is the "Filipino" mode of thinking "rational" in itself to justify the present situation of the Philippine social reality? The methodic approach to be used in this paper would be Critical Theory as presented in the works of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer's criticisms against instrumental rationality and Adorno's insights on the culture industry give a depiction of society which, ironically, seeks to destroy itself for its own progress. In their works, we find a society which makes dehumanization of its people a precondition for social mobility; the societal progress through capitalism being the end and its people being the means. The method of criticism of the critical theory is not exclusively limited to certain societies of the world. On the contrary, all social reality may be subjected into a critical explanation of each of their current situation. In the case of the Philippines, the collective "Filipino identity" may be said to be losing its original conceptual content as the society progresses; yet this said "progress" of the Philippines could not even eliminate poverty and social suffering of the country. It should be noted here that a particular aspect of our identity is how we think - our mode of thinking. And so, this paper seeks a sufficient rational explanation on why such social phenomenon is necessitated in our country, starting from our [contemporary] "Filipino" mode of thought to certain fragments of the Philippine social reality. The first part of the paper would critically examine two aspects of our social reality in order to extract "Filipino" mode of thinking or Filipino thought: 1) the social history of our civil society and 2) our culture. The second part would focus on discussing Filipino thought being actualized or reified into our present social reality. The paper would not dwell on Filipino social reality in its totality, only a fragment of it, which is found in our socio-historical and contemporary culture and which may already be sufficient in explaining the present "awful" situation of contemporary Philippines.

**Keywords:** Critical Theory, Filipino Social Reality and Mode of Thinking

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## Introduction - Two Disasters: An awful situation

October 15, 2013 – A 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the island of Bohol at around 8:12 a.m., the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology and the United States Geological Service reported. The epicenter was detected in Carmen, Bohol; the tremor lasted a minute. Blackouts and other damages were expected from the quake including the devastation of some of the oldest churches in the Philippines. Power was down and so as water supply. Aftershocks were experienced in Bohol and in other places in Visayas. Some of our fellow *pinoy*s in Bohol were injured, others even died; all of them needed the help they could get. Of course, the whole nation aided them because even Bohol's provincial disaster management team could not handle all the problems.<sup>1</sup> It is a good thing that Filipinos are there for each other in times of devastation. Luckily, no notable tarsier was harmed during the tremor.

November 7, 2013 – Supertyphoon 'Yolanda' (international name: Haiyan) entered the Philippine area of responsibility. Yolanda "packed maximum sustained winds of 195 kilometers per hour near the center and gustiness of up to 230 kph."<sup>2</sup> Damages were expected, specifically on the Visayas region. Tacloban City, Samar, Leyte, Capiz and other provinces were nearly wiped out by the storm surge. By the time Yolanda left the Philippines, people who were heavily affected had nowhere to go and seek for help. Almost all of the resources in their location were destroyed. Death toll reached 4,000 and still counting, injured Filipinos were about 18,000, and there are still others missing.<sup>3</sup> The nation took immediate action in aiding affected places the day after the incident happened.

We can at somehow give a picture of the Philippines' current situation in dealing with disasters brought by nature. However, these are not the disasters I am about to discuss here. The stories continue:

Two days after the earthquake incidents in Bohol, President Benigno "Noy" Aquino III went to South Korea for a business trip. The business trip to Korea would assure benefits for the country in terms of tourism and economy. Of course, it is inevitable for Filipinos to be enraged with such action of the President. Filipinos would think that Pres. Aquino left for the business trip instead of being focused in helping our fellow Filipinos in Bohol. Pres. Aquino defended his decision to push through with his trip to South Korea, despite the devastation wrought by a 7.2-magnitude earthquake that hit Bohol and other provinces. "While we are working on the present, we should perhaps also not abandon the future," he said as he defends himself during a televised press conference at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. Aquino assured the public that members of his Cabinet were in Bohol and Cebu to address the needs of those affected by the quake. "In the mean time, I am going to South Korea to address the future [of the country]...", he said.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, it is obvious that the motive of President Aquino is primarily caused by opportunities – a simple example of an instrumental rationality. Nothing is wrong when a person is profit-driven; it only becomes wrong when profit-driven actions are done at the same time neglecting situations that affects other people.

In Tacloban City, people had no idea on how to survive with the scarcity of each resource they own after 'Yolanda' visited the Philippines. That is until several residents began looting grocery stores and breaking into shops for food and other basic items they needed to survive. Due to

low police power and military force in the area after the typhoon, no one was put to jail. Jiggy Manicad, a reporter, even saw policemen looting for their own survival.<sup>5</sup> Anarchy was present in this event. No one could blame those looters; they needed the resources for them to survive. It merely alludes to Darwin's phrase of "survival of the fittest". Sadly, a part of popular culture in contemporary Philippines would still emphasize that looting is evil in itself – a much distorted one-sided kind of thinking.

