

THE GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE : POSSIBILITIES AND THREATS

*Raul Pertierra**

To say that we live in a global present has become a cliché. However, what such a present consists of, how it differs from the past and what its relationship is to the future, remain largely unanswered questions. In this paper, I explore only some of the implications of globality as it affects culture.

For anthropologists, culture is a way or mode of life. It includes whatever a group of people use to reproduce themselves as distinct from others. This is a broad definition but it indicates that culture is concerned with the differences as well as similarities between and within human groups. This function of culture extends to all aspects of human agency.

While this initial definition is useful for describing isolated, small-scale societies whose members share a common life style, it is less useful for understanding large, interrelated and complex societies. Members of the latter seldom share a common way of life or, if they do, such commonalities often transcend societal and cultural boundaries. For this reason, modern societies are often seen as multicultural, implying that their members belong to partly distinct cultures. Moreover, these modern societies also participate in a common globalized culture.

We seem to have struck a paradox. On the one hand, we claim that large modern societies are too complex to have only one culture (*e.g.* their members speak distinct languages, practice different religions, subscribe to particular values and experience alternative life styles). Hence, we describe these societies as multicultural. On the other hand, we refer to a global culture, which implies an

* Raul Pertierra, Ph.D., teaches at the Department of Sociology, University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. He is currently a Visiting Professor at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City, Philippines.

international monoculture. To resolve this paradox we have to re-examine our understandings of culture.

Local Culture

As already mentioned, anthropologists see culture as a distinct life-mode whose members distinguish themselves from others who do not share this way of living. Usually, such a life-mode is confined to a locality whose members are well known to one another. Strangers are not part of this common life-mode. In reality, very few cultures, societies or communities, if any, satisfy these conditions.

The absence of strangers in local cultures makes it unnecessary for their members to explain their culture to one another, except as part of the socialization of children. Instead, adults are adequately informed about the main elements of their culture, which they experience as part of everyday life. This lack of explanation or exegesis of culture makes it as much a practical lived-experience as a set of conscious principles and orientations. Such cultures are usually spatially limited since their members must keep in regular face-to-face contact to maintain coherence. It is rare for members to belong to more than one such local culture because their membership is usually defined by the circumstances of birth or other ascriptions, such as marriage. One cannot normally choose one's local culture. Finally, membership in such a culture tends to be total. It involves kinship, language, religion and residence.

National Culture

With the exception of the problematic Tasaday, no group or community in the Philippines would satisfy the requirements above. Even in the most isolated barrios whose members might share kinship and residence, they are also aware of a larger entity. As well as belonging primordially to their local communities, they are also Filipinos. They belong to a national culture. However, national cultures are constituted very differently from local cultures.

To begin with, a national culture is composed, almost totally, of strangers. How many of the 75 million Filipinos do you know? How does a culture whose

members are unknown to one another constitute and reproduce itself? Such large numbers of unknown people imply that their members cannot possibly share a common life-mode. There are rich Filipinos but many more are poor. Some have excellent education, others are barely literate. Some are technologically sophisticated, while many are not. Some Filipinos have lived abroad and are cosmopolitan, while others have remained close to their villages of birth. We speak distinct languages, belong to different religions, subscribe to a wide range of values and inhabit a diverse territory. Despite these fundamental differences, many Filipinos, most of the time, are secure about their national identity. But whatever this identity is, it is very different from being an Itneg from Lucaban or even a Singson from Vigan.

We learn about our Filipino identity from comparatively impersonal sources rather than from family and friends or from local experience. These sources involve schools, the media, the arts and our experience of public institutions related to the Philippine State. They often impart confusing, if not contradictory messages and we have to consciously sort out and unravel their meanings. What does "*Erap para sa mahirap*" ("Erap for the poor"), apart from its superficial appeal, really mean? How can we admire both Bonifacio and Aguinaldo, if the latter killed the former for betraying the revolution? How can we appreciate Rizal if he wrote in a language most of us no longer understand? Why do many Filipinos prefer to work and even live abroad? Even if these questions can be satisfactorily answered, they raise issues which are deeply disquieting. In other words, a national identity is inherently problematic and contestatory. It can also be changed and it involves an element of choice. A friend describes herself as a Filipino from California. Another considers himself to be an Ilocano from Hawaii.

