

DECOLONIZATION THROUGH PEOPLE'S ART

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The recognition of traditional and current people's art, the study of its form, function and content, an analysis of its relation to our life and culture at this point in our history will provide, for us, the direction towards a culture that is authentically ours.

To focus on the art of the people as a point of departure is to acknowledge the important role it has in our effort to reeducate ourselves and counter the colonial consciousness that we have. This requires a restudy of approaches and methods of providing points of unity for the people with their own activities as its base.

The forms we see around us create a cultural environment that may be natural or incidental. For whatever intent it was made, these forms are perceived and are clearly the manifestations of life of the people who made them.

In these times of depravity and depression, these forms assert themselves culturally and contribute to the continuity of our life thread as a people.

Art reflects, interprets, and supports man's concept of himself and the significance of his role in the world. It is an integral part of the mechanism of social existence just as it is concerned with personal expression and aesthetic exploration.

The nature of art is such that it has a life of its own, a quality of "separateness" which makes it not only a description of reality but a parallel reality of its own. This does not mean that art is unconcerned with other things, because art has no meaning without a social context.

Art and human perception is a creation. The individuals who create and perceive art are part of society therefore people, art, and society are interrelated.

The intent of this paper is:

First, to focus on the art of ordinary people so that we may begin to recognize that there is a way of doing as a result of a way of life, therefore, form carries both function and meaning;

Second, to discover aesthetic values in people's art so that we may appreciate a sensibility that evolved from local history and local conditions, helping us to become aware of our identity as a people;

And third, to propose possibilities by way of concrete suggestions on a process of decolonization through people's art.

The Problem of Identity and Consciousness

One of the fundamental causes of the corruption of our national character is the infiltration of our psyche by colonial cultures. Renato Constantino¹ says: "the crisis of identity is so serious and difficult to resolve precisely because westernization has been so pervasive that by and large the Filipinos are unaware of their own lack of a national consciousness."

Pre-colonial Philippine society was not sufficiently developed as a nation when the Spanish colonizers came, conquered, and eroded whatever culture there was.

Using religion as a ploy, the Spaniards modified and changed the authentic historical development of a people when they Christianized them.

This process of westernization continued with the Americanization of the Filipino, and this time, through education, the Indio was taught how to think, feel, and appreciate what was American, a phenomenon that we still witness to date.

As a result of colonization, we have an impoverished culture, deprived of natural growth, a culture much abused and bastardized.

Culture is a production of the interaction and interrelations within a society. It differs from one society to another as a result of the dynamic forces within it, including factors such as ecology, geography, systems of thought, politics, beliefs, education, and so on.

Concretely, we can think of a culture in terms of modes of activities that express a collective competence or capability of what

the society has learned to do or make, such as ways of building, dancing, settling disputes; or in terms of entities such as institutions, customs, languages, tools and art works, embracing social systems and settled practices.

Culture competence is dependent on skills and talents of the members of a society but this competence is possessed by a society, thus it is a collective entity.

There are two types of cultural competence:²

Causal competence, referring to technology such as irrigating land, making weapons or weaving fabric, bringing about results by applying means-ends rules; and

Conventional competence, which gives added character or meaning to actions through the establishment of conventions, such as instituting marriage or devising systems of visual symbols.

Artistic activity is one of the components of culture and part of the life process that carries the seed of creative change. The meaning of a people's life is manifested in the products of artistic activities. The works of art created by people describe their past and present conditions and expresses their needs, values, thoughts, and emotions.

It would be easier if we were, as a people, homogenous in culture but our history attests to the fact, like it or not, that as a people, we have been exposed to diverse cultures. We see this in the number of languages that we speak, the different ways by which we cook and flavor our foods, the way we clothe ourselves, our manners, idiosyncracies and differences in behavior.

Before our country was colonized, our people are said to have had a diverse nature and differed somewhat in their lifeways. With colonization, the people were forced to conform with the culture of the invaders.