And now people blame God for "forsaking" them during these two disasters. It is not God who is to be blamed, neither the government nor ourselves. After all, we are powerless before the two disasters happened. Man cannot control the forces of nature in toto; man is even possibly powerless in his social sphere. Randolph David, a notable sociologist in our country, in his editorial essay "The Powerless Public" gives a finest depiction of Filipino social reality in Metro Manila, to be specific:

"Massive shopping centers are out up on vital arteries of the city, without any provision for the traffic that is bound to be created by the concentration of so many people and activities in one place. High-rise offices and condominium complexes are built without adequate provisions for parking, drainage, garbage disposal; and totally without regard for the pressure that high-density buildings exert upon existing water, power, and other utilities. Huge construction projects, sometimes employing as many as a thousand workers, are started without providing proper temporary housing for the workers. As a result, squatter colonies often sprout beside large construction sites, remaining there after the building is finished to await demand for maids, drivers, and security guards. Streets are taken over and used as dumps for gravel and sand, steel bars and lumbers. And while the construction is going on, the entire neighbourhood must put up with all the hellish noise and dust created on the project site. The developers don't care, of course, for they don't live there."<sup>6</sup>

We Filipinos cannot even speak against the powerful [ones] in the social aspect, what more to the natural. Another depiction of powerlessness is found in Agustin Martin Rodriguez's narrative of the "Drama of the Sidewalks" in his book *Governing the Other: Exploring the Discourse of Democracy in a Multiverse of Reason*. In 2002, Bayani Fernando, a Filipino politician (notable as one of the most effective and active), successfully removed all business affairs of illegal vendors in the sidewalks of Manila. Those vendors' wares were confiscated and doused with gasoline in order to prevent the illegal vendors to resume their sidewalk vending. The dousing of gasoline in the wares signifies negation of the poor's livelihood.<sup>7</sup> Nothing is crueller than the phenomenon of the powerless being negated of their social existence.

The consequential events happened after Bohol and Yolanda are good examples of how Filipinos deal with social reality of everyday life. Though we might say that those events occur rarely, the ways which Filipinos normally react upon such situations differ not at the most fundamental level of social reality. In other words, disasters always happen; may it be natural or social and the solutions are always made by "the social" - the society. And believe it or not, it is empirically obvious that the current situation of our country is awful. It is always good news when survey results inform progress in our country, but these results are mere conceptual information formalized by those great positivists. It cannot feed, clothe, or give us shelter. Try living in the slums and "squatter's house" in Metro Manila, and ask yourself where that progress is. There is progress, as evidences show, but how visible can it be in the midst of the poverty that was present since the very beginning of our social history? While inquiring into the solutions on how to eliminate the "inevitable poverty" of the

Philippines, a critical theory of our society should be useful. By critically examining our social reality, including history, culture, and the factors of its stabilization, one could determine where society have failed to realize, which lead to this awful situation of today. A possibility arises here: all these awful situations that the country experiences resulted from the Filipino mindset. Giving insights from the perspective of the Frankfurt School (or the New Left), it is possible that a social reality is simply the reified form of thought of the people. And so the Filipino mode of thought could have resulted into the current situation of our country. This view on our social reality requires thorough explanation. The overarching aim of these fragmented works revolve around two questions that give the explanation it seeks: (1) Is it possible to extract a Filipino mode of thinking through a critical theory of the Philippine social reality? (2) Is the Filipino mode of thinking "rational" in itself to justify the present situation of the Philippine social reality? The flow of the discussion might be unsystematic; it is to give justice for the fact that these are fragmented writings on Filipino social reality in the philosophical lenses of critical theory. First, we must inquire into the Filipino mindset, and then justify its reification to our social reality.

### **The Filipino Mode of Thinking: Debunking Traditions**

“Who is the Filipino?” This is a question that fundamentally constitutes all inquiries on our social existence. Perhaps it is time to look once more in a certain new way of looking at the Filipino mindset. We have had enough relying so much to methods on looking on Filipinos with parameters given by traditional Filipino anthropology, psychology, and values education. Take account of this example: *Filipinos are known to be hospitable* – traditionally, we would interpret this phrase by examining our behaviour in

matters of tourism and international relations; critically, we would try to inquire whether our colonial history has something to do with us being hospitable (whether there were *datus* or chieftains happily being conquered and executed by colonizers some time in our history). By deducing our mode of thinking according to the traditional method, we are limiting our mindset into its traditional aspects in living the everyday life. Nothing new is seen here, nothing new would be seen at all. The danger is that when the traditional view of the Filipino mode of thinking does not recognize the diverse changes in the concept of Filipino mindset they have been teaching. As history progresses, man also changes. What tradition has seen in Filipinos might be different from the sight of the Filipinos of today. We have now our contemporary Filipino identity, the *Pinoy* – which I doubt to be the same as what tradition has seen through time. What we should do is inductively examine the mindset of the *Pinoy*s disregarding traditional mode of categorization and viewing them according to their social relations. From what I have gathered, at least, is that our social reality revolves around two concepts that were once been already studied by those critical theorists in the Frankfurt School: the first one is that the [Filipino] individual is highly motivated with instrumental reason, and the other is that our [Filipino] social reality, with the aid of “culture industry”, provides a mode of thinking wherein an illusory hope for a better world keeps us stable in poverty. We take advantage here the studies of those critical theorists from the Frankfurt School in explaining such concepts-in-themselves, but how these concepts also becomes visible in our social reality is another matter I am about to tackle.

### **Horkheimer, Instrumental Reason and the Philippine Civil Society<sup>8</sup>**

There is no doubt about this statement: as history progresses, the Filipino identity changes from time to time. In order to understand the contemporary *Pinoy* mindset, one should not rely so much on popular Filipino anthropologies and psychologies. Here, it is necessary to trace back from [civil] history to derive the influences we gained from our folks and how far our mindset has changed from them. So far as history of civil society is assessed in a critical manner, we find that the Filipino mode of thought is highly controlled by instrumental reason. Instrumental rationality of the Filipinos is evident in daily life. We give an example of a jeepney driver, on his habit of defying traffic rules in order to benefit himself the time and resources he needed in order to progress in life. Not only does the driver disobey traffic rules due to benefiting consequences, but it would also make his job a little easier and comfortable. However, often does he realize that what he is doing would make more complications in the traffic flow: other drivers would be in disadvantage, accidents may occur, or if the jeepney driver gets caught for disobeying traffic rules, it will bring more misery to his life [either in jail or not]. This “parable” of the jeepney driver would best depict contemporary Philippine society as governed by instrumental reason.