Having a stable national identity does not mean that Filipinos forego earlier or other identities, such as Cebuano, Muslim or gay. National identities are neither total nor exhaustive. Moreover, since their methods of socialization involve secondary institutions, national culture is learned vicariously. This vicarious culture is also exemplary. It is embodied in exceptional individuals, such as Rizal, President Quezon, Cardinal Sin and Nora Aunor, or in antiheroes like Flor Contemplacion, Ferdinand Marcos or Leo Echegaray. Most of us may admire and identify with, or deprecate and condemn these embodiments and exemplars of national culture, but we do so vicariously. In contrast, a local culture is a directly-lived experience. Being an Itneg from Lucaban or a Singson from Vigan does not require an ideological imagination even if it serves as an inspiration for it.

Global Culture

While local cultures are found in small, cohesive communities and national cultures reflect the consciousness of a nation-state, global cultures express translocal and transnational orientations. These global cultures are older than we think and include religions such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. They are also expressed in civilizational elements, such as the Phoenician script, solar calendars and wet rice cultivation, as well as in classical trade routes that brought Moluccan spices to Europe, Mexican silver to India and Roman beads to the Cordillera.

In more recent times, one of the first truly global commodities was sugar, later tea and coffee (Mintz, 1985). Precious metals, such as gold and silver, have a much older global genealogy but were too rare to have a significant impact. In contrast, the ready availability of sugar grown in the West Indies and the Philippines but consumed in Manchester and Boston had a profound effect for their producers as well as for their consumers. British ships laden with sugar from the Philippines returned with English textiles. The caloric intake from sugar allowed Manchester workers to produce cheap cotton cloth that, in turn, impoverished Ilongo and Ilocano weavers unable to compete. Their only hope was to migrate to the expanding sugar *haciendas* in Negros or the empty lands in Pangasinan. This resulted in the disparities of Negrense society as well as created the image of the frugal, hard-working Ilocano.

Since the 19th century, global forces have impacted significantly at both local and national levels of Philippine society. Colonialism had earlier roots, but generally could only respond to, rather than control the margins. In contrast, imperialism, using the telegraph and the steamboat, was able to exert control from the center to the periphery. Spanish colonialism has had a significant effect on the Philippines, but American imperialism was swifter, more thorough and ultimately more devastating for a growing national culture. Colonialism can only respond to the past, while imperialism controls the present and even the future.

If Ilocano frugality and Negrense decadence can be traced to their global sources, how are these traits related to local and national cultures? They indicate that local and national cultures are not as self-enclosed as they often claim to be. Global forces have differential effects on local and national cultures. Apart from

frugality, the Ilocano experience of migration resulted in the phenomenon of *balasang-a-baket* or Ilocana spinster (Pertierra, 1992). In Negros, it led to the pauperization of the *sacada* (sugar plantation worker), as well as the opulence of the *hacendero* or plantation owner (Aguilar, 1998). Finally, these elements of global culture have become indigenized, such that their members are often unable to appreciate their initial sources. In other words, our distinctions of local, national and global culture are themselves problematic.

The Definitions of Culture

We can now return to more general aspects of culture. Kapferer (1988) defined culture as the set of principles that locate and orient human beings within their existential realities. Culture is a framework for organizing the world and our position in it. It involves both conscious and nonconscious processes. In addition, we have to see culture as incomplete, contested, inconsistent and never fully established. It is a process of a negotiated becoming rather than a set of fixed, pure or transcendent principles handed down from one generation to another. Culture is always in a process of change because its transmission is incomplete and because it is reinterpreted and contested by each generation. These features of culture apply at all levels: the local, national and global.

The Dimensions of Culture

Culture has three dimensions. One involves identity. Another consists of representations, while a third is embodied in objectifications. The first (identity) results in a sense of self(s) versus other(s), members and nonmembers. The second (representations), using signs and symbols, links identities with objectifications. Objectifications consist of material practices and social relationships contextualizing representations and their corresponding identities. In other words, culture involves a deep sense of identity using signs and symbols embedded in social relationships and material practices. It consists of psycho-social aspects as well as material practices.

Local cultures produce strong identificatory affiliations. Small communities can conflate identity, representation and objectification so as to appear seamless. A Kankanay may share a fundamental affinity with kin, Kabunian and the village ricefields. Other cultural orientations are seldom so compressed.

National cultures are more dependent on abstract representations. These are usually coordinated by national institutions, such as schools, the media and aesthetic practices. These representations are often exemplary and exegetical, applying across and even against direct experience. When appropriate, these representations can motivate profound responses. The deaths of Ninoy Aquino, Flor Contemplacion and Leo Echegaray, or events such as Holy Week, are examples of the extent to which representations can arouse feelings (even if disparate) within a national community. When combined with objective conditions, such as military situations, these feelings can be coordinated so that Filipinos willingly kill and die for the motherland.