People assimilate experiences, so naturally, the foreign culture brought by the colonizers became models of our people who, exposed to new forms and systems, incorporated these in their lifestyle.

Consequently, we have become a people of conglomerate cultures and much confused in so far as a national identity is concerned.

People's Art

"People's art," in the context of this paper, refers to the art created by ordinary people. Art created by ordinary people has also been referred to as folk art, to mean the artistic production of the peasantry, of rural people. This is a narrow definition in Philippine context, since a great number of rural people have migrated to urban areas.

Rural folk who migrate to the cities in search of better life conditions, carry with them their traditional values but are shocked culturally by an alien and alienating city culture. They nevertheless assimilate this confused and polluted culture, increasing the number of the population who have been displaced culturally.

In a broad sense then, we shall refer to people's art as the art of the greater majority of the people. In our society, it is unfortunate that the greater majority of the population belong to the lower rather than the middle or higher strata. Thus, the word "people" also implies a social class which is lower in economic rank in comparison with the rest of society.

A low economic status, however, limits the greater majority's chances for thorough cultural pollution since exposure to foreign culture is limited by a deprived opportunity for education, travel, or the luxury of going to the movies, viewing video tapes and so forth. Somehow, values remain authentic and most of the art they create transmit value-images that their culture has of itself. Even as they are prone to imitate models of alien cultures, whatever unfolds from them are still more natural and naive, more authentic as the expression of a people.

There is a need to recognize people's art as an authentic manifestation of identity. Art is one of the systems of culture having its own dynamic, capable of transforming the status quo of colonialism in culture through the development of forms of expression and action that will crystallize into a people's culture, a culture linked to the people's needs and aspirations.

The Nature of People's Art

Before the age of modernization, crafts used to spring out of the heart and hands of man because he needed them. These products were made for use without any thought of creating works of art.

A people's art arises from cultural needs even if it is subject to natural conditions. It maintains traces of a primitive communal practice of art where we can hardly distinguish producer from consumer.

The art can become so popular that finally no one can say who invented them and as a result of continuous repetition and constant adaptation, take on such a conventional appearance that their unique, individually conditioned features disappear. The work comes into being as the constantly changing result of gradual adaptation. The creation of individuals and the property of many, this art assumes many versions and all versions are relevant and reliable.

People's art is created for its function and the maker is usually not conscious of producing art. As an art, it is considered stylistically behind the art of the "fine artist." However, the people who create the art are not conscious that they are producing something which goes beyond the boundaries of their daily forms of life and needs. The people are aesthetically innocent in their lack of concept of art for its own sake but it does not mean that what they produce are artistically inferior.

In people's art:

- (1) The producer is an unknown craftsman, not an artist-craftsman (the artist-craftsman being an individual artist who is conscious of himself as a "signature" artist);
- (2) There is a close connection between technology, the development of skill in an industry, and artistic activity;
- (3) Culture is a major consideration being the result of historical happenings, and therefore, patterns of culture carries with it particular points of view.

Let me discuss these points one by one, for in considering the art of a great number of unknown craftsmen, we hope to discover a directness of vision and honesty of purpose that will help us in our effort to define ourselves in history.

(1) *The producer is an unknown craftsman*

People's art is the art of anonymous craftsmen who produce crafts in quantities used by the masses in their daily lives. Initially, the art work is the creation of an individual but this is taken up by a social group, and by adoption, reproduction, or variation, become "folk art," i.e., people's art.

Many individuals work on the craft and as this happens, technology is transferred from one to another and the process becomes a tradition, learned over generations.

The repetition of the same process and constant adaptation takes on a collective character and a conventional appearance so that the individually-conditioned features disappear.

(2) *There is a close connection between technology, the development of skill in an industry, and artistic activity*

The process by which an object is created affects the resulting product. There is a close relation between technical virtuosity and the development of artistry. When the craftsman has become technically proficient, he is able to explore various possibilities in design.

