

## **Making Sense of Being and Becoming Filipinos: An Indigenous Psychology Perspective**

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This qualitative study explored how 36 undergraduate students from the University of the Philippines who were born, raised and currently residing in the Philippines make sense of their “pagka-Pilipino” (being Filipinos). Using the method of *ginabayang talakayan* (indigenous facilitated discussions), it was found that notions of “being Filipino” were shaped by any of three factors: a sense of shared origins (*pinagmulan*); growing up in a similar cultural milieu (*kinalakhan*) and a shared consciousness (*kamalayan*). This may suggest uniformity in the participants’ definitions of “who the Filipino is” but analysis reveals that different people and groups tend to place different emphases on the three factors in their own attempts to come to terms with their identities as Filipinos. Hence, “Filipino” and “being Filipino” may evoke different meanings among different people.

National identity may be considered as one of the most complex, even most highly contested, concepts in this modern era. It may also have brought about the most dramatic effects, both positive and negative, in world history (Salazar, 1998). National identity has been the rallying cry of the colonized as they fought for their freedom and independence from colonizers. But at the same time, it also served as fuel for the oppression and discrimination of individuals and groups considered as “not one of us”.

Despite these powerful yet opposite effects, interest on national identity within psychology remains to be rather limited. The individualist focus in mainstream psychology may account for

this lack of interest. National identity and its relative, nationalism, may be deemed as too "macro" a construct for a psychological lens. Another reason may be that the concept may be too difficult to manage or operationalize since the affiliate concept of nation is also fraught with much semantic confusion (Jackson & Penrose, 1993). I found that if national identity is discussed, it is framed rather negatively, e.g., as a source of intergroup tensions (Cassidy & Trew, 1998) or in the reproduction and maintenance of stereotypes.

However, the increasing popularity of social categorization approaches may have provided some initial spark to this fledgling domain. Credit could be given to Tajfel (1969, 1970) who acknowledged the importance of membership to broader social groups such as the nation to our social identity. This recognition provided the preliminary basis for the development of his social identity theory (Salazar, 1998).

In contrast, national identity has been a long standing concern in the Philippines. However, Conaco (1996) observed that the popular approach is to examine the concept in its socio-political-historical context. Examples of this approach would be Constantino's (1974) treatise on the mis-education of the Filipino and even Enriquez's (1977) critique on supposedly Filipino national values. In a series of surveys, Doronila (1982, 1989 and 1992) provided the earliest empirical work on Filipino national identification.

Within Philippine psychology, however, very few empirical studies have been conducted. Cipres-Ortega (1984) explored the development of social-psychological concepts, including national identity, among children. Using a social cognitive approach, Conaco (1996) examined the location of national identity within the matrix of social identities identified as relevant by Filipino college students.

In general, the dominant discourse on national identity tends to focus only on the political aspects. Hence, there is a tendency to use national identity and citizenship interchangeably (Azurin, 1995). In this sense, national identity becomes a purely political identity and refers only to identification with the state. However,

an emerging view treats national identity also as a cultural identity (Anttila, 1997).

I feel that the role of culture in identity should never be underestimated nor neglected. I define culture as a system that creates meaning. A model called the *circuit of culture* demonstrates a process whereby culture gathers meaning at five different 'moments' — representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (du Gay, et al., 1997). Each of these 'moments' is interlinked with the other 'moments' in an on-going process of cultural encoding and dissemination. According to this formulation, identities are created, used and regulated within a culture that provides a set of meanings through a symbolic system of representation that feeds on identity positions.

Following this formulation, it is interesting to see how representations influence identity positions and vice versa. In particular, it would be fascinating to examine how representations of what it means to be a Filipino influence and are influenced by our identity positions as Filipino.

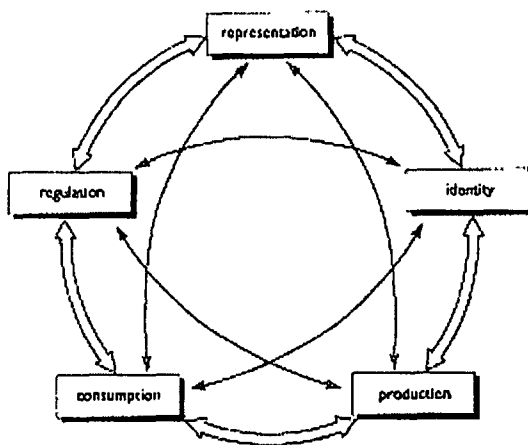


Figure 1. The circuit of culture

This sensitivity to culture as a primary context for meaning (and the subsequent creation and representation of identities) is one of the arenas of the indigenous psychology perspective. Enriquez (1976) decried the seemingly uncritical acceptance of Western theories, models, techniques and methods that dominated Philippine psychology in the 1970s. This lack of sensitivity to Filipino cultural conditions, in his view, led to a psychology that is alienating and alienated from the very people it was designed to serve. He envisioned to formalize a psychology that would be sensitive to Filipino realities and context, a psychology he termed as *sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology), but without neglecting knowledge derived in Western psychology that was found to be applicable to the Philippine setting (Enriquez, 1994). Thus, the indigenization of psychology in the Philippines was started.