While both local and national cultures can give rise to strong identificatory affiliations, global culture seldom does so. While many of us might prefer Jollibee, only nationalist ideologues would ban McDonald's on the grounds that it threatens our Filipino culture.

Global culture is an expression of objectifications linking local, national and international economies. Because of these linkages, it is difficult for them to combine these objectifications with representations that result in strong identifications. The lack of fit between global objectifications and their corresponding identification is described by Williams (1983:177). Translated for the Philippines it reads as follows:

There was this Filipino who worked in the Manila office of a multinational corporation based in the United States. He drove home one evening in his American car. His wife, who worked in a firm that imported Italian kitchen equipment, was already at home. Her small Japanese car was often quicker in the traffic. After a meal which included New Zealand lamb, Taiwanese pears, Australian honey, French cheese and Spanish wine, they settled down to watch a programme on their television set, which was made in Korea. The programme, made with a grant from a German foundation, was a historical reenactment in Tagalog of the declaration of Philippine Independence (in Spanish) in 1898. As they watched it they felt very warmly patriotic, and very proud to be Filipino.

We can see how the global interdependence of objectifications can reinforce national and even local images and identities, while simultaneously undermining them. Modernity has given culture an unprecedented autonomy from the conditions that generate it. Mass literacy and the electronic media allow for the almost limitless transmission of representations. Not only images but also objects (*e.g.* cigarettes

and Coke) enjoy global circulation. Combined with modern institutions, such as schools and bureaucracies, elements of culture can be shared by global populations. This results not only in the global standardization of elements of culture but also in an increasing cultural self-awareness (Pertierra, 1997). In a global world, new identities are constructed as people become increasingly aware of cultural differences. Globality has both homogenizing as well as differentiating consequences. In the recent millennial celebrations, television images of disparate places and peoples merged. In this collage, indigeneity enjoyed a privileged position.

Cultural Boundaries

According to Kessler (Pertierra, 1997):

Over recent years one of the central underlying assumptions of the social sciences has demonstrably collapsed. We can no longer think of the world as consisting of an aggregation of discrete societies, each with its own culture, each managing and expressing its autonomous identity through the instrumentality of a nation-state that participates, as one of many, in a mosaic of nation-states known as 'international society'. Instead, we now have to fathom how to understand global representations of the local and local experiences of the global. To do that, we need to rethink the very foundations, character, objectives and agenda of the social sciences.

Appadurai (1997:166) gives us some suggestions of this rethinking:

No idiom has yet emerged to capture the collective interests of many groups in translocal solidarities, cross-border mobilizations, and postnational identities. Such interests are many and vocal, but they are still entrapped in the linguistic imaginary of the territorial state. The incapacity of many deterritorialized groups to think their way out of the imaginary of the nation-state is itself the cause of much global violence because many movements of emancipation and identity are forced, in their struggles against nation-states, to embrace the very imaginary they seek to escape. Postnational or nonnational movements are forced by the very logic of actually existing nation-states to become antinational or antistate and thus to inspire the very state power that forces them to respond in the language of counternationalism. This vicious circle can only be escaped when a language is found to capture complex, nonterritorial, postnational forms of allegiance.

Appadurai points out that the global condition does not necessarily result in greater homogenization because of its non-isomorphic flows. He identifies these non-

isomorphisms as follows: Capital investments and infrastructural developments do not always coincide with sites for the production of knowledge. The politics of ethnicity is not always contained within a national narrative. The global location of production will have to take note of cultural specificities. A consumerist ethic has unexpected consequences for the notion of agency. These non-isomorphisms ensure a nonhomogenous and indeterminate future for global society.

Castles (1997) makes a similar argument, pointing out major contradictions of globalization. It is both inclusive and exclusive, it affects us all but often results in exacerbating internal differences, such as *sacadas* and *hacenderos*. It creates a tension between markets and state—witness the political effects of the Asian economic collapse. It produces both wealth and poverty. It opposes local interests to global interests or the particular and the universal. It creates a conflict between the interests of the economy and the environment. There is a hiatus between modernity and postmodernity, between systems-rationality and the rationality of the lifeworld. It both increases and conflates hierarchy and equality. While other times and other places may have contained similar contradictions, globalization concentrates these dichotomies within a new totality.

Papastergiadis (1998) suggests that we have to reconceptualize the spatio-temporal parameters of the global condition. No longer sited in specific places nor drawing from common times, the postmodern identity is spatially and temporally plural. How are we to conceive of social structures that generate such disparate identities? Such structures must base their coherence on principles distinct from earlier views of socialization with their emphasis on social reproduction. In its place, postmodern structures systematically reproduce difference. Based on representations at best loosely connected to their generating structures, a postmodern identity acts like a free-floating signifier carried by prevailing winds to settle in unpredictable places.