Basically, people's art is a product of an industry in which feeling for form is inextricably bound with technical experience. Form and style depend on the development of technique. People's art could be anything from basketry, carving, weaving, metalwork, pottery and so on.

The initial motivation for production is its use and the form results from this functional need. Limitations of technology affect the nature of the forms that come out technomorphic.

Different crafts have technical limitations and possibilities which affect the resultant product, but the proficiency of the craftsman and the development of technique makes for artistry.

Franz Boas³, in his work on Primitive Art, pointed out that certain elements are apparent in all forms. One of these is SYMMETRY. By symmetry there is reference to balance. The most common being bilateral symmetry which is physiologically determined.

Craftsmen work with their arms and hands and the right and left motions lead to the feeling of symmetry, which may be arranged vertically, horizontally, or radially. It may also be inverted where we experience two symmetrical halves facing each other, in rotation.

RHYTHM is another important element evident in people's art. Technical activities with regularly repeated movements lead to rhythmic repetition which leads to pattern. The craftsman who has the

ability to perform a more complex action, produces a more complex rhythm.

Both symmetry and rhythmic repetition generally run on horizontal levels. This is why we commonly see repetitions in horizontal bands.

Treatment of surface leads to the development of patterns. While patterns are usually decorative, they are also visual symbols that are, in effect, the viewpoint of the producer.

(3) *Culture is a major consideration, art works transmit value-images*

A look into the relationship between art and religion is one way of looking at art as an integral part of the mechanism of social existence and its being interdependent with personal expression and aesthetic exploration.

The relationship of art and religion as manifested in the art of people tell much about their life.

Art and religion existed together in some form from the beginnings of organized communities. In interpreting the universe, all aspects of life were bound together in image-making. For the indigenous Filipino, *Bathala* was the "all-powerful god" represented by the sun, the moon, and the stars. They believed that there was a divine energy that animated the universe and this was manifested in every aspect of the natural world such as in stones, trees, clouds, fire. These symbols are represented in people's art: in baskets, blankets, tools, and implements. Early Filipinos must have incorporated them to ensure a good life.

The indigenous form of worship was done through the mediation of the *anito* or spirit of dead relatives represented by idols that were carved from stone, wood, and ivory. The carved idols were the conceptual representations of the divine power of *Bathalang Maykapal* and the other spirits in the universe.

Sacrificial offerings were given to the idols for the recovery of a sick person; for a good harvest; for a prosperous voyage; victory at war; or a successful delivery in childbirth and other such favors.

The *anito* was carved by anyone and regarded as a household guardian. Every family had such an image and carved one when-

ever a relative died, so that a household could have as many as 200 *anitos* passed from generation to generation. These figurative forms were carved rather vaguely since animism did not clearly delineate the appearance of supernatural beings.

When the Spaniards came, these carved figures were destroyed and in their stead religious images, called *santos*, were carved in the likeness of Christian saints and were venerated.

If we were to examine the sculpture produced in pre-Hispanic times, crude as they may be, we can still say that the art of carving the *santos* had a primitive tradition, although in the *santos*, Christian iconography and Chinese elements were incorporated. The pre-Hispanic form may have been Christianized and given a new face but it remained very much the indigenous carved figure that represented the *anito*. Basic values and practices persisted with external concepts modified to suit local patterns of doing, believing, and thinking. For areas converted to Spanish Catholicism, the Filipinos creatively evolved a folk Catholicism where traditional elements of worship fused with the new religion, and traditional system of values overlapped with Christian practices. This folk Catholicism gave rise to forms that show its syncretic nature.

Medallions made of copper or bronze, engraved with images of the Holy Family; the Blessed Virgin Mary, or of the saints, together with Latin scriptures, are examples of syncretic Catholicism. The early Filipino believed in the *anting-anting* or amulets, objects—natural or man-made, believed to have special powers, like giving protection (*panagang*) or of bringing good fortune to the believer. Amulets carried or worn by a person are kept in a place which is the desired sphere of influence, as on a roof or in the field.

