

Some Critical Notes On Leonardo Mercado: Rethinking Filipino Philosophy and Beyond

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Abstract

In this critical re-reading of Leonardo Mercado's project that validates the existence of indigenous elements of Filipino Philosophy, I argue that such a scholarship is against the idea of paying attention to the necessity of cultural transformation, to address the pressing issues affecting Filipinos' well-being. Thus, I ventured into asking the following questions: What is the scope of Leonardo Mercado's critical enterprise in his brand of Filipino Philosophy? Did Mercado tolerate the native forms of political manipulation to simply prove that there is a unique way of living, thinking, and a set of human values among the Filipinos? Did Mercado underestimate the potential of Filipinos to philosophise and improve their social conditions? Correspondingly, this research characterises Mercado's scholarship as anti-dialogical as it puts a rigid boundary between scholarly works in the intellectual landscape and the intensity of social predicaments in the Philippine cultural setting. This research attempts to be a venue for the critical involvement of various thinkers from different academic disciplines to

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magnify the impractical and reactionary underpinnings in Mercado's brand of philosophising. Signalling the call for more dialogical philosophising, this research aims to recover intellectual humility from the threats of cultural triumphalism.

1. Introduction

The coming into being of a burgeoning amount of literature from various philosophical traditions can be attributed to a movement towards a more inclusive way of thinking, which can make philosophising be defined by intellectual tolerance and anti-hegemonic tendencies. Perhaps this has been the penchant of Leonardo Mercado's scholarship for having been known as one of the most prolific researchers in Filipino Philosophy. Mercado's brand of philosophising takes as its point of departure the belief that it "is a behavioral science, [and] it is inseparable from culture".² Despite the colonial forces that ravaged and left its vestiges in almost every aspect of Philippine society, Mercado believes that the existence of Filipino Philosophy cannot be doubted. It will not measure the fruition of unique lifeways in pre-Hispanic temples, formidable bureaucracies, and religions with a large number of adherents.³ To trace our oriental outlook, according to Mercado, is to magnify the patterns of cultural phenomena that naturally unfold in the lives of ordinary masses that resemble other Asian characteristics. Mercado's scholarship to prove that there is an organic Filipino way of philosophising is oppositional to the claim that the lack of developed culture, collective psyche through a written language, and even written philosophical literature before the arrival of the first colonisers in the Philippines would suffice to prove there is no such a thing as Filipino Philosophy without the academic development.⁴ Emmanuel Batoon commented that this scholarship opposes "those who maintained academic disciplinal rigidities and territorial limits in terms of research methods".⁵ Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of Mercado is, indeed, to prove that philosophising is not only confined to what is imposed by dominant academic standards of thinking but also encapsulates reflections and actions regarding one's religious and/or personal

² Mercado, Leonardo (1994) *Essays on Filipino Philosophy*, Manila: Logos Publication, Inc., 22.

³ Cf. Jose, F. Sionil (2008) 'We Are Not Asian', in Alejandro D. Padilla, ed., *Why We Are Hungry: Rats in the Kitchen, Carabaos in the Closet*: 1-3, 1st Printing, Solidaridad Publishing House, 1-3.

⁴ Co, Alfredo (2009) 'In the Beginning a Petit Personal Historical Narrative of the Beginning of Philosophy in the Philippines', in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road*, Vol. VI: 28- 46, University of Santo Tomas, 29-30.

⁵ Batoon, Emmanuel (December 2020) 'A Tribute to Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD: His Legacy to the Filipino Nation', *Kritike* 14, no. 2: 2.

beliefs, organisational affiliations, social interactions, consumption habits, environmental awareness, among others.

As one reflects upon one's own thinking, one may notice "cultural items like language (which is also a perception of reality, be it from the individualistic or the social perspectives)".⁶ However, this should not be taken to mean that the categorisation present or absent in linguistic instrumentalities of one's culture can be the end of critical analysis of social reality. While there is no use of gendered pronouns when referring to persons in the native languages of the Philippines,⁷ language cannot stand as the sole reference to which we should let passivity eat up the core of our political commitment towards social justice.⁸ Instead of aiming to narrow down the objects of critical enterprise, cross-cultural methods must be appreciated at the level of assuring the universality in the rich bases of findings, that is, "to realize that science is not value-free and that culture is a context for the scientific enterprise".⁹ One must attempt to prevent cultural elements from getting in the way of social development. Hence, wisdom must be constitutive of contextualised points of understanding to know the difference between hospitality as a positive trait to accommodate what is genuinely positive for our individual good and the common good, and the right moment to be inhospitable or "inimical", as it were, to anything negative that can be deleterious to social development. Filipinos must not be indiscriminately flattered when the value of hospitality is generally attributed to the indispensable form of their cultural milieu, especially if colonial forces in Philippine history are not to be taken aside.

⁶ Mercado, Leonardo (2009) *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*, Manila: Logos Publications Inc., 21.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cf. Guillermo, Ramon (2009) *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw*, Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 28-29. Also see Philippine Institute for Development Studies (March 31, 2023); 'Women in the Workplace: Paving a Better Landscape in the Labor Force', webpage, Philippine Institute for Development Studies. The labor force in the Philippines continues to dismally experience the problem of gender inequality. Under a society that generally attenuates the gender roles of women to stereotypical child-rearing and marriage-dependent relations, the intellectual and economic capacities of women are not put into full realization since they are constrained to domestic responsibilities. While there is no need to deny the biological implications of being a woman and the need for orderly human reproduction in society, the government does not adequately address the problems about the equality of opportunity to secure one's work and in developing the potentiality of women to experience and provide meaningful and decent work as a service to the collective progress of the nation.

⁹ Enriquez, Virgilio G. (1992) *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience*, 3rd Printing, Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 112.