Sinha (1997) identified four threads that define indigenous psychological perspectives: a) arise from within the culture; b) reflect local behaviors; c) interpret data from a local frame of reference; and d) yield results that are locally relevant. In essence, indigenous psychology aims to produce knowledge and practice that are culturally meaningful and relevant.

It is ironic that, despite the emphasis of *sikolohiyang Pilipino* on identity and consciousness, no empirical investigation of Filipino national identity from an indigenous psychological perspective has been done. The present study is an attempt to bridge this gap. Specifically, the study aimed to: a) surface meanings that participants associate with the term "Filipino"; b) explore their bases for defining the Filipino; c) examine the notions of "being Filipino"; and d) identify persons and contexts that shape their ideas and beliefs about being Filipino.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, I utilized a qualitative approach since I found this approach most consistent with the indigenous psychology perspective. In qualitative research, the *wholeness of experience* is valued and the discovery of *meaning and relevance* is prioritized.

I employed the *ginabayang talakayan* (GT) or *facilitated discussion*, an indigenous research method that is frequently used in the elaboration of issues or concepts (such as the concepts of *pagkatalake at pagkababae* in Pe-Pua, Aguilung-Dalisay, & Sto. Domingo, 1993), or in the collective analysis of problems, and decision-making (Galvez, 1988). In this research, I used the GT mainly to surface the meanings attached by the participants to the concept of being Filipino. Similar to the focus groups, the collective nature of the GT method also moves away from psychology's "essentially individualistic framework" (Puddifoot, 1995).

### **Participants**

Thirty-six undergraduate students (18 males and 18 females) from the University of the Philippines Diliman participated in the study. UP was chosen since it has a diverse undergraduate student population base, with a number of students coming from geographic locations outside Metro Manila and Luzon.

The participants represented six cultural groupings: Metro Manila and Batangas (Luzon); Iloilo and Cebu (Visayas); and Christians and Muslims (Mindanao). I approached different student organizations in order to identify and recruit potential participants. Aside from these, they were also recruited based on the following criteria: 1) both parents were Filipinos; 2) born, raised and currently residing in the Philippines; 3) finished elementary and secondary education in their home regions or provinces; and 4) undergraduates at the time of study.

The mean age of the participants is 19.47 years. More than half are products of private schools: elementary (77.8%) and secondary (63.9%). Majority of the participants (86.1%) reported using two to five languages, with Filipino as the most used language (97.2%).

## Procedure

Each GT is composed of three to five participants. I served as the facilitator for all the six GTs. I used a guide written in Filipino in facilitating the discussions, which I presented to every group at the start of the GT for approval. I also asked their permission to record our discussions. Before we started, I explained to the participants the purpose of the research and the details of the GT process. I emphasized to each group that they have the prerogative to steer the discussion in the direction and pace that they desired.

The discussions took place in the participants' accustomed environments, usually in their *tambayans* (student nooks) or in empty classrooms in the campus. The sessions usually lasted from one to one and a half hours. At the end of every discussion, I asked the participants about the process and thanked each one for their time and contributions.

All the discussions were transcribed and the transcripts were the bases of my analysis. I coded bits of information that I deemed important. I gave particular attention to "indigenous concepts," or terms used by the participants to label their experiences, feelings or thoughts (Patton, 1990). I then organized the coded information into categories or themes. I also looked for similarities and differences across cultural groupings. I also took note of illuminating or exemplary quotes from the participants.

After the analysis, I attempted to present the findings to the participants, but I was not able to re-convene all the groups for such a purpose. I was only able to gather the Metro Manila participants for the validation phase.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I would like to share an interesting observation that I have made as I posed my initial questions to the groups. While the participants gave immediate replies to the question "Are you a Filipino?" an uncertain silence usually prevailed when I asked them: "Why do you say so?" Some gave me incredulous and confused stares as if telling me that I should know the answer

to that question since all of us were Filipinos. Some stated that it is easier to answer the question if a foreigner has asked it. This stance revealed to me what Jackson and Penrose (1993) wrote about the concept of 'race' and 'nation' as being:

*"...so rooted in the way we think about the world that we tend to take the categories themselves for granted." [emphasis mine]*