When the Spanish missionaries brought medals to replace the *animistic idols*, the people developed a new system of faith and prayers; animistic beliefs and practices, however, continued and fused with Catholicism resulting in the metal *anting-anting*, an adaptation of the medals brought by the friars.

Because the *anting-anting* protected the wearer against witchcraft, sickness, or accidents, and made them invisible in the eyes of evil, it played a significant role in the thinking and motivation of peasant rebels, bandits, soldiers and generals.

There were many methods and variations of obtaining *anting-anting* but the most common way was to get hold of objects used

or associated with Holy Week rituals. However, it was not merely a matter of obtaining objects that magically protect their wearer, it also points to a complex system of beliefs and practices which is half-Christian and half-indigenous.

The fusion of beliefs, both colonial and indigenous is also evident in the syncretic form of wax effigies called "*katawan*," similar to *ex votos*.

These votive figures are set alongside votive candles as offering to God or the saints, requesting for varied favors such as the healing of some illness, protection of property and possessions, or as thanksgiving for requests granted.

As a votive figure, it functions much like the carved figures of animistic worship. The *katawan* is a supplement to prayer and through it, the faithful believes it will help solve problems such as marital infidelity, sickness, or even difficult examinations. It may be an offering to the departed or an expression of gratitude for favors granted such as the healing of a disease.

Most of the people who believe in the viability of the *katawan* rely on faith for most anything. For those who cannot afford a doctor or a counsellor, there is faith, the *katawan*, the *anting-anting* and "bahala na ang Diyos." The poor have nothing else but faith to see them through life's problems. And the *katawan* is an inexpensive remedy at 35 to 50 centavos each, much cheaper than a visit to the doctor.

When problems are chronic, a sustained prayer in the form of a nine-day novena is usually practised. The votive figure vendor becomes the "suki" of the person who has a problem and often becomes some kind of a shock absorber as she asks the other how she is getting along.

Both the *anting-anting* and *katawan* are people's art. The craftsmen who create these objects are anonymous; the process used are simple and economical.

The *anting-anting* is done through lost-wax process in small workshops using very simple and crude equipment. Because of constant use, the negative molds have eroded so that the linear quality of the images and inscriptions are no longer legible.

The process used in making the *katawan* is also economical. In fact, the melted wax (*pagkit*) from the burnt wax sold earlier,

are recycled. Negative molds are carved out of wood and constant use has also partially erased the features of the images.

Those who make the *anting-anting* and the *katawan* are not conscious of technical refinement or its aesthetic qualities. It has taken on a commercial purpose for the maker and the objective is to finish as many figures to sell, a means of economic production. Meanwhile, those who acquire either or both still believe in its magic.

Both forms are manifestations of faith and beliefs that go back to indigenous beliefs and practices, a fusion of two systems which adhere to the ideas of the colonizer and the viewpoint of the indigenous.

There is a social perspective, a creative perspective and a perspective which has to do with the medium itself. People's art is affected by social, economic, and aesthetic differences as much as underlying continuities of belief, imagery, and subject matter.

A conscious effort is necessary for decolonization. After all, the penetration of our hearts and minds by colonial cultures have all but anesthetized us. The people should be encouraged to think, question, reason, and create from their life experience. As a counter consciousness movement, it necessitates an awareness of issues and the need to destroy the colonial frame of mind.

It was through education that our consciousness became alien to our own culture. The American pattern of life became our models which encouraged imitativeness rather than originality, geared to a culture that we have psychologically accepted as our own, justifying it as being contemporary and international enjoying all the gloss of a canned culture that is nonetheless artificial.

Our sensibilities have become confused. We are more familiar and comfortable with western modes rather than Asian or eastern modes. A Philippine aesthetic cannot develop naturally because of the constant bombardment and continued intrusion of ideas and forms from without. Our concepts and standards of beauty are learned and acquired rather than lived and felt.

Decolonization will need some kind of internal revolution, a soul-searching that promises to be painful but inevitable if we want to survive as a people. An awareness and acceptance of the need to decolonize is the first step to authentic consciousness.