Filipinos are bound to keep the promise of political allegiance not only because of coercive measures that cage the fullness of political freedom and choices but also because blind acquiescence to the prevailing political manipulation will only forestall the genuine sense of collaboration.¹⁰ One must even go beyond how we are simply moved by tantalising sensations and other fleeting emotional motivations to do good, or how we are discouraged to go against the current of the forceful waves of cultural commonalities and traditional identities. Hence, there is a need to challenge the hold of social order by not simply compelling an obligatory line of out-and-out charitable acts to mitigate the issues on human rights, but to directly diagnose and identify the deep sources of the problems – and all the vanguards that made possible the perpetuation of social maladies.¹¹ Rather than feeding ourselves with the collision of secluded brackets of belongingness – ironically sliding toward societal dissolution – even the subtle forms of power bargaining must be put into question. There are several socio-political phenomena that speak of this issue in the Philippines. What and whose interests are we really of service when, in the name of financial indebtedness, the Philippines absorbs into its educational system the orientation of partnered capitalist institutions to promote a sense of learning that is exceedingly equated to how a docile person can be lucrative for the commercial interests of a globalised world at the expense of deeper purpose of education?¹² Before we celebrate the so-called forging of an alliance of the *Association of the*

¹⁰ Cf. Hume, David (2009) 'Of the Original Social Contract', in Matt Zwolinski, ed., *In Arguing About Political Philosophy*: 71-77. Routledge, 71-77.

¹¹ Cf. Singer, Peter (2007) 'The Singer Solution to World Poverty', in James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, eds., *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*: 138-144, 4th edition. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 138-144.

¹² Tuibeo, Amable G. (2005) *Philosophy of Education: A New Perspective*, Makati City: Grandwater Publications, 166-170. For instance, the commodification of education in the Philippines can be traced to its adoption of foreign standards from its biggest creditors that put a highfalutin value on globalisation, modernization, and income-generation strands in the neoliberal line of thinking. A strong case for this would be when the World Bank "funded the implementation of the Revised Basic Education Curriculum (RBECE), the main product of the government's 10-year Master Plan for Basic Education (1996-2005) that sought to develop and prepare students with skills needed by the global economy. This made the teaching of Filipino, [H]istory, [S]ocial [S]cience, and [V]alues [E]ducation secondary to English, [S]cience, and [M]athematics." Also see Del Rosario-Malonzo, Jennifer (2007) 'Economics of Philippine Education: Serving the Global Market', in Bienvenido Lumbera et al., eds., *Mula Tore Patungong Palengke: Neoliberal Education in the Philippines*: 81-94. IBON Books, 93.

Southeast Asian Nations (A.S.E.A.N.) countries to prove that “harmony” is indeed a breath of life for Asians,¹³ one must be wary if this international organisation is a bastion of upholding the rule of law and the political values that unswervingly protect universal human rights, or if this is simply a regional amalgamation of narrow profitable interests only swayed by tariffs, economic sanctions, and other trading benefits at the expense of more humane causes.¹⁴ Even those working under the cloak of so-called local collaboration, regionalistic demands, and national progress must be critically evaluated if they allow any form of political exclusion and manipulation to take place.

If the mind is fed with too much complacency or the illusory elements that superimpose the reception of “normalcy”, the energy for the critical understanding of taken-for-granted societal assumptions might dwindle. The liberating potential of the mind is not to succumb to powerlessness in the face of oppression propped up by a culture of blind conformism. “Military victory”, Renato Constantino asserts, “does not necessarily signify conquest. As long as feelings of resistance remain in the hearts of the vanquished, no conqueror is secure”.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this definition of effective subjugation is not to be taken as isolated from one’s cultural milieu. A nation with a tragic past from colonialism, such as the Philippines, will probably intend to walk through the present and the future with vengeful ambition. It is clear, however, that this must not be a scapegoat to be insensitive to the need to develop by correcting the faults of one’s culture. One must not be hoodwinked that recognising the traditional roots in

¹³ Cf. Mercado, Leonardo (1979) *Elements of Filipino Ethics*, 2nd Printing, Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 54-62.

¹⁴ Bagulaya, Jose Duke (2022) *ASEAN as an International Organization: International Law and Region-Building in Southeast Asia*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 1-57. ASEAN is a regional organisation addressing the security and economic concerns of its member states which include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. In this book, Bagulaya argued that the regional order in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is burdened by mutual suspicion of economic leveraging and market sanctioning. Consequently, the ASEAN does not unequivocally commit itself to oppose the legitimization of the lawlessness due to human rights violations in the recently established Myanmar junta, and the strong evidence of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines brought about by the “anti-illegal drug” war of the former President Rodrigo Duterte.

¹⁵ Constantino, Renato (1982) *The Miseducation of the Filipino*, 6th Printing, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 2.

philosophising might be to place an absolutising ground for indignant sentiments to be planted and mature to the extent that one takes pride in the “native” forms of social domination. Instead of ignoring it, this philosophical caveat in the practice of cultural examination will be highlighted more as we go deeper into the critical re-reading of Mercado’s idea of Filipino Philosophy.

2. Examining the Underlying Assumptions

To put forward the essence of an effective resistance toward nation-building is also to be on guard against the temptations of cultural exoticisation, which is, indeed, a key component to promoting ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. Such an attitude can be gleaned from the motivational ground in the scholarship of Mercado. Mercado admitted that he wanted to place a point of unification in the status of Filipino Philosophy. Mercado sees the need to take a solid stance on the concern for a methodology in the investigative enterprises in Filipino Philosophy by bringing in standardised thematic guides and questions in philosophical fora.¹⁶ Two working assumptions can be uncovered. First, Mercado overemphasised the unchangeability of one’s culture. Second, Mercado pinned down the role of Filipino philosophers to a descriptive practice of cultural phenomena, that is, to create a traction “from the implicit to the explicit”.¹⁷ Mercado likened this so-called philosophical role to a midwife who simply assists in a mother's birthing. But if the overarching ambition of Mercado for promoting Filipino Philosophy is to “describe what is there”,¹⁸ why is it that his methodology is simply geared towards defending what seems to be naturally residing on Philippine soil, without realising that this will be exclusionary of Filipino citizens who aspire for the betterment of society, combatting lurking cultural elements that hamper social progress?

¹⁶ De Leon, E. C. and Marvin Einstein C. Mejaro (December 2016) ‘An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,’ *Kritike* 10, no. 2: 6.

¹⁷ De Leon and Mejaro, ‘An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,’ 8.

¹⁸ De Leon and Mejaro, ‘An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,’ 12.

Intellectual colonialism is like a process of conditioning; *it induces a person to forget his own culture and eventually makes him ape a supposedly superior model. But one man's medicine can be another's poison.* What works for the West can hurt the Filipino. God made all men different and intended each man to develop his unique [potentialities]. If a person is dissatisfied with himself and starts aping an idol – say a movie star – the former will turn out a neurosis. The analogy can be applied to the national level. *God made all nations different by heredity and environment and intended that each nation develop more in being herself. By being herself, each nation can make a contribution to the world. But if the nation is contented with merely imitating a foreign model, she may turn out to be a false and a “neurotic” who possesses what Renato Constantino calls a “national inferiority complex.” In short, the Filipino needs a philosophy to explain and support his identity*¹⁹.