When a typical Filipino citizen is asked of the question “What is civil society?” they do not give the most generic or universal conception of what civil society is. Rather, they conceive civil society in the context of the testimonies and also of the situation of our country. Two of the answers are most striking and, in some way, alarming. One of them is “Non-Government Organizations and market system” to which they perceive civil society as it benefits them;

the other is “radical/aggressive social activism through the form of rallies, rebellion, etc.” Indeed, such answers are, in one way or another, exaggeratedly biased. But we are not to blame our fellow Filipinos for conceiving our civil society in such ways. For our way of conceiving it, as already mentioned earlier, lies in the context of Philippines - which includes our history, anthropology and psychology, culture, politics and economics, and even Filipino philosophies. On the contrary, the universal concept of *Civil Society* really has no permanent definition. Its use and definition has always changed in every moment of world history. During the nineteenth century, Hegel conceptualized civil society as “the sphere of ethical life interposed between the family and the state”. The concept fell into disuse until Antonio Gramsci revised it. For Gramsci, it is “the sphere of cultural politics” – encompassing the church, schools, trade unions, mass media, and other organizations – in which the state constitutes itself through the manufacture of consent rather than coercion or formal rule.<sup>9</sup>

In the Philippine contemporary setting, civil society has a very significant part when it comes to politics. It refers essentially to the so-called “intermediary institutions” between the people and the government<sup>10</sup>. Social movements all throughout the Philippine history are the civil society in the Philippines, clearly defined as: “A sustained and purposeful collective mobilized by an identifiable, self-organized group in confrontation with specific power structures and in the pursuit of socioeconomic and political change”<sup>11</sup>. Obviously, the mere fact that Filipino civil society is socially active (and sometimes even to the point of being aggressive) makes it reasonable to think that it has not yet fulfilled its objectives. It is to eliminate poverty - the suffering of society in the practical viewpoint - which is their fundamental objective. Meanwhile in Germany,

Max Horkheimer, one outstanding leader of the Institute of Social Research which became the home of Critical Theory (Western Marxism, or well-known as "The Frankfurt School"), made some of the greatest contributions to the reaction against Enlightenment thought: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (alongside with Theodor Adorno), the essay "The End of Reason", and the *Eclipse of Reason*. One of the fundamental presuppositions of his social philosophy is his idea of social emancipation from the suffering of the society. The possible convergence of reason and freedom was said to be immanent to man and human labor; with this, the goal of a community of free human beings is the idea of a rational society according to Horkheimer<sup>12</sup>. In the *Eclipse of Reason*, he discusses "reason" in an interdisciplinary approach. The task of reason is to direct social reality, regulating our preferences with other human beings and with nature<sup>13</sup>. However, reason could either be objective or subjective; the former indicates a principle inherent in reality; the latter on the other hand implies a subjective faculty of the mind - "the ability to calculate probabilities, coordinating the right means with a given end"<sup>14</sup>. It is normal for any typical person to pursue his own self-interests, but if it is by means of subjective reason, reality (of the society) loses its essential content. In other words, subjective reason values an idea for another's sake. The worst is when subjective reason is formalized and develops its own objectivity; every meaning becomes the function or effect of things and reason becomes a mere tool, an instrument of attaining objects of our interests<sup>15</sup>. This is what Horkheimer calls "Instrumental Reason", which seems to be evident in the Filipino society. A society dominated by instrumental reason dehumanizes its people and uses them in order for the state to progress.

Proceeding to an analysis of the Filipino civil society, it may be possible that "Filipino" instrumental reason is rooted in and, at the same time, also determines our identity. Our cultural values such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *hiya* (shame, innocent humility) and *pakikisama* (getting along with each other in harmony) do not only serve as norms governing interactions with others leading to relationships of obligations and responsibilities<sup>16</sup> but also increments an individual's practicality. By far most observations, no responsibility to others is done without any ulterior interests. Assessing all social movements in the Philippine history, most of their methods in mobilizing their agendas include a pursuit for one's own self-interest. Revolts, in our history, were organized out of the outburst of repressed resentment of a group. Socioeconomic inequalities began during the era of the *datus*, whereas the *datus* "gave tremendous lands to the Spanish nobles and friars" during their colonization<sup>17</sup>. Many *datus* established "peace" with the Spaniards for an ulterior motive: to gain allies in fighting other clans ruled by their enemy *datus*. Since then, the problem of land ownership paved way to the great divide between the landed and the landless. The existence of alienation between them is when the landless were forced to serve in the lands of friars and nobles in order to avail the resources they need to sustain their family. Peasant agitation later began in order to gain social recognition from the powerful. This gave rise to the *principalia* class, the very first middle class in the Philippines. For the *principalia* class, social recognition would also mean for political power<sup>18</sup>. When bourgeois ideals have been introduced by Spaniards, not only the *principalia* class market systems were heavily influenced but also the *ilustrados'* concept of education. If the *indios* would not be educated, it would mean great danger to them for the rest of Philippine history. But what do they mean of the concept

of education? Theoretically, education for them is a kind of enlightenment, liberation of oneself from ignorance through the use of human reason; practically, it is to dignify oneself in order not to be treated by the Spaniards as inferior. But as time passes, the practical concept of education later became a weapon of the bourgeoisie as they maintained its subjective reason to dignify oneself. These words of Horkheimer in "The End of Reason" depict how reason becomes subjective and affects the society:

"The name of such reason is held to be a meaningless symbol, an allegorical figure without a function, and all ideas that transcend the given reality are forced to share its disgrace. [...] Reason has...only been reduced to its pragmatic significance much more radically than ever before.[...] Reason in this sense is as indispensable in the modern technique of war as it has always been in the conduct of business. Its features can be summarized as the optimum adaption of means to ends, thinking as an energy-conserving operation. It is a pragmatic instrument oriented to expediency, cold and sober."<sup>19</sup>

Our ideas of freedom, nation, and power are affected and distorted by this subjective reason. What polarized the "great division" between the land owners and the landless was education which aggravated further the socioeconomic inequality of the country. Education became an instrument in order to maintain resilience of elite class in the Philippines. *Ilustrados* focused their concern to establishing national territory but in terms of recognition of the Philippines as a Spanish province. Liberal-democratic ideas provided by the propagandists would influence Filipinos resulting to the creation of the *Kataastaasan, Kagalanggalang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (KKK). But acquiescence of such ideas came from the *ilustrados* which are influenced with bourgeois ideals. Acquiring sufficient education, the KKK fought in the

name of "reason". Even after the Philippine Revolution of 1896, civil society's main concern territory, particularly setting our idea of a nation.

Because of the emergence of the elite class, many of those "less powerful", particularly coming from the working class, thought that liberal democracy cannot be attained in a country where the majority are poor and elites gain authority due to colonial power<sup>20</sup>. Thus the rise of early socialist/communist movements took part in the civil society. After the war against the Japanese, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP), *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP), HUKBALAHAP remnants, and other socialist movements were still active especially through their participation to the electoral politics in the Philippines during those times<sup>21</sup>. But a great change to the mobilization of their agenda began when Marcos declared martial law, limiting the freedom of the people and democratic principles. The very main focus of the civil society during this time became the disposition of Marcos's authoritarianism leading to destruction of crony capitalism. This time, majority of the social activism came from labour sector and the working class. The failure of Marcos' agrarian reform (particularly Masagana '99) and the struggle of the New People's Army (NPA) to bring back democracy of the country resulted to social radicalism during the Martial Law era.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, all was left as a solution for all anti-Marcos movements was electoral politics for it is a political opportunity to change the ruling system of the government. The aftermaths of civil disobedience by the people would later epitomize the civil society of the Philippines with the event that changed the country to its current situation – the People Power Revolution I<sup>23</sup> - a mass deception for maintaining bourgeoisie in the Philippines. Why is it a mass deception? Let us remember that Marcos' "bourgeois" authoritarianism which led

into dictatorship caused the "repressive suffering" of many Filipinos; on the other hand, it also caused the economic boom for our society before he used it as a means for corruption. Social upheavals would react against this corruption. But in a viewpoint which applies instrumental reason, those elites and elite families who led in the EDSA revolution knew that such actions they are doing because they knew it was the right thing to do. Horkheimer's words apply to this Revolution as becoming a mass deception of the people:

"The human being can fulfill his natural wants only through social channels. Use is a social category, and reason follows it up in all phases of competitive society; through reason the individual asserts or adapts himself and gets along in society. It induces the individual to subordinate himself to society whenever he is not powerful enough to pattern society upon his own interest... In modern society, it is supposed to be determined by reason, that is to say, by the individual's consciousness of where his advantage lies."<sup>24</sup>

Here, the concept of what is right is distorted: the elites knew that the economy of the Philippines, no matter how it progresses, would not benefit them unless Marcos would resign in his position. The concept of what is right is reduced only to the term "benefit"- a pursuit for one's self-interest. During the first EDSA revolution, the Filipino mass was used as an instrument not only to remove Marcos' regime, but also it is used for the elite to mobilize their own progress. This thought, in a way, expresses Horkheimer's idea when he states that:

"Cognition thus becomes that which registers the object and proceeds to interpret the quantified expressions of them. The less human beings think of reality in quantitative terms, the more susceptible reality becomes manipulation... It is regarded as a matter of subjective preferences whether one decides for liberty or obedience, democracy or fascism, enlightenment

or authority, mass culture or truth. Freedom of choice, however, has always been the privilege of the small groups which enjoyed a life of abundance. For them it was possible to select among the so-called cultural goods, always provided that these goods were in harmony with their interests of dominion."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore:

"...self-preservation may even call for the death of the individual which is to be preserved. Sacrifice can be rational when it becomes necessary to defend the state's power which is alone capable of guaranteeing the existence of those whose sacrifice it demands. [...] The rationality of sacrifice and self-renunciation, however, was differentiated according to social status: it decreased with decreasing wealth and opportunity, and eventually became compulsory."<sup>26</sup>

The mass deception to which any typical Filipino citizen is ignorant of remains unknown to them. For culture and ideas such as nation, freedom, democracy has clouded their minds and influences them to think that the Marcos regime was corrupted; on the contrary, it is them who are being corrupted by such ideas and those elites who provided the ideas for them have become their corruptors. This explains why our society is still in poverty. Progress is present, but its presence could justify its consequences of sacrificing the many toward their own poverty. In an article by Temario Rivera<sup>27</sup>, capitalism in the Philippines shows resilience through dominating the manufacturing nurtured by the import-substitution industrialization (ISI) period. On the other hand, the elite, oligarchic capitalists remain through its continuing capture of political power and diversification of wealth in the financial and manufacturing sectors of the economy. The advance of technology and with this ISI bourgeoisie existing in the industrial development, the Philippine economy develops in such a way that domination by the elite

among subjects and process of dehumanization becomes a necessity. Our society justifies inequality as rational:

"In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly. What is not mentioned is that the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest. Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of a society alienated from itself."<sup>28</sup>