Art, being a total experience, is one medium which may be used for this purpose, the more authentic and powerful experience would be that which starts at the base.

Decolonization is possible through people's art:

- 1) Through documentation, preservation, revival, adaptation and popularization;
- 2) Through a program of conscientization of the craftsmen;
- 3) Through an art program that will focus the people's art, life, and culture in its curriculum.

Documentation, preservation, revival and adaptation of people's art is the initial stage of the process. A systematic collection and classification, a thorough study of people's art is necessary for us to take stock of our strength as a people. It is possible to conceptualize various programs after this initial phase, and to popularize it so that a great majority of the population will recognize the aesthetic of the people.

A second course of action is the program of conscientization of the craftsmen themselves; so that they may realize the power that they have in their hands as a people, shifting their goal from material profit to the higher goal of identity and consciousness.

Many craft communities have all but lost its tradition to meet the urgent problems and needs of a society in crisis. Such a community as Paete, for example, is rapidly being consumed by commercialism and the industrialization of handicrafts.

Paete is a town of creative people. Each household seems to be involved in one craft or the other such as wood carving, *bakya*-making or papier-mache toys (*taka*).

National consciousness does not come at all in the production of miniature wooden toys and dolls copied from printed catalogues as commissioned by wholesale purchasers from as far as Europe. Wood carvings of duck decoys, elephants, and figurative forms are done by reproduction, using machines to make the basic shape with the craftsman hand-finishing it at the end of the assembly line. Even the inexpensive *taka* sold outside church doors at fiesta time are no longer just the horse and the carabao. The giraffe and the elephant have joined the menagerie.

Economic need coupled with a disintegrated consciousness has contributed to the pollution and erosion of the authentic expression of people.

It is necessary then to raise the level of consciousness of the craftsmen themselves to counter the continued production of mindless crafts intended for the outsider but provide the insider with the outsider's images, thereby changing his own system of doing.

To further explain how a craft can evolve from its traditional form to a commercial form and then possibly to a conscious form, we will take mat-weaving as an example.

Matweaving: A Study of Contrast in Form and Content

Traditionally, the mat (*banig*) is used to sleep on, especially in many areas where raised beds are not used. The *banig* is also used like a carpet, for praying; to dry *palay* on, and lately, as a piece of art collected for display. It varies in size and quality, it can be coarse and rough but it can also be fine and soft.

Two areas are especially known for the *banig* that they produce. Those woven in Sulu and in Samar. Both have achieved recognition for their craftsmanship but they differ somewhat in technology and in content. Matweaving, because of the very nature of its process, contributes to the geometrization of forms found in its design patterns. Local culture also affects the nature and quality of the expression and the visual symbols incorporated as designs.

The Mats of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi

Matweaving is a woman's craft in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. It is found in different parts of Sulu but Laminusa, Siasi and Ungus Matata, Tandubas are considered the best centers of matweaving in the area.

The mats of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are double in thickness on account of a lower mat (*lapis*) which is plain and coarse, and an upper mat which is of finer weave and has a patterned design (*diam*). The size of a mat varies from 3 by 6 feet to 10 by 15 feet.

It takes about a week to prepare the fiber for weaving. First, *pandan* leaves are cut and the spines (*legget*) and center rib are removed. Then the halves are separated and rolled (*angalidikid*) in a coil (*pinatoko*), tied, and placed in a pot, held down by a rock, and softened in boiling water (*billa*). Later it is dried in the sun, uncoiled and flattened with a stick (*ambuhut*). The leaves are drawn

through a small metal-bladed gauge (*jangan*) which cuts each leaf into 4-5 narrow strips. These are loosely bundled and left in the sun before it is again soaked for 12 hours in cold water. When the fiber is dry, it is again softened with the *ambuhut*. By this time, the natural color has almost completely faded and the fiber is dyed (*angangibi*). Commercial dyes (*angibi*) of green (*gadung*), orange (*kulit*), red (*kapot*), violet (*taluk*), and blue (*bilu*) are used. After dyeing, the strips are dried in the shade to prevent fading and gently beaten to ensure softness.