An example of this pursuit of difference using global forms is found in youth culture. As Appadurai (1997) argues, the disjunctive features of globalization create new spatio-temporal conjunctions, such that lived-relationships and their corresponding imaginaries or counterfactuals subvert dominant hierarchies or hegemonic claims. He uses the example of American popular music, particularly country and western, which has been accepted by Filipino youth, not as a sign of their cultural domination, but rather as an example of cultural hybridity. This hybridity has resulted in a proliferation of genres combining western forms with

local and national interests. Kidlat Tahimik in film, Grace Nono in music and Santi Bose in painting are only some examples of these hybridities.

For Filipinos, the nostalgic associations of country and western music that motivate American audiences are irrelevant. Instead, Filipinos subvert this genre by denying its past, relocating its present and playing on its future. Rosaldo (1989) has identified this condition which he calls ‘borderland hysteria,’ a new colocation where the past coexists with the future through the present.

The drastic reorientation of the spatio-temporal order, resulting in the deterritorialization of culture, means that the relationship between the local, national and global no longer follow traditional hierarchies. In this new context, identities are no longer contained and reproduced in former structures, whether local or national, past or contemporary.

Globalization and the Subversion of Hierarchy

Let me continue with other Philippine examples. A few years ago, I attended a barrio fiesta in Zamora. Much was made of the presence of *balikbayans* (returnees) who were visiting from the United States, Canada and Italy. Another visitor who had left the village many years before and had only then returned for the fiesta was clearly upset at the attention the *balikbayans* were receiving. At one point in the festivities, he announced publicly that while he was not a *balikbayan*, having only moved to Manila, he had nevertheless done very well and could therefore match whatever donations the *balikbayans* had given. I was embarrassed by the situation, but my village friends assured me that the man had acted improperly. He had chosen not to visit the village in the past, when he easily could have, so why did he now make a fuss about not receiving appropriate attention? The *balikbayans*, on the other hand, had made special efforts to return, which therefore merited mention. While there may well be other complex reasons for resentment, what struck me was the insistence to celebrate the return of the *balikbayans*. It was as though the locals were celebrating their collaboration with globality and bypassing the nation-state. The man who had returned from Manila clearly felt culturally superior to his barrio kin. They, in turn, seem to be subverting this Manila superiority by claiming a close affinity with overseas kin. This was stated to me in other ways—“*No agyanak idiyay Manila, nasaysayaat ditoy laengen, napinpintas ditoy ilik. Ngem no mapanak idiyay abrod mabalin ta padasek ken makitak iti sabali a lugar*” (“If I can only go to Manila, I might as

well stay in the barrio where life is better. But if I have a chance to go abroad, I'll try my luck so I can see other places"). What we are seeing here is the rebellion of the local against the national through the former's identification with globality.

Several years ago, I was taught to dance the macarena by Ilocano friends in Toronto. On my return to Zamora, I keenly displayed my dance skills, only to be informed that my Toronto teachers had got it wrong. They, the Zamorans, had learned the proper version from their kin who lived in Spain. Ilocanos in Toronto depend on their barrio kin to send them dubbed versions of Maria Mercedes and other Latin-American *telenovelas*. These examples indicate that the barrio is as much the source as the recipient of cultural flows.

One of the most powerful examples of this new global identity was provided by the Flor Contemplacion case (1995), a Filipino worker executed in Singapore. The national outrage represented the humble maid as hero, in contrast to the usual apologetic tone used for overseas maids. Contemplacion mythically encapsulated the nation's sufferings and indignities. Her death redeemed the injustices committed against others like her.

The Contemplacion example is interesting because it inverts national images in a global context. While rich Filipinos are embarrassed by the image of the overseas domestic worker, the poor use it to escape local conditions. The sight of thousands of Filipino maids camping in Hong Kong's public areas is a positive assertion of identity. When a wealthy Filipina expressed her indignation at being mistaken for a maid, she was quickly disabused by her poorer compatriots and instructed to remain at home on a day that belonged to them. The global context allows ordinary Filipinos to assert themselves in ways that subvert local and national hierarchies.

Conclusion—Possibilities and Threats

I began this paper by alluding to a paradox. Modern societies are invariably multicultural. They include a variety of local cultures as well as modes of life associated with different strata of national society. In addition, there are local and national experiences of the global as well as global representations of the local and the national. The problem is to sort them out in a meaningful way.