While Mercado admitted that he wanted to promote social diversity and respect for the variegated ways of living, predicating this objective to a theistic claim can be damaging to the essential development and inherent support of a dialogical practice. In a word, exclusivist from the beginning. That there are atheists in the world that we live in is no secret. Hence, there is a need to reformulate theistic claims and reconstruct theological categories to avoid cultural subordination in the place of dialogical paths that allow religious and theistic beliefs to participate.²⁰ Furthermore, instead of hastily declaring that all worldviews have the right to thrive – as the so-called “God” purposively designed them to generate cultural variations – Mercado should have been more careful to include questions on how doctrines and other outlooks can be devised to the detriment of the society.

By simply equating the modelling of foreign standards to national inferiority, Mercado prevented a developmental vision from thriving in the dialogue of

¹⁹ Mercado, Leonardo (1974) *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 7., Emphasis mine.

²⁰ Timbreza, Florentino (2001) ‘The Struggle for Wholeness in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenge to Education in the Next Millennium’, *Karunungan: Official Journal of Philippine Academy of Philosophical Research* 18, no. 1: 125.

cultures to learn from one another, which requires reasonable flexibility and adaptability. It is no less than Constantino himself who pointed out that being accustomed to the idyllic presentation of rural sceneries in the Philippines should not impede the realisation that the Philippines also needs to responsibly industrialise to be economically independent.²¹ Imitation is not a problem *per se*, any more than we should blame teachers when they strive to be the paragons of the political and intellectual values they teach to their students. In line with this, we must support a radical line of cultural studies that helps us realise “that what appears to it on first impression as the truth is most frequently the result of naturalisation and appropriation of unexamined impressions and are often no more than false assumptions that configure as forms of false consciousness”.²² Even cultures one typically takes pride in are not immune from power imbalances and oppressive power relations. Such a tendency forestalls the development of critical thinking that necessitates the examination of cultural assumptions on which the oppressive measures of culture rely.

3. The Problem in Connecting Philosophy, Human Values, and Culture

Mercado believes that culture and philosophising cannot be torn apart. This view is considered “anti-elitist” since it points to the anthropological vision in explaining the so-called “existential postulates” that constitute a specific philosophy vis-à-vis geographical and cultural considerations.²³ Does Mercado prioritise cultural concerns over the rigour of philosophising? Mercado is ambiguous in this respect.

Mercado argued that to paint culture as completely immutable or extremely volatile is to disregard how philosophising shapes social acceptance and its significant implications in interpreting social reality.²⁴ In this sense, a particular

²¹ Cf. Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino*, 6-7.

²² Hornedo, Florentino (2002) “‘Cultural Studies’ and Hegemony”, *Karunungan: Official Journal of Philippine Academy of Philosophical Research* 19, no. 1: 151.

²³ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 4.

²⁴ Mercado, Leonardo (1983) ‘Philosophy of Knowledge in the Philippines,’ in Leonardo Mercado, ed., *Research Methods in Philippine Context*: 29-42, 2nd Printing. Logos Publications Inc., 34.

way of philosophising creates its social reality by rejecting ideas and opinions, however prevalent these are – as its reactive and creative prowess. Mercado sees this as a reason to seek the philosophical nuances in the Filipino culture that have been submerged in the layers of the colonial past and other foreign influences. Mercado delineated the investigative enterprises that take Filipino culture as their object of study based on their respective purposes:

Since cognition is one chief concern of the social sciences and since cognition is interdisciplinary, perhaps the phrase “philosophy of knowledge” may be the more all-embracing expression. Hence[,] philosophy of knowledge is taken here at two levels. Firstly, in the sense that the different social sciences are interested in cognition from their respective viewpoints. Secondly, at the level of philosophy, that is, philosophy begins where the [social] sciences end. After the social sciences have given their findings[,] philosophy takes them over and gives them a higher synthesis[.] [...] Philosophy of knowledge is not to be understood here as epistemology[,] which is the science of the validity of human knowledge. [The] philosophy of knowledge is taken here to mean the philosophy of a people²⁵.

What Mercado has in mind in defining the purpose of Filipino Philosophy is the meticulousness in finding the purity behind the patterns of behaviour and thinking found in Philippine society. Filipino Philosophy might be understood as, coming from Mercado’s deciphering, the ultimately intuitive searching for the native ground of Filipino actions and thoughts and not a critical enterprise to counter any of these elements. But this might be an egregious misconstrual since Mercado believes that he champions a distinct methodology that takes philosophising at a “higher plane of synthesis” in which it is capable of transcending the “dangers of subjectivistic interpretations and of eclecticism”.²⁶ For instance, Mercado assumed a level of objectivity that can be attained and should be maintained in his brand of metalinguistic analysis as well as in his other method that he calls the “phenomenology of behaviour”.²⁷ After

²⁵ Mercado, ‘Philosophy of Knowledge in the Philippines,’ 30.

²⁶ Mercado, *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*, 26.

²⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 9-11.

undertaking semantic comparisons, through lexemes and words, among the selected Philippine languages,²⁸ Mercado believes that this spells out the indigenous worldview of Filipinos in perceiving reality. Mercado also sees the need to magnify the coherence in the patterns of behaviour to uncover the native behavioural conditions of Filipinos.²⁹ These two methods must be dovetailed to an ever-expanding experiential basis of comparison through exposure to other cultures and become less ethnocentric and narrow-minded. Mercado even claims that this will capacitate the observer – employing the two aforementioned

²⁸ To illustrate the manner in which Mercado conducted his metalinguistic approach to Filipino Philosophy, Mercado, in one instance, tried to show that the Visayan, Tagalog, and Ilocano languages in the Philippines can be considered as linguistic relatives that can be a treasure trove to extrapolate a particularly obscure philosophy of causality, especially if it would be juxtaposed to Western conceptions of causality. As Mercado observed in the Visayan language: “*Tungod (because, due) can be affixed with various meanings. It can also mean ‘by’ or ‘in’ as in ‘tungod sa tinaan sa Santa Krus’ (by the sign of the Holy Cross) or ‘at’ ‘by’ as in ‘Thunong ang jeep tungod sa anang balay’ (Stop the jeep by that house). It can also mean ‘near’ or ‘directly beneath.’ See Mercado, Elements of Filipino Philosophy, 131.*

The ambiguity in the vagueness and imprecision of the notion of causality was also noted by Mercado in the Tagalog words *dahil/dahilan* which can mean “circumstances”, “reason”, “motive”, “cause”, “pretense”, and so on. Thus, Mercado claims that causality in the Tagalog language does not necessarily amount to the idea of origination or derivation. In a similar way, the Ilocano language exhibits a nebulous way of using the word *Gapó* that cannot be exclusively used to signify a “cause”, for it can also mean “occasion”, “motive”, and “ground.” See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 132-133.