Actual weaving takes from 2 to 4 weeks. Weaving begins at the middle with a special simple pattern (*amatal*). The strips are usually not long enough to reach the edge and a technique called *anugpat* is used where strips are added as continuators (*sugpat*). At the edge, the strips are knotted (*lipi*) to prevent unraveling.

All designs are directly woven into the mat. Patterns of design are never planned in advance. Because design motifs are traditional and small in number, there is a high degree of uniformity in design. There are four patterns (*sasa*):

- 1) stripes (*jali*)
- 2) vari-colored squares (*tabanas*)
- 3) checkered pattern in white and any other color (*kusta*)
- 4) zig-zag (*seko*), also known as *sasa kalis* because it is reminiscent of the wavy blade of the *kalis* (kris).

When a special design is made, a more difficult technique of weaving in the design is used (*sasapanapana*). A special border pattern (*sasadandan* or *sasaibud*) usually surrounds the inscription.

Generally, the quality of the mats is not based on the design but on the texture and softness of the weave.

In Ungus Matata, the weaver's pride was in his ability to produce more complex rhythms. Variations include long rectangles in different colors (*palang borus*); large squares in alternating colors (*kabang*), a complex zig-zag design (*binaliku*), a combination of stripes and diamonds (*balintung*); a pattern of small hexagons, and a popular pattern called *Tinabi*.

The Mats of Samar and Leyte

The Samar-Leyte mat is slightly different in technology and design from those in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The actual weaving cen-

ter of the area is Basey, a small coastal town in Samar, 27 kilometers from Tacloban City. It is not known when matweaving began but it is also a woman's craft in Samar.

The basic material used is the *tikug* plant. It is usually grown after rice harvest but *tikug* grows as weed with the rice in the fields. After harvest (*paggili*), the *tikug* weeds are dried under the sun (*paggamara*), then dyed (*pagtina*). Originally, vegetable dyes such as yellow from the *dulaw* plant and red from the *barok* tree were used, but now, synthetic dyes are used. Flattening of the fiber is done with a piece of wood before actual weaving (*paglara*).

In contrast to the Sulu process, the design is pre-sketched on the mat, after it has been woven (*pagbadlis*). A piece of chalk is used to sketch motifs such as flowers, peacocks, fruits, landscapes or the map of the Philippines. While the design motif is directly woven in Sulu, the designs in the Samar mat are embroidered (*pagpahut*). The designer suggests colors but the weaver and the one who embroiders may change the colors as they prefer. Buri is used as the embroidery material because it is softer than *tikug*.

Earlier design motifs were the hibiscus flower (*gumamela*) and landscapes of a farm, mountain and a nipa hut. Lately, other motifs have been added such as roses, dahlias, and orchids, the peacock, map of the Philippines, and the San Juanico bridge.

Representational motifs require a sketch but checkered patterns are also made without previous plan. Recent mats also carry designs that have been influenced by mats from Sulu but while the mats from Sulu are lighter in hues, the Samar checkered mats are heavier and colors are brighter. Border outlines are also used to frame central motifs.

Although bright and vivid colors are preferred, economic conditions have affected design trends. Design motifs have been embroidered using only natural and undyed fiber, creating a monochromatic scheme which is less costly and can be completed at a shorter time.

The mats of Basey are considered special. Many buy these as gifts for weddings, birthdays and special occasions. Monograms of the recipients, "His & Hers," or "Recuerdo" have been made to order. It has become such a special craft that designs conceived cater to the demands of the buyer or of souvenir hunters, tourists, and collectors.

And while it remains a people's art as a craft, most of the consumers are those who can afford the price.