Now any typical Filipino citizen would realize one thing: that the system of our society is distorted by instrumental reason. Although it might be impossible to change the system so long as there is no end to inequality among the powerful and the powerless, many of us would still insist: the methods of our society are wrong! I do not say that moral progress is against social progress. But a society must not make moral regress a means for attaining social progress. For it is society which builds up a nation, but the idea of a nation requires its people's concept of their identity. As an example, the Philippine Nation is determined by the Filipino identity. But if our society dehumanizes our people and removes our Filipino identity, we remain nothing but an irrational society devoid of a nation but fully controlled by instrumental reason. By far most observations, the Filipino progress of civil society could be seen as a growing domination of the subjective concept of reason at the expense of an irrevocably obsolete objective conception<sup>29</sup>. Filipino instrumental reason distorts our way of thinking; citing Horkheimer in his words, even reason itself is distorted whenever it becomes instrumental to dominate a society:

"Mind becomes in reality the instrument of power and self-mastery for which bourgeois philosophy has always mistaken it. [...] The

powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers but the logical consequence of industrial society, into which the efforts to escape it have finally transformed the ancient concept of fate. [...] Domination, in becoming reified as law and organization... has had to limit itself."<sup>30</sup>

So much for instrumental reason, we now turn our interests in what makes our instrumental rationality stable even after we realize its aspects of irrationality. We now find that what the critical theorist thought of the notion of "culture industry" also took place in our social reality.

### **Adorno, Culture Industry and the Contemporary *Pinoy* Culture**

Long ago, early indigenous Filipinos lived their lives in a manner where religion is the center of their social existence. Myths identify their existence through traditions, rituals, creed, and norms of the indigenous community. Our folk culture is primarily embodied in the religious behaviour before it was "compromised", meaning that the culture from other countries were shared, or rather imprinted, upon our way of living. According to ethnohistory scholar Florentino Hornedo, the religious way of living by the indigenous people can be classified into two categories: re-enactment of myth and enactment of ethical duty. By the term 'enactment', it refers to the mimetic repetition whose purpose is to make present the original reality and the condition of things.<sup>31</sup> No wonder that culture may be as powerful enough to imprint upon us the rational structure of the order of things it carries – in the case for today, we call this order the status quo. In the case of indigenous people, the strong folk culture made them remain as they are up until now as there evidently exists ethnic groups in some parts of the country and also pure Filipino values we inherited from our ancestral family.

And then colonizers came to the Philippines. They did not only conquer us politically but also introduced to us the foreign culture they carried. But because during those times, we have less consciousness for a national identity, we welcomed the culture they brought to us and some of them were whole-heartedly accepted by the early Filipinos. They have conquered us culturally: Christian evangelization started, clothing changed, education is institutionalized, U.S. democracy was introduced, capitalism became stable, fiestas and other celebrations were established, etc. Our culture was enlightened. Furthermore, our culture has become hegemonic. It is not only because we have three colonizers who introduced their culture and traditions, but also because the folk culture we inherited hardly vanished from us as we try to embody the culture of other countries. The hegemony in our enlightened culture “damaged” our identity; consequently allowing Filipinos to lack total consciousness of social memory or a sense of pure national identity. We hardly could not even identify ourselves as “pure” Filipino people, what more to identifying ourselves as “pure” Filipino nation. What is left to us is the collective behaviour as a whole which we may use to keep order to the country and to survive the conditions of global recognition. In other words, we form ourselves a government in order for us to represent the country to the world as a nation potential for progress. Also, because our enlightened culture is hegemonic, it easily welcomes ideas that seemed to benefit status quo; all these phenomenon are graciously due to instrumental reason. From here comes a great threat to our contemporary mindset.

Culture is said to carry the spirit of a society from one generation to next, from one place to another. Even philosophers such as Montesquieu, Vico, and Hegel would agree that culture is primarily the repository of identity of

a nation. However, this notion of culture is negatively subsumed in the contemporary setting of the Philippines. Popular (mass) culture in the contemporary Philippines presents a banality of providing sense in things in the most unreasonable aspect. Our enlightened culture welcomes ideas that give us pleasure, easily imprinting us the new ways of living in the [capital] world. The danger of globalization is that it fails to limit the embodiment cultural influences from one country and of another. It was Benedict Anderson, a scholar of the history of ideas, who explained thoroughly how Philippines were affected with the capitalism of Europe which led in the birth of national consciousness in our country. By the time education’s resources were starting to be manufactured (i.e. books were mechanically reproduced and disseminated), capitalism was still in restless search for markets. Printing was then commodified, and soon education would to. It was the best way to educate people in the simplest and effective way. The capitalism of that age, according to Anderson, was given further impetus by three factors, two of which are the cause of the origins of national consciousness: (1) Latin, as the “language of the elite”, became the medium of instruction, (2) The impact of the Reformation, portraying Martin Luther as the first mass leader of popular literature, (3) and the spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization. System of production and productive relations (capitalism) and the technology of communication (printing) dominated man’s life during those days. The particular elements became universal to the masses of those days.<sup>32</sup> And not only that the Philippines was a victim of this, but we once craved for this when we send our people to be educated in Europe (the *illustrados*) not being critical about the fact that we wanted to join status quo. All we wanted