²⁹ To illustrate the phenomenological approach to explicate Filipino behaviour, in one instance, Mercado contrasted the prevalent elucidation of health vis-à-vis the idea of being in harmony with the larger forces of human existence in Philippine society, with the mastery-over-nature orientation to health that is prevalent to Western societies. The consciousness of health of the Filipinos, as claimed by Mercado, arises out of the deep sense of not upsetting the *pagkakapantay, di pagkakatalo* (equilibrium-maintenance) of the various elements found in nature. That is, whereas the Filipino values the interconnectedness between all people, one’s individuality, nature, and the supernatural domain, the Western model treats nature as a tool that can be exploited in which there is an attempt “to make nature serve [the people] by altering the flow of a river, by changing the weather[,] [one’s] genes. [One] tampers with the balance of nature to the extent that nature rebels in the form of ecological revenge such as polluted rivers, smog, extinction of certain biological species.” See Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 110-111. On a critical note, however, while Mercado argued that his methodology of the phenomenology of behaviour could be an instrument of verification in showing the so-called Filipino modal personality; he did not cross-check the above-discussed elements and realities in Philippine society to other reliable references in the social sciences. After stating an excerpt from F. Landa Jocano’s study as well as indicating John B. Carroll and Lester O. Troyer’s studies, Mercado hastily concluded that Westerners gave a mastery-over-nature disposition. While one may well argue that Mercado defined his phenomenological methodology as also of reflective overtones, the observational circumstances in which he was working must be explicitly noted in order to avoid, as he himself claimed to have done so, the dangers of subjectivism. In this way, the behavioural patterns – and all their limitations and selective processes – that Mercado indicated in his study can be verified and rectified by scholars in the social sciences. This will also emphasize that Mercado’s phenomenology of behaviour goes hand in hand with the observational route that he himself believes to be a requisite to attain philosophical objectivity and ensure the complementarity of pattern-finding schemes in the exposure of what he calls the “existential postulates” in the anthropological terrain of Filipino thinking. Cf. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 11-12.

methods – to be more disconnected when reflecting upon his own culture that, in turn, provides an external standpoint to an “objective spokesman [systematiser]”.³⁰ This is worth noting since there has been a defence in Mercado’s project that overemphasises the so-called emic observation in cultural settings to extract what seems to be naturally and philosophically occurring. For instance, Emmanuel Batoon contends that this cultural project of Mercado is contrary to a “detached observation that a tourist makes on other people’s lives but [it is] a participant observation of a people’s own view of their lives. The social behavioural data is meant as a basis for comparison to check if the people actually ‘do’ what they ‘say they do’”.³¹

The problem with Batoon’s commentary on Mercado’s work is his idea of distinguishing emic and etic constructs in anthropological studies. It must be noted that emic constructs have nothing to do with the gathering techniques used by the scholar – to directly elicit from human participants of research or infer from one’s observation – but only with regards to the nature of knowledge composed of “accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of a culture whose beliefs and [behaviours] are being studied”.³² Contrary to Batoon’s claim that Mercado’s approach to anthropological philosophising is emic as it is participatory in its data-gathering techniques – which contradicts Mercado’s own admission that his role as a Filipino philosopher is to come from an external standpoint to “systematise” a culture – empirical and logical analysis actually characterise etic analysis which entails the replicable, comprehensive, accurate, falsifiable, precise, and objective scrutiny of data at the backdrop of epistemological principles regarded as meaningful by the scientific scholars to generate more universal knowledge and critique of human societies.³³ While there seems to be an inconsistency between Batoon’s defensive

³⁰ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 11.

³¹ Batoon, Emmanuel (June 2014) ‘Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (First of Two Parts)’, *Kritike* 8, no. 1: 10.

³² Lett, James (1990) ‘Emics and Etics: Notes on the Epistemology of Anthropology’, in Thomas N. Headland, et al., eds., *The Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*: 127-142. Sage Publications, Inc., 130.

³³ Lett, ‘Emics and Etics: Notes on the Epistemology of Anthropology’, 134.

comment and the actual project of Mercado, the two converge in pointing out that there is a herculean task to immerse with cultural groundwork where the assumed philosophical indigeneity rests.³⁴

Does culture determine human values, or are these produced under the condition of philosophising? Mercado believes that there is a mutually influencing space between these elements. As Mercado puts it: “One part of culture is [the] world view which includes its values and its interpretation of reality. We take philosophy here to mean worldview, that is, how a particular group looks at reality from its perspective”.³⁵ It is instructive to come to terms with how Mercado relates human values with the intersubjective nature of truth. Even if Mercado pushed for objectivity in a systemic rendition of philosophising in the Philippine context, in large measure, he emphasised that knowledge and the discovery of truth cannot be separated from the truth of human connectedness. Language, the crucial ventricle for knowledge formation, is encoded by the cultural ingredients that are deeply embedded in the fabric of our thoughts. Thus, Mercado argues that “a culture shapes the value of an individual[;] values are not taught, they are caught”.³⁶ Does Mercado, for good or ill, believe that people are merely passive receptacles of values without exercising their intellectual autonomy to critically examine how these values affect their lives, as given by their cultural setting?

It is obvious that we need to discern and know the context in which our actions and thoughts must be adaptive. Our lives must not be spliced to ideologically prioritise a particular aspect of our lives over others – without any afterthought and second thought about how these affected and will affect the overall quality of our living. This is congruent with Mercado's argument that we must be holistic in understanding human nature to understand particular values, like Filipino

³⁴ Mercado's task of seeking the uniqueness and indigeneity can be confirmed by how he described Filipino Philosophy: “Firstly, let us assume that Filipino philosophy and Filipino psychology exist. We distinguish ‘music in the Philippines’ from ‘Filipino music.’ The former includes the performance of foreign music in the stage, movies, radio, and television; the latter means something which uniquely reflects the Filipino soul. Similarly[,] we distinguish ‘philosophy in the Philippines’ from ‘Filipino [P]hilosophy.’ The former includes all the kinds of philosophy which are taught and read in the classrooms. But ‘Filipino [P]hilosophy’ is much narrower[,] for it is about the Filipino [worldview].” Mercado, Leonardo (1977) *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, 2nd Printing, Tacloban: Divine Word University Publications, 55.