There is a slight difference in the processes used by the two areas in the weaving of mats but the greatest difference is in the design motifs used. The difference is basically cultural. With the difference in material and process came the difference in quality. Culturally, the matweavers of Sulu are Muslims and traditionally use geometric rather than representational motifs. In contrast, the weavers of Samar-Leyte region come from a Hispanized area and use motifs that are representational.

Commercialization of Tradition

Whereas the *banig* was originally intended for home use, it has also become "art" bought by local and foreign connoisseurs for display in their homes. This has contributed to the commercialization of the craft which has in turn changed the attitude of the craftsman towards the craft. When the craftsman wove mats for home use, he made sure it was durable and colorful. As the product became popular and in demand among consumers from the craftsman's own social group, the product assumed a new function, that of community, so that the quality diminished to meet the demand and keep the supply going.

Both Sulu and Samar matweavers have now been affected by the open-ended nature of our culture. While motifs used to be traditionally geometric in Sulu, it now produces mats as well as woven wall hangings with motifs that are representational. Both areas still weave traditionally where technique is concerned, but both areas have adapted motifs more likely to be sold in the contemporary market.

In Sulu, a contemporary rendering of a landscape, almost descriptive of the area and its life and people, is used. The design is interesting but one doubts the authenticity of the motif as a natural expression of a people. It could very well be the design concept of one who studied design. In Samar, themes for the *banig* are made to order and lately, motifs such as the San Juanico bridge are popular, as evidence of the adaptation to contemporary life.

We see the people creating an art that is not entirely theirs because content no longer comes from within but is made to order from without, to meet economic demands.

The original function and motivation for creation is lost in meeting the demands for products which have taken on a commercial nature so that motifs and images may not even be significant to the person creating the piece.

Decolonization: A Conscious Form

As tradition continues in people's art, the content evolves in process and tradition becomes dynamic and can rightfully be referred to as a living tradition.

A living tradition implies a dynamic energy of a continuing tradition, changing in process yet retaining its tradition without being fossilized. As a living tradition, people's art, by way of technology, form, and content continues to provide meaning for both the producer and the consumer.

It is with this in mind that the process of decolonization is possible. The craftsman, if decolonized, will help hasten social transformation and provide the impetus for the decolonization of other minds.

First, it is important to recognize and become aware of our colonial consciousness so that we can provide concrete steps for social change. It will require great effort on those who will take on this proposed course of action, putting efforts and energy together to liberate our consciousness from colonial hang-ups and work together in capturing the spirit of the people, concretizing and objectifying it in different forms of expression. If it is possible to have contemporary motifs using the age-old tradition of mat-weaving, then it is possible to weave mats that will document and express insights from life perceived by the people themselves. The recording of these perceptions in the weaving of mats will actually document our history visually. It will provide future generations with important visual evidence of our history as recorded by unknown artists who, in effect, will be the recorders of our history. Motifs, subject matter, or themes to be produced should not be dictated to the craftsman. It is necessary for the craftsmen themselves to become conscious of the situation, to critically think of their socio-economic and historical processes so that they may express their own thoughts, ideas, and feelings about lived experiences, and for them to use their own symbols and images in the depiction of these experiences.

Motifs that depict local history, graphic analysis of society, contemporary news events and actual village experiences should be used more than those motifs which are stale, obsolete and empty. This is true not only for matweaving but for other crafts as well.

The potential of such a movement cannot be underestimated because it will draw from the power of a people's spirit and provide a dynamic force in the formation of a national consciousness. But before this can happen, there has to be a group of dedicated persons who will work with people. Their approach should be different from the middleman who imposes specific design to craftsmen for profit. The group who will implement such a program should consider the people and their culture even in the conceptual framework of the program itself. They should be people who can appreciate the aesthetic and technology of people's art even if the standards are different from those they have learned before. This dialectic manner of working with people will allow both of these groups to learn from each other and hopefully evolve a people-based aesthetic.

The Botswana Experience

A similar movement has been initiated in Botswana, Africa. Stories about the life of the people are woven into tapestries or wall hangings as part of a program of conscientization.