was equal treatment of us *indios* with the Spaniards, but, fundamentally, “being equal with them” is a paraphrase for “belonging to the status quo.” Today, this sickness of us became worse. Culture here became commodity reification. The popular culture irrationally embodies almost everything that is appreciative, benefiting and maintaining their position to an illusory status quo. Popular culture distorts the minds of *Pinoy*s by dictating things as universal although such dictation is full of prejudices. *Tupperware* was once a brand of plastic containers; that is until *Pinoy*s nowadays commonly used such term as a generic (universal) name for plastic containers. And the worst has been finally achieved: popular culture dictates itself to embody appreciative ideas as part of our identity to the point that it tends to eliminate our original Filipino identity. So much is predicated for irrational hegemony. Our cultural roots, having evolved into today’s time, shared the same fate with our physical roots – the Malay race slowly becoming extinct in contemporary popular culture, so as the identity of “pure” Filipinos. And what we replace into us are ideas for identity which we do not even fully understand, we just appreciate them so much even to the point of not giving ourselves the moment for self-reflection. Take account of the Korean Pop Music as an analogical example. *Pinoy*s love them even if they do not fully understand the language of Koreans; the songs just merely fit into the ears of these *Pinoy*s. Appreciation would then lure them into learning the language itself. Once we get to translate the lyrics into our language, we seemed to realize that one could have just sing the song into English or Filipino because the lyrics can be as simple as those. We just love them because we have become curious of them. But the greatest mistake is when some of us do not even care to translating the song, but merely sing them because these songs, which they do not even

understand, can fit to the ears with its rhythm, tempo and melody. In the case of contemporary Filipino popular culture – we embody culture of other countries we do not fully understand but because they are easy to be appreciated, we tend to treat them as universal-single identity in our status quo. Psychoanalysis would tell us that our habit of embodying the culture of other countries is a result of our desire for equality. One could see that our social reality has the same qualities of an irrational society which is distorted by culture industry as theorized by Theodor Adorno, the great critic of mass culture. Adorno disenchanted his readers in “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) and his essay “The Schema of Mass Culture” by proclaiming of the oppressive power of popular (mass) culture and its tendencies to disorient the people:

“The commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear. Aesthetic semblance (Schein) turns into the sheen which commercial advertising lends to the commodities which absorb it in turn... Imagination is replaced by a mechanically relentless control mechanism which determines whether the latest imago to be distributed really represents an exact, accurate and reliable reflection of the relevant item of reality.”<sup>33</sup>

To understand how culture industry appears in our social reality, one should start on our cultural roots. We once have our folk culture, and then it evolved into an [hegemonic] enlightened culture. As we were affected by the capitalism of Europe, we embodied the technology and system of production because of our need to be educated. What we do not know is that we just got ourselves trapped in the status quo that was engulfing the world. Tendencies would be the negation of the last remaining spirit of our folk culture with the “new identity” imprinted upon us (which we do

not even fully understand) as our contemporary *Pinoy* culture. Our folk culture is negated for the progress of our country. More specifically, our Filipino identity is “given up” in our contemporary *Pinoy* culture, relying on the wish for social progress. There is no escape from this kind of objectification. If we try to change oppose the status quo, society would negate us. If we try to avoid status quo, society would leave us behind. If soon, religious behaviour would be diminished in our daily life, it is culture which we would be grasping from now on if we are to acquire roots for our identity.

In J.M. Bernstein’s analysis of Adorno’s notion of culture industry, it is said that its effectiveness depends not on its parading an ideology, “on disguising the true nature of things, but in removing the thought that there is any alternative to the status quo: ‘pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown.’ – a liberation promised by amusement ‘is freedom from thought and negation.’”<sup>34</sup> Bernstein would refer to it as the “social realization of the defeat of reflection”<sup>35</sup> – the reflection for some determinate negation; in our case, the negation of our Filipino identity. Such analysis is an allusion to the Arthur Schopenhauer’s dictum – “prolonging the suffering of the world”. Even Adorno’s depiction of the television<sup>36</sup> alludes to as a weapon of culture industry to maintain us as its prisoners enchanted of its offerings.

Take account on television shows or *teleseryes*. Did it not occur to any typical *Pinoy* that almost all of the stories and plots of *teleseryes* present awful class-structure, poverty of the tragic hero/heroine, cruel governance by the elite, the notion of “fun” being commodities? Never. Because those typical *Pinoy*s are enjoying themselves with the illusion that fate will provide them a happy ending as they portray the hero they watch from *teleseryes* as themselves;

all that is needed is some *deus ex machina* in order to actualize their enchantment. However, not all the time there would be a *deus ex machina* in [social] reality. Nonetheless, it is obvious that our contemporary culture is facing a tragic mission today: to give us salvation from cruel social reality. What we lack for our nation, we portray them in our culture and identity. And so when happy endings happen a lot in *teleseryes*, it is because we lack it in [social] reality.

When did milk teas become so mainstream that in the mindset of *pinoy*s, it is demanded very much to the point where its drinkers also become “high-class” for today? When did riding jeepneys reek the poverty of our country? When did Facebook become the unofficial universal medium of relating with others? How do the educated people of the working class become the “jejemons” according to the elites? Where can you find *bayanihan* today? The answers may not be found easily, but one thing is for sure: *Pinoy* popular culture gives its object the aesthetic semblance enough for us to be lost in pleasure and forget the way things should be – rational and needing changes. From here, our mindset has been compromised to have an inescapable fate of remaining to be in its current state – stable in poverty and forever “developing”.

It is not being said here that Adorno’s notion of the “culture industry” is found in our Filipino social reality. That statement was obvious from the beginning, given that we are still a developing country having a capitalist market system. What I am merely arguing here is that if Adorno’s “culture industry” is visible in our social reality, it would take form into our “cultural damage” – our distorted national identity due to its irrational hegemony, specifically the discrete embodiment of capitalism’s oppressions.