³⁵ Mercado, *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*, 5.

³⁶ Mercado, Leonardo (2000) *Filipino Thought*, Manila: Logos Publications Inc., 93.

values, suitable to a specific condition.³⁷ Not all our claims and demands must have an alibi as afforded by the values we consider too rigid not to be adjusted to our needs and circumstances. As Mercado creatively explained this: “In the biologicistic perspective, God meant every part of the body to have its specific purpose, such as eyes for seeing, the nose for smelling[,] etc. [...] If this logic is to be taken to its logical conclusions, that means one should not shave his beard, have a haircut or trim his/her fingernails”.³⁸ This aspect of Mercado’s enterprise seems to counter, albeit partly, the critical observation that his philosophising seems “limited by its descriptive and constructive tendency to produce a ‘universalized’ reduction of Filipino thought”.³⁹

In view of the foregoing discussion, one may suspect that Mercado has created a convoluted defence of his philosophical enterprise in which he failed to build a systematic fortress for Filipino Philosophy to thrive in its most original form. On the one hand, Mercado asserts the impenetrable characteristic of human values, which, in contrast to norms that prescribe rules for behaving in a particular context, are “standards of desirability [that] are independent of any specific situation”.⁴⁰ In other words, Mercado accentuates what he believed to be a fact at the unshakeable core of human values, which are beyond the touch of intellectual adaptability or other forms of cultural reworking. On the other hand, Mercado must clarify what he meant by saying that “[i]nstead of focusing [on] philosophy, culture, and religion, our focus should be the human person who is the culture-bearer. If thinkers grow up in a certain culture, then such upbringing will naturally flower into persons who will produce philosophies and theologies corresponding to their respective cultures”.⁴¹ In this regard, it is as if Mercado has been refuting his claim that human values do not come second to the formation of culture; instead, human actions are moved by the volitional and autonomous dimensions of decision-making and the weighing of values themselves. Furthermore, this forking in Mercado’s philosophic exercise must be squared to

³⁷ Mercado, *Filipino Thought*, 12.

³⁸ Mercado, *Filipino Thought*, 13.

³⁹ Cf. Pada, Roland Theuas D.S. (June 2014) ‘The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy’, *Kritike* 8, no. 1: 4.

⁴⁰ Mercado, *Filipino Thought*, 99.

⁴¹ Mercado, *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*, 21.

the role that he attributes to Philosophy that “critically examines the most fundamental assumptions or the existential postulates that underlie our lives,” which he even noted that such a “definition includes culture”.⁴² For instance, in one of his works, Mercado underlined the subservience of strong political institutions to their cultural underpinnings simply because these very institutional measures that edify such are inextricably linked to the cultural configuration of specific populations or communities. As Mercado puts it, “Culture is an acquired thing[,] and the people who acquire it use culture for their purposes. And values are part of [the] culture”.⁴³ To illustrate, Mercado even explained why those who drive in Manila hardly follow the traffic rules because of the lenient police force, while the vigorous enforcement of laws as predicated on the predominance of American ethos present in Subic Bay makes the drivers obedient to legal terms of traffic. What is problematic in this deciphering is that it reverberates the static understanding of culture and human values that, as one may recall what was mentioned elsewhere in this essay, only blames human values that are simply “being caught” by persons who seem to have no direction of their lives. To prove and objectively describe that traffic violations are pervasive in society is one thing, but to give a chance for ethical assessment to thrive and for social transformation to take place in philosophising is another. Should we not give the Filipinos the autonomy to change for the better – to have better institutions and a better society that they scrupulously established for the common good? Therefore, it is of significant pursuit to know the limitedness of critical and intellectual enterprises in Mercado’s scholarship. A culture that becomes repugnant to a spirit of inquiry and educational endeavours is a culture that becomes enclosed in its echo chamber whereby the voices of truth, the reality of reasonable social diversity, and political emancipation are locked out.

4. What Makes Culture Unphilosophical According to Mercado

⁴² Mercado, *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*, 29.

⁴³ Mercado, *Essays on Filipino Philosophy*, 48.

The ambivalence of Filipino values must not escape our critical attention to things. Rather than accepting these values *tout court*, Filipino Philosophy must deliver a space where contextual bearings of these human values must be discussed, not just left for the culture to decide on its own. Emerita Quito noted that the two sides of these values must be seen as we spin the coin in the hope of our favour. For instance, the obsession with collectivist considerations and merely going after group interest, as often seen in the *sakop* (territorial) mentality, can be damaging in that it “stunts growth and prevents a person from growing on one’s own. [...] This mentality also makes us consider the world as one vast comfort zone”.⁴⁴ Indeed, this critical remark resonates with what this essay has been belabouring to discuss: to strike a balance between complete political apathy and the hegemonic bent of the illusory point of social unification. If left unresolved, the *sakop* orientation will push the citizens to be like-minded appendages of a social machine that will bring to the fore *hiya* (shame) and *pakikisama* (loyalty) as values that keep blind conformism spiralling down to mindlessness. Tracking down the conflictual baggage in Filipino values, psychologist Jaime Bulatao observed that the democratic attitudes in school that ideally promote critical thinking might be interpreted as brushing aside the authoritarian dispositions at home that highly cherish benevolent and compliant ways of thinking.⁴⁵ However, as great faith is placed in heroism in Philippine society, the emphasis on the struggle for social justice and intellectual progress must correspond to attaining a critical view of nuances, even in human values. The narrow understanding of old-new dichotomy in values shall be supplanted with the meaningful creation of social development that does not solely define nationhood in stringent rays of traditional values, but one that portends the incremental awareness that democratic social condition naturally endures, through intellectual humility, the moving dissensions which counter the regime that rests its case on a Procrustean bed as a pompous murderer of emerging truths.

⁴⁴ Quito, Emerita (1994) ‘The Ambivalence of Filipino Traits and Values’, in Manuel Dy, ed., *Values in Philippine Culture and Education: Philippine Philosophical Studies I*: 51-54. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 53.