1) *On Drought*: If rain doesn't come, there will be drought and the life of the people becomes grim because of too much heat and little water.

2) *On Women*: A woman is on her feet the whole day. She does different tasks. In a poem on women, she is asked: "You're doing everything—what else don't you do?"

3) *On Woman*: The meaning of woman is often underestimated and because she is ordinary, she is not noticed. The woman provides light in the home and a lot of her tasks cannot be paid with corals or gold. She has a central role in society.

4) *Exodus of children*: This particular visual example shows how Botswana has been the refugee center for neighboring countries (South Africa, Namibia, Angola, and Zimbabwe). The theme shows the escape of 300 schoolchildren altogether in buses as they went over the border. This particular exodus has not yet been surpassed.

5) *On Mine workers*: The employment rate in a mining area in Botswana grows as production grows. Thousands are sent to the mining areas in South Africa, which is a bitter necessity.

For months, the mine workers' families are fatherless as they work in the mines. They are not allowed to go home after working hours. The daily wage earnings does not last from morning to evening but the workers continue to work.

6) *About tradition*: What is the value of a marriage if it is not talked about? My husband will never be home anyway because he can find work only outside the country. Our marriage will become very expensive because of wedding traditions: the bride's dowry, the wedding gown, the reception.

The example of Botswana is an inspiration for all people who have been colonized and who suffer on account of their colonial history, notwithstanding present conditions of neo-colonialism. There are many ways and means of fighting the problem of identity and consciousness, the best place to start is at home, and from the people themselves—with the language of their hands, hearts and minds, and their art.

In effect, the encouragement of the production of conscious forms implies a micro-media counterculture movement of educating the craftsman in terms of perceiving the actual realities of their socio-cultural environment. All aspects of production need to be studied so that the craftsman, while conscious of his form and content, will also be able to think of the economic aspect of production.

As technology and skill of the craftsman is developed, raising the artistic level of the works, it likewise becomes a document of the life of the people with their own perceptions and insights inextricably woven into the form.

A third program of action for decolonization through people is to consciously Filipinize the art programs in schools, on all levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. This does not limit itself to mean the mere use of Philippine materials as subject, nor the use of indigenous, natural, and economical materials available in the local market but a conscious effort to change attitudes and expectations with regard to education through the arts.

Instead of imposing standards of other cultures with the teachers providing the criteria, the learners need to be allowed to articulate and verbalize the visual expressions they themselves created or the visual perceptions that they have of their environment.

The general concern of art programs in most of our schools has been materials and techniques, the production of works which

are brilliantly colored with focus on skill for those schools which have a budget. In the meantime, pallid and timid works come from schools which have no budget. Art is not a matter of materials alone but the power of the expression. If the one who creates has something to say, then the work will be powerful even if he were to use a piece of charcoal.

An overemphasis in the learning of skill and technique limits the learner's capacity for expressing ideas, insights, and feelings or for the exploration of thought out themes based on actual realities. Many art programs are perceived as a luxury course that develop originality, spontaneity, and creativity. Many do not see it as a serious medium of education where learning is total because the creation of art is a whole experience of both mind and senses.

To decolonize through art programs would require a training program for teachers and the making of a curriculum that will have for its core the history and conditions of Philippine life and culture from the point of view of the people. This proposed program will study the art of the people in their community and the community at large. It will include the learning of crafts which are traditional and all creative work and exercises on sensory perception will be based on the specific culture of the learner. Such a curriculum will help learners recognize the worth, potential, limitations, and problems of culture.

Decolonization through people's art implies a campaign against a culture of ignorance. Focusing on the art of the people hopes to surface the needs, aspirations, and frustrations of the people. And by revitalizing and popularizing people's art, it may yet be a potent and dynamic force in the remaking of our history.

END NOTES

¹ Renato Constantino, *Insight and Foresight*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1977.

² Monroe C. Beardsley, *Art and Its Cultural Context*.

³ Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, (New York: Dover, 1955.)

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