### **Social Reification, Rationalization and the Need for reflection and discourse**

Now that we have another view of how typical Filipino citizens normally think, we should turn our attention to how it manifests into our social reality. It is most obvious to think that if one empirically inquires the cognitive behaviour of the mind from the social [awful, in the case of the Philippines] environment, then it is not very far for any typical thinker to somehow see the possibility of the mindset resulting into its reification to one's social reality. In Filipino social reality, we have found fragmented aspects of the contemporary Filipino (*Pinoy*) mode of thought which is highly tainted with instrumental rationality and the distorted cultural production or industry. Now, we inquire on how such mode of thought is translated in everyday experience in order for it to constitute the social reality we have in our country.

It is general knowledge to speak of reification as “to turn into things” from abstract to concrete. Traditional Marxism would emphasize more on the objectification of social relations by treating them as relations between things. There is no general definition of reification, but the fundamental constituents for a theory of reification is found in Marx's discussion of Commodity Fetishism in his work *Capital* as found by Gajo Petrović:

“The commodity form, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connexion with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. It is simply a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things ... This I call the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities ... To the

producers the social relations connecting the labours of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, thinglike relations between persons and social relations between things.... To them their own social action takes the form of the action of things, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.”<sup>37</sup>

Human subjects are reduced into objects, into things. They function in society to the point of being dehumanized. The mentality of man can only be translated into social reality through human work. It is most obvious that all human work is directed towards certain motives. The distorted mentality caused by instrumental reason would make man pursue distort selfish objectives towards fulfilment of social existence, even to the point of neglecting the social existence of other people. No one can escape such phenomenon because everything (every aspect of social reality) is sugar-coated by mass culture. We think of these selfish pursuits as the correct things to do only because one sees it from society's ruling criterion – popular culture itself. In the case of the contemporary Philippine social reality, such phenomena visibly appear in the objectification of “goals in life.” Take account of this example: Students, though still not working, aimed their goal to pursue another of those inventions of popular culture – Apple Inc.'s iPhone (invented and reified for the easier method of communication and other applications for entertaining oneself.) In the Philippines, the iPhone became a symbol of success. Once you own one, you're social existence would be acknowledged. To own an iPhone requires labor in the free market. From here, the student (having so much dreams in his youth) objectifies his dream by participating in the economic realm. However, instead of pursuing for a better future, what is merely wanted is to own just one iPhone and life is already fulfilled. What great idea for fulfilment

of oneself! Cognitive behaviour is distorted by such selfish subjective reason. But where is the “treatment of/as relation between things” in this example? There is no specific detail; because anything, and anyone, can be a means or an instrument for the attainment of such end. Another more banal example is, as already given insight earlier, is the destruction of “pure” Filipino identity, through the embodiment of hegemonic tendencies, in order for its social existence as a whole nation to be acknowledged by the world; the outcome of which is the contemporary identity of *Pinoy*s, damaged and trying its best to recover. Ideas and technological inventions produced by cosmopolitan popular culture are pursued by our fellow *Pinoy*s, believing that such things are signs of progress for our country. Wrong motives are actualized in “good” work. The labor of *Pinoy*s is directed towards each and every different instrumental reason and entertainment provided by these inventions is what makes us blind enough to not notice that we are forgetting our cultural values inherited from our ancestors – the sense of nationalism, our intense religious behaviour, high respect for family and familial principles, etc. Even our very own justification for our social reality also becomes mere rationalization – “that is just how we are and how we live”. This phrase becomes a valid excuse for such awful situation of contemporary Philippines. Although one could point out that such justification is hard for us to accept, such rationalization is valid because it is, obviously, how *Pinoy*s think today. The reification of our mode of thinking result not only to the “dehumanization” of our people for the progress of the Philippines, but also to our conception of a common good.

*Pinoy*s, because of instrumental rationality, ideological enchantment, “cultural damage”, and oppressive tendencies of its hegemony and capitalism, have various conceptions of what is

the common good. One *Pinoy* would think that “ $x$  is good” while others would think that “ $y$  is good”. But  $x$  is not  $y$  and both are different in all aspects. Most conception of common good may vary and be contradictory to each other. No wonder that there is hardly a sense of nationalism in our country due to the fact that each and every single Filipino has different notion of what is good. Citing again Agustin Martin Rodriguez, “the problem with governance in this country revolves around the lack of solidarity amongst its people. Our governance systems do not work because that makes sense they are unable to gather our people under a system that makes sense to them.”<sup>38</sup> And so how do we build our nation then, in the midst of instrumental rationality and hegemonic popular culture resulting to different variations of the common good? The solution should be a deliberation through discourse, as what Jurgen Habermas (another critical theorist) tackled for the past recent decades. Rodriguez’ promotion of Habermas’ discourse theory of will-formation to Filipino social reality should provide us the least possible way in order to maintain social order: “people are bound by discourse action because in the process of discourse two important things happen: (1) Participants are drawn to take the position of a decentered rationality.... (2) Participants in the process of decentering discourse are drawn into a dynamic movement of rationality seeking reason and justification... In discourse, no rationality is allowed to rest in its certainties and is pushed to commit to the quest for the shared meaning of communal existence.”<sup>39</sup> No Filipino would pursue something evil. It is just that we have different conception of what is good that some of them conflict each other and views each other as wrong and evil. Through deliberation by discourse, all of our notions of the good are examined of their validity to each citizen of the

country. Teleologically, this method would bring us into a mutual understanding not only for a shared pursuit of the deliberated common good, but also brings us in our consciousness the present awful situation of our social reality. It is for us to recognize the fact that our instrumental reason might be clashing with another's and try to accept each other's notion of what is good. To recognize that we are not the only ones whose pursuit is fulfilment in the social reality is the key to forming the grounds for solidarity. If we are in mutual understanding with the community, we are in the state of solidarity.<sup>40</sup>