⁴⁵ Bulatao, Jaime C. (1998) *Phenomena and their Interpretation, Landmark Essays (1957-1989)*, 2nd Printing, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 240.

Another problematic definition is given by Mercado when he has given flesh to what Filipino Philosophy should be: “It is the philosophy of the masses first of all, and not what [Jose] Rizal, [Apolinario] Mabini or other Filipino elitist thinkers have thought of, *except when these thoughts reflect the viewpoint of the masses*”.⁴⁶ This definition of Filipino Philosophy has been defended by Batoon as a search for “philosophy sui generis and not merely an appendix of academic philosophy because it is constructed by a group of ordinary people (ethnos) that results in an empirical and observably unique but not idiosyncratic worldview”.⁴⁷ These elucidations assume that there is and there will be no connection between the academic and cultural types of philosophy. This calls into question the purpose of philosophising vis-a-vis the necessity of cultural transformation. Have we not acknowledged the fact that even the French Revolution’s dream of political autonomy from oppressive religion, government, and tradition has had an impact on the Philippine independence in 1898 and its forerunners, we cannot throw into light the truth that for human freedom to flourish, one must fight for it by resisting unbridled political control.⁴⁸ In fact, beyond violent revolution (which Rizal, one of the Philippine heroes, initially rejected) and the assertion of complete independence, Rizal argued that holistic education is the key to authentic human freedom – an education that completely transforms the personhood of the whole citizenry whereby even the temptation of the enslaved people to be the new tyrants is eliminated.⁴⁹ This sends a signal that Rizal also learned from the debacle of the French Revolution. As one may recall from one’s History lessons, it was one of the greatest ironies that the lists of grievances (*cahiers de doléances*) that were pushed forth before the French Revolutions included the abolition of censorship and reforms in the legal system, yet it ended up in the horrible hands of the *Jacobins* who, in the so-called pursuit of social justice, indiscriminately burned

⁴⁶ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 4, Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ Batoon, ‘Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective’, 3.

⁴⁸ Hornedo, Florentino (2001) *Ideas and Ideals: Essays in Filipino Cognitive History*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 53-80.

⁴⁹ Gripaldo, Rolando, *Filipino Philosophy: Traditional Approach, Part I, Section I*, 2nd Printing, Manila: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 11-14.

villages and killed civilians whom they thought were against the revolutionary objects towards the establishment of human freedom.⁵⁰

If the Filipinos during the Spanish colonisation accepted that their dire condition would remain for eternity as they were intentionally deprived of material resources and educational opportunities to become more decadent, iniquitous, and foolish – which then became an alibi for the perpetuation of so-called “civilising custody” of the Spanish colonisers – those hopeful Filipinos would not have known that they could shape their future. Disassociating ourselves from critical discourses, be it from the masses or the more academic side, is to place our consciousness entirely in keeping with the status quo without going beyond it, let alone be aware of what common ground the individuals should settle in as a nation and dignified people. The issue, perhaps, is not to deride the critical education that Jose Rizal has acquired in Europe, nor to disparage the attempt of Andres Bonifacio, another Philippine hero, to painstakingly undertake a self-study to be conscious of the world beyond the sheer dictates of tradition.⁵¹ Apolinario Mabini, a Philippine hero, even tried to put a recharging ember on the whole point of internal revolution to produce an external revolution that does not also allow the furtherance of exploitation even in women and children, a thing that Mabini saw when Filipino soldiers abused their military might to be the new oppressors.⁵² The solution to this is an enlightening of the heart and mind of the purpose of revolution – and so, individually, the citizens must embrace the challenge to mature beyond the know-how of the militaristic picture of warfare.

While culture can undeniably play a vital role in supporting the educational development of its citizens, this fact does not translate to allowing culture to make us its pawns. In the case of *sakop*-oriented social philosophy, Mercado argued that territorial limits and concerns must be expanded up to the national level to avoid parochialism and insularity among citizens,⁵³ yet he failed to direct his discussion

⁵⁰ Sanderson, Stephen K. (2005) *Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Political and Social Change*, London: Paradigm Publishers, 17-26; 141-143.

⁵¹ Hornedo, *Ideas and Ideals*, 53-80.

⁵² Majul, Cesar Adib (1964) *Apolinario Mabini, Revolutionary*, Manila: National Heroes Commission, 196-207.

⁵³ Mercado, *Essays on Filipino Philosophy*, 135.

on power distance – involved in the cultural framing of *sakop* mindset – to a critical examination. Despite the admission that centralisation of authority, worsening gaps in socio-economic statuses, status symbols, clientelist politics, populist rule, inter alia, are symptomatic of an exclusivist power distance, Mercado does not seem reluctant to say that “[i]f inequalities in society are desired, then it values obedience to authority, respect for parents[,] and other authoritative figures”.⁵⁴ Moreover, Mercado seems to normalise the occasion of exclusivist selection of job applicants based on what school the applicant graduated from without taking into consideration if this will result in massive unemployment, lack of partnerships among the educational institutions of the country, or if this is a reliable and equitable way to heighten economic growth.⁵⁵ Mercado did not exhaust his scholarship to explore the non-duality between respecting one’s authority and community as persons with dignity or institutions with honour and correcting them when they are not morally upright and politically reasonable. Respecting authorities does not mean we must be firm like a rock in obeying them, even when strings are attached and pulled on us. Instead of becoming a building block to erect the bureaucratisation of our intellectual pursuits, one must be supportive of dialogical channels to open questions that can be beneficial to nation-building, one that places a never-ending enthusiasm to solve problems, one that understands and critically weighs every idea from whoever has something to offer. As Paulo Freire once quipped:

One of the roots of education, which makes it specifically human, lies in the radicalness of an inconclusion that is perceived as such. The permanence of education also lies in the constant character of the search, perceived as necessary. Likewise, here lie also [the] roots of the metaphysical foundation of hope. How would it be possible for a consciously inconclusive being to become immersed in a permanent search without hope? My hope starts from my nature as a project. For this reason[,] I am hopeful, and not for pure stubbornness.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Mercado, *Essays on Filipino Philosophy*, 124.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Freire, Paulo (2007) *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Donaldo Macedo and Alexandre Oliveira, trans., New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 93.