We have seen how global forces have had differential effects at the local and national levels. The internationalization of the Philippine economy in the 20th century exacerbated the plight of peasants in Negros and Ilocos. It also reinforced the influence of the wealthy and produced a national elite whose control of Philippine society remains practically unchallenged.

More recently, global opportunities are allowing poor Filipinos to achieve the social mobility denied them at home. It has also given them a new space in which to explore old and new identities. As a consequence, both local and national societies are changing. Balikbayans, including overseas workers, are accorded new and often improved statuses on their return.

This global awareness extends to all aspects of cultural life. Feminist and gay movements, environmentalists and New Ageists, postmodernists and followers of Tagalog rap all celebrate a new openness made possible by globality. Not only is cappuccino coffee and *shawarma* food more widely available, but national and local cuisine are recontextualized. *Dinuguan* (meat and entrails cooked with sour blood sauce), *balut* (about-to-hatch duck's egg) and *asucena* (cooked dog meat) become local delicacies. In the land of difference, everyone is the same.

While the global condition presents opportunities for exploring and celebrating new identities, it also poses corresponding threats. Local culture may be limiting and boring, but it imparts a strong sense of self and is not banal. Global culture threatens to dislodge the self so that one is at home nowhere and everywhere. One is always in transition somewhere else.

The symbolism of speed and travel capture this global restlessness. In a world without boundaries, movement becomes an end-in-itself and the vehicle represents the limits of our experience. The image of the cowboy riding into the sunset or of space missions searching for lost galaxies express this global preference for transitions. Its best embodiment is in the tourist constantly seeking new experiences elsewhere. Those who cannot afford to travel visit theme parks and enjoy a New York winter at the megamall. They are tourists at home.

Postmodernism is an attempt to celebrate this dislocation. But more prosaic examples are found in contemporary Philippine architecture. Subdivisions in Metro Manila give themselves exotic names like Buckingham Village or Corinthian Place and become monuments of banality. This banality is a consequence of the disarticulation between experience and representation which globality exacerbates. Hence, Coke can unashamedly advertise itself not only as a thirst quencher but

also as uplifting the Filipino spirit. The incongruities and contradictions of globality manifest themselves in places like Subic Bay and Clark Field, which combine marinas, golf-courses, casinos and other distractions for the super-rich, built next to sweatshops employing non-unionized labor. We are chillingly reassured that this is where our future lies.

The Philippine nation-state can hardly claim to have delivered the basic rights of citizenship to the majority of Filipinos. For this reason, many seek these rights abroad. But they also return, realizing that the nation-state remains a basic unit for the exercise of sovereignty. As Anderson (1983) has argued, a national imagination can create profound feelings of solidarity. This solidarity may even exceed feelings of local community. The latter are always subject to practical and contingent constraints while the former is necessarily imagined and hence may be idealized. Recently, the examples of mass suicides involving communities of strangers linked together by strong ideological ties remind us of the power of these new imaginaries (*e.g.* Jonestown).

National narratives invariably involve heroic struggles to achieve liberation. While nationalism often ends in chauvinism, in the modern period, no other entity has replaced the nation as a collective source for emancipation. How can a Filipino voice be heard other than through the nation-state? Put alternatively, how can a national culture survive without a supporting state? The global condition does not eliminate nation-states. In fact, it reinforces the dominance of powerful states, such as the U.S.A. and Japan. National cultures are a way of resisting this new global domination.

In this paper, I have tried to show the various ways in which local, national and global cultures are intertwined. Each has its appropriate sphere of relevance. Locality ensures a strong sense of self rooted in practical life. But it is limited by a lack of self-consciousness or a critical exegesis.

National cultures expand this self to include a wider community that is centered in a narrative of collective emancipation. It is the smallest unit that exercises the notion of sovereignty and conscious self-constitution. Notions of freedom, human rights and equality find their clearest expressions in national communities. However, these emancipatory narratives often fall under the control of exclusive national elites, Marcos' Bagong Lipunan being the most recent example of this corruption.

Global culture provides some space for identities unable to express themselves within the local and the national. However, as Appadurai has argued, diasporal interests have yet to find a discourse of emancipation outside the territorial nation-state. This lack of anchoring allows global representations to express fantastic claims unrelated to a lived-reality, hence the claim that Coke uplifts the Filipino spirit.

Culture is the web that we spin to locate ourselves within the world. It provides us with a perspective and a link to others. These perspectives and linkages ensure that no one exists alone and that the achievements of others enrich us all. But globality also disarticulates identities and representations from their corresponding objectifications. For this reason, as Markus (1997) argues, modernity is characterized by a surplus of meaning and a lack of sense. The surplus allows us to explore new imaginaries, but the lack creates problems for maintaining notions of stability.

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