This method of will-formation might be the only choice that is left for us *Pinoy*s in order to maintain social order despite our distort mode of thinking, our "damaged culture", our ideological imprisonment, our awful situation. Reflection on our social reality should be enough a reason for the need of discourse in the country. For we think we are pursuing the common good, but what really is happening is the pursuit of one's subjective or instrumental reason. What is worse is that the method of such pursuit traps us in its ideological parameters invented by popular culture. We *Pinoy*s are, at some point, lost. "For they know not what they do", as Slavoj Žižek's allusion to the Christian phrase<sup>41</sup> best describes the *Pinoy* in his contemporary Filipino social reality. As we inquired on who the *Pinoy* is, through his mindset and social reification, we find ourselves lost, specifically almost in the brink of social desolation. But such inquiry on ourselves gave us another chance of viewing ourselves, reflecting upon the reality we are situated. Such realization, I hope, may be a step for change, if not status quo, then at least the concerned Other.

## Postscript

One thing comes into the mind as we ventured the inquiry of the Filipino mode of thought and its reification to contemporary social reality:

We are doomed to continual negation of ourselves so long as these two disasters – Filipino instrumental reason and *Pinoy* popular culture industry – imprison us for the rest of time. Our responsibility should be directed towards a certain "disaster risk management" – a discursive planning for a social development without determinate negation. For it is what we lack and neglected in the first place. After all, these two disasters might not leave our area of responsibility if we ourselves would not be responsible for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Mangosing, Julliane Love De Jesus, Nestor Burgos Jr., and Jamie Elona, "32 Dead, Power down as 7.2 quake hits Bohol," in *INQUIRER.net* <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/507169/6-dead-power-down-as-7-2-quake-hits-bohol>>, 15 October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Mangosing, "Supertyphoon 'Yolanda' enters Philippine area of responsibility," in *INQUIRER.net* <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/521845/supertyphoon-yolanda-enters-philippine-area-of-responsibility>>, 7 November 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Julliane Love De Jesus, "Yolanda' death toll now over 4,000" in *INQUIRER.net* <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/530951/yolanda-death-toll-now-over-4000>>, 20 November 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Kristine Angeli Sabillo, "Aquino justifies S. Korea trip as Visayas deals with quake devastation", in *INQUIRER.net* <<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/88055/aquino-justifies-s-korea-trip-as-visayas-deals-with-quake-devastation#ixzz2mffmHfbh>>, 17 October 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Xianne Arcangel, "Looting reported in Tacloban in aftermath of Yolanda", in *GMANETWORK.com* <<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/334750/news/regions/looting-reported-in-tacloban-in-aftermath-of-yolanda>>, 9 November 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Randolph S. David, "The Powerless Public", in *Nation, Self and Citizenship: An Invitation to Philippine Sociology* (Diliman, Quezon City: Department of Sociology, College of Social Science and Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 2002), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez, *Governing the Other: Exploring the Discourse of Democracy in a Multiverse of Reason* (Loyola Heights, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>8</sup> This part of the paper contains fragmented excerpts from my final term paper in the course PHL210 (Social and Political Philosophy) entitled "A Critique of Instrumental Reason in its Visibility on Philippine Civil Society", delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 as a final requirement.

<sup>9</sup> Resil B. Mojares, "Words that are not moving: Civil Society in the Philippines", in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 34 (March 2006), 33-52.

<sup>10</sup> Civil Society International, "What is Civil Society?" in [civilsocietyinternational.org <http://www.civilsoc.org/whatisCS.htm>](http://www.civilsoc.org/whatisCS.htm), 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Alejandro Colas., *International Civil Society* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2007) 67.

<sup>12</sup> David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1980) 385.

<sup>13</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1974) 9. [Hereafter mentioned as ER].

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> Lukas Kaelin, *Strong Family, Weak State* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012), 103.

<sup>17</sup> Teresa Encarnacion-Tadem, and Noel Morada, *Philippine Politics and Governance: Challenges to Democratization and Development Vol. 2*, (Diliman, Quezon City: Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines, 2006), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason", in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2002), 28. [Hereafter mentioned as EndR]

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 12-16.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 28-36.

<sup>23</sup> Resil B. Mojares, "Words that are not moving: Civil Society in the Philippines", in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 34 (March 2006), 33.

<sup>24</sup>EndR, 28-29.

<sup>25</sup>EndR, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>27</sup> Temario Rivera, "The State, Civil Society, and Foreign Actors: The Politics of Philippine Industrialization", in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 16 (September 1994), 157 – 177.

<sup>28</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 95. [Hereafter mentioned as DE]

<sup>29</sup> *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, edited by Benhabib, S., BonB, W. and McCole, J., (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), 390.

<sup>30</sup>DE, 28-29.

<sup>31</sup> Florentino H. Hornedo, "Notes on Filipino Religious Symbolic Action", in *The Favor of the Gods, Essays in Filipino Religious Thought and Behavior* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2001), 147-152.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Pasis City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 1991 [Revised Edition]/ 1983 [First Published]), 38-42.

<sup>33</sup> Theodor Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture", in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 61-64.

<sup>34</sup> J.M. Bernstein, "Introduction", in Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> DE, 95-97.

<sup>37</sup> Gajo Petrović, "Reification", in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, edited by Tom Bottomore, Laurence Harris, V.G. Kiernan, Ralph Miliband (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 411-413.

<sup>38</sup> Agustin Martin G. Rodriguez, *Governing the Other: Exploring the Discourse of Democracy in a Multiverse of Reason* (Loyola Heights, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009), 42.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *For they know not what they do, Enjoyment as Political Factor* (London/ New York: Verso, 1991/2002)

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