As Freire further elucidates the interdependence of a liberating education and an authentic sense of collective growth for society:

The statement, “Things are as they are because they cannot be any other way,” is one of the many instruments used by the dominant in an attempt to abort the dominated’s resistance. The more historically anesthetized, the more fatalistically immersed in a reality impossible to be touched, let alone transformed, the less of a future we have [...]⁵⁷

One, therefore, needs to know that we are one humanity that needs to fight a global order that condones power asymmetry and economic exploitation. On this view, the intellectual avenue for critical intervention is not to be sneered at as innately exclusionary and an ultimate display of prestige. Academic resistance can be a key to the crystallisation of warfare against all forms of social injustice – the issues that transcend the barriers of nationality.⁵⁸ Intellectual inbreeding often leads to the adumbration of myopic interests that capitalise on the repulsive energy in self-improvement and conversational exercises in theory formulation. Thus, to disregard how Filipinos are shaped by a maddening educational system and political culture is to proceed to a nationalistic temper that only becomes indifferent to how things become crippling for proactive political participation, which, to begin with, requires a divarication from the often-peddled flirtation with the “native warp and woof” in society. Blind obedience characterises the Philippine educational system today, and this fact should be lamented by going back to the roots of our educational arrangement – to reflect on why we have to teach and learn, after all.⁵⁹ We should not simply unreasonably resort to “*hiya*” or shame to save one’s face from becoming repulsive to social relations and anything that supports those connections. The value of “*pakikisama*” or conformism seeps into every bloodline of social ties making possible the normalisation of sacrificing personal concerns for the sake of the group’s interest.⁶⁰ In this case, it is clear that someone has got to give. To illustrate the problem of being obsessed with

⁵⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 100-101.

⁵⁸ San Juan, Jr., Epifanio (2016) *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora: Lessons of Resistance and Critical Intervention*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 57-58.

⁵⁹ Estioko, Leonardo (2000) ‘Some Weaknesses of Philippine Education’, *Karunungan: Official Journal of Philippine Academy of Philosophical Research* 17, no.1: 251-257.

⁶⁰ Mercado, *Essays on Filipino Philosophy*, 69-76.

so-called Westernised models in research methods and other institutional assessments, Mercado pointed out that there are cultural variables that we should not lose sight of when analysing the results of one's assessments lest we face the ethical impasse of not appropriately and contextually resolving the dilemma.⁶¹ In an attempt to prove the point of this, Mercado argued that if the evaluation of the faculty members of educational institutions becomes *sakop*-oriented, that is, if it does not single out any educator as having a low rating in their performance in their classes as graded by their students, this will create a more accurate picture of performance-based improvement and will collectively compel the teaching force to do their job well. According to Mercado, there is a malaise in expecting students to be objective and fair in the evaluation of teachers who are strict with them and that will only force irresponsible teachers to simply give every student a high grade in his/her class as a bribe to the students during the evaluation period to save his/her face. Group pressure is preferred by Mercado rather than an individualised improvement as he understands the former as alienating to a culture that avoids being left out from the rest of one's affiliations and other connections.

I find Mercado's elucidation problematic because it can give persons who do not take responsibility for what they did or omitted an alibi to effortlessly escape their negligence and imprudence. Consequently, this idea of Mercado might lead to blaming others who have no hand in a certain situation since it is beyond the scope of their work designation. One might expect a blame game to be prevalent in an organisation in which every member becomes obsessed with pointing their fingers at one another when a problem arises without having the slightest understanding that each of them has an individual bearing on their institutional successes. To get rid of this worry is simply to give in to the convenience of bureaucratic forms of thinking that do not address the issues of moral integrity since there is no pressure or disruption from the narrow operational expectations of a certain organisation. Harking back to Mercado's exemplification, I believe that teachers should also rethink not just the method of how they teach but also

⁶¹ Mercado, 'Philosophy of Knowledge in the Philippines', 34-38.

their purpose as teachers. They should ask if they should only mind their status in becoming promoted to professorial or teaching rank through impressive student evaluations, or if they are primarily concerned with an authentic learning experience that involves scholarly rigour even if that might deplete the chances of getting high scores from the evaluation of students. These are things that one cannot question if society has come to the habit of thinking that it is logically erroneous to assert personal convictions in the deliberative practices of organisations – a very dehumanising and demoralising rationalisation of so-called organisational efficiency.⁶² For a leader to ensure commitment and motivation in the workforce, he/she must be capable of facilitating periodic cultural diagnoses which are not one-person jobs since “[f]indings from this will serve as a jump-off for initiatives that will ensure the continued relevance of organization values and strengthen the alignment between the values of the organization and each individual employee”.⁶³ Such an endeavour involves a consultative character in establishing an institutional identity. From this purview, one cannot find it unnecessary that institutional evaluation and problem diagnosis must permeate any level of the organisation and not just be fixated on a herd mindset.⁶⁴ Moreover, enlightening debates will not prosper in a society that parallels conversational points of knowledge formation to the terrorising unsettling of reason itself. Therefore, the extent of communication and communicability in knowledge production and differential access to it must not pass our critical senses.⁶⁵ Not even the reality of technological advancements in disseminating information and other publication concerns nor the ubiquity of research specialisations and expertise shall make us believe that everything is running smoothly for all the citizens to influence knowledge formation equally. Indeed, the

⁶² Ladd, John (1988) ‘Morality and the Ideal of Rationality in Formal Organizations’, in Thomas Donaldson and Patricia H. Werhane, eds., *Ethical Issues in Business: A Philosophical Approach*: 130-142. 4th Edition. Prentice-Hall Inc., 130-142.

⁶³ Teng-Calleja, Mendiola (2021) ‘Cultivating the Filipino Workers’ Motivation and Engagement’, in Mendiola Teng-Calleja et al., eds., *Filipino Leadership: Stories and Science*: 91-103. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 99.

⁶⁴ Cummings, T. G. and Christopher G. Worley (2011) *Understanding Organizational Development*, Pasig: Cengage Learning Asia Pte Ltd, 109-111.

⁶⁵ Birnbaum, Norman (1971) *Toward a Critical Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 431.

ill-intentioned manipulation of influential platforms in knowledge, not the pursuit of knowledge itself, must be feared and rejected.

In the case of education, the overemphasis on products and evaluative results can take us away from the lustre of arduous and variegated processes of learning – this eventually leads to falsely equating the speed of learning to the depth of knowledge.⁶⁶ Peddling the idea that there is a one-size-fits-all learning style and strategy does not recognize the variance in personality, values, cultural upbringing, and natural talents in every student. One must be aware that in humbly accepting one's individual limitations, one also opens oneself to the potentiality of building relationships with other people as an opportunity to learn.⁶⁷ Indeed, one of the major problems that society faces is the hubristic arrogation of power – that one becomes too territorial not to be receptive to whatever good others have to offer which, in turn, leads to the failure to admit one's mistakes. If education is an endless quest for knowledge as it involves re-learning, unlearning, and questioning, to become a secluded, know-it-all group is to build a culture that destroys the very spirit of scholarship.

Suppose Mercado, *arguendo*, really thinks that change is a natural part of a culture.⁶⁸ In that case, he must also decipher what undergirds these cultural changes that affect the very lives of Filipino citizens. But this doubt may be deemed ineffectual if Mercado's reactionary obduracy will be magnified. Mercado once said, "In the long run, we cannot go against [the] culture because culture is selective: it accepts what it likes and rejects what it dislikes. Both Filipino psychologists and philosophers – if they wish to be really Filipino – have to follow the wisdom of Filipino culture".⁶⁹ But this dubious claim must be squared to how Mercado avowedly viewed human values as contextualised and not meant to be absolutised; otherwise, we face its adverse consequences.⁷⁰ Contrary to the

⁶⁶ Manahan, Didi P. (2020) 'Authentic Learning Requires Authentic Assessment', in Ani Rosa Almarino and Tina S. Zamora, eds., *School is Life: Progressive Education in the Philippines*: 98-106. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 117-120.

⁶⁷ Nuncio, R. V. and Elizabeth Morales-Nuncio (2004) *Sangandiwa: Araling Filipino Bilang Talastasang Pangkalingan at Lapit-Pananaliksik*, Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 111-121.

⁶⁸ Mercado, *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, 76.

⁶⁹ Mercado, *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, 64.

⁷⁰ Mercado, *Filipino Thought*, 95.

suggestion that psychologists should merely follow the tracks that the footprints of cultural domination left, psychologist Jaime Bulatao argues that the “abject surrender to traditionalism” of Filipinos must be disturbed by a realisation that the re-inventing of self-image and world-image is necessary for the growth of the socio-psychological level of democratic governance. As this essay has pointed out, if education is a liberation of the mind even from a tyrannical culture, we must not be afraid to take individual responsibility to effectuate social responsiveness; that is, we need to profoundly appreciate the great dynamics between the group and the individual, the radical reflection of an individual and cultural transformation, and the authority figures and social accountability. While the changing of self-image does not come quickly as it is not simply the work of an individual insistence, to keep the ground running is to realise that intersubjectivity, as the *sine qua non* of transforming self-image, is made possible by many small efforts that the individuals exerted.⁷¹ As this research has shown, Mercado tends to de-politicise this transformational side. Ultimately, Mercado overemphasised the value of the so-called collectivist spirit to the extent that he derided the “*pilosopo*” (philosopher) by inappropriately categorising them as “anti-social” or “non-conformist” which Mercado believed to be contrary to the communal form of thinking and behaving.⁷² If Mercado’s scholarship is examined carefully, this obscure traditionalism is perhaps because he believes in the psychological way of learning in which the Filipinos allegedly assimilate the from-concrete-to-abstract route in learning, allegedly the opposite of the more logical (or abstract) way of thinking of Westerners.⁷³ Ironically, the fact that Mercado asserts that Filipinos start from an “inductive” development of thinking cannot be logically reconciled with his claim that there are apparently static elements and categories of thinking in Philippine culture that any form of re-thinking and re-designing cannot dispel. The problem with the “inductive approach” that Mercado attributes to the educational force that the Filipinos allegedly possess is that it does not notice the conspicuous consequences of

⁷¹ Bulatao, Jaime (June 1965) *The Technique of Group Discussion*, 8th Printing, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 42.

⁷² Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 96.

⁷³ Mercado, *Applied Filipino Philosophy*, 59-60.

cultural tyranny, which also works as its very cause. Is this not an underestimation of the capacity of the ordinary masses to learn from and also contribute to the transformational praxis that authentic knowledge formation entails? By taking a blind eye to the real problem, from a hubristic standpoint, Mercado stifles the energy to capacitate the Filipinos, as learners of their own making, to question the power structure and hegemonic roots that perpetuate numbing complacency and simply seeing the frames of the cultural situation only between the road for the individual and the road for the country – not realising that there is a path, a road less travelled, where two directions meet at some point.

5. Conclusion: A Philosophical Challenge for Philippine Society

The Filipino people must refuse to be treated like puzzle pieces to be fitted to blank spaces as conditioned by a culture beyond the reach of social transformation. Inserting the nationalistic cheer when facing neo-colonial predicaments must not be deflective of public awareness to look more closely at the cultural causes of social maladies. Power imbalance knows no limits. The brutality of political exploitation and economic subjugation knows no gender, nationality, ethnicity, educational attainment, and the list goes on. To try to privilege a location for the gravitational pull of power struggle – as in the case of how Mercado presented a victimised Philippine society – will prove ineffectual when valuable ideas, even from a foreign land, come knocking at our door. In this critique, it has been presented that Mercado launched a challenge to the academic sphere that it should also be inclusive of the masses' concerns and significant contribution to nation-building, so much so that one should give equal importance to the challenge posed towards Mercado not to underestimate the potential drive of the masses to surpass even the overwhelming and seemingly dazzling frontiers of cultural artifice.

There is nothing more of a humane desiderata in making society a better place than the idea that its people are for the reinvention and rethinking of their

collective historicity. At the bottom of this cultural struggle is the constant reevaluation of the citizens who find inadequacy in the way things are: to deliver a message that nation-building is a learning process. This means that if philosophising remains under the atrocities routinely inflicted by the siege of domesticating malpractices and cultural domination, no one will see how change is necessary for a culture to grow. Indulging in philosophising as a pure game of “marketing a particular philosophical tradition” will only make a measure of protection from foreign influences but only to become a casualty of its disempowering stupor by preventing itself from engaging in a critical mode of intellectualisation. This is a problem exacerbated by a culture that disdains reasonable radicality by embracing a rubric of political correctness given by social conformism and amaurotic loyalty. It is not a disservice to the nation to listen and converse with the ever-changing global community to learn, and likewise teach, the lessons on how to extirpate the negative cultural traits that are, more often than not, the result of projecting superciliousness.

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