The term "taken for granted" does not mean that the notion of being Filipino is unimportant. On the contrary, the participants found their "Filipino-ness" an important aspect of their social identity. This was similar to the findings of Conaco's (1996) study on the social identification and identity of college students. One participant from Manila remarked:

*"Kapag tinanggal sa iyo iyun, hindi mo alam kung saan ka pupunta o nanggaling." [If it's taken away from you, you wouldn't know where to go or where you have come from]*

Being taken for granted meant that the idea of being Filipino is usually unexamined, assumed, naturalized, and beyond inquiry in the context when the people involved in an interaction are *assumed* to be all Filipinos. Hence, the question "Are you a Filipino?" is seen to be more legitimate when it comes from an outsider. But, in the study, the participants were asked by another Filipino to explain, examine, reflect on and even challenge their own ideas about Filipino-ness. This was done in order to discover how and why the meanings about being Filipino is constructed, negotiated, and re-constructed.

### **Loob at Labas (From within and without):**

#### **Filipino as a social category**

For the participants, the label "Filipino" is a category that denotes a specific group of people. Salient in their identification of features were attributes that separated "Filipinos" from "non-Filipinos." Thus, it was important for the participants in their definition of Filipino to delineate members (ingroup) and non-

members (outgroup) of the category. This brings to mind Doronila's (1989) concepts: boundaries of inclusion (*loob*) and boundaries of exclusion (*labas*). The loob/labas (internatality/externality) dimension has been found to be important in Filipino indigenous psychology (see Alejo, 1990; Enriquez, 1994; Miranda, 1989).

Qualitative analysis of these boundaries revealed three important themes: *pinagmulan*, (socio-political dimension); *kinalakhan*, (cultural dimension); and *kamalayan*, (psychological dimension). Figure 2 represents these three dimensions.

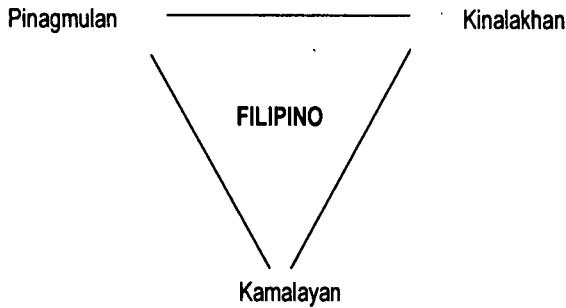


Figure 2. The dimensions of being Filipino

The first cluster of responses has something to do with the following: being born in the Philippines, having parents who are Filipinos, residing in the Philippines, is a Filipino citizen. Collectively, I referred to this cluster as "*pinagmulan*" (socio-political origins), which corresponds to a socio-political dimension. This dimension corresponds to the narrow definition of citizenship as stated in the 1987 Constitution.

The second theme, which I termed "*kinalakhan*" (cultural roots), revolves around participation and being immersed in a cultural milieu acknowledged as Filipino. The features identified in this cluster relate to ideas that identifies Filipinos from foreigners, which Moerman (1974) termed as "ethnic identification devices."



The salient features in this cluster include speaking of a Philippine language, and to a variety of beliefs and practices the participants termed as *diskarte* (loosely, approach or strategy). The *diskarte* concept is a fascinating one since I have heard the present generation of young Filipinos use it in a variety of contexts (see Tan, 1997). In this study, Ima, a Manila participant, defined *diskarte* as:

*"the way we see things, the way we look at things at saka paano natin pine-face yung bawat situwasyon na ma-encounter." [and how we face every situation that we encounter]*

Further exploration of the concept revealed two contexts of meanings. The first referred to cultural behavior, which is reminiscent of Jocano's (1997) *asal*. The second indicated a values component, which Jocano termed as *halaga*. In this respect, *diskarte* would refer to *asal* and *halaga* that the participants viewed as identifiably Filipino.

The last cluster is what I called "*kamalayan*" (consciousness). The responses in this dimension are associated with awareness of the self as Filipino, acceptance of membership in the category "Filipino", and also pride in this membership. I called it the psychological dimension, following Enriquez (1977):

*"Filipino identity is not static; a Filipino's self-image as a Filipino can be as varied as his background; it goes without saying that all Filipinos are alike regardless of all these, his consciousness of being a Filipino psychologically define him as one no matter how he sees and defines the Filipino."*

These stated boundaries become significant not only for identifying others who are part of the *loob* or *labas* of the category Filipino, but also for identifying the self as *loob* or *labas*. Interestingly, it was found that adolescents residing in the United States who self-identified as Filipinos provided bases that could be clustered using the same dimensions (Protacio-Marcelino, 1996). I considered the similarities as suggestive of a shared definition

of the label "Filipino" among those who are members of the category. Conaco (1996) also observed the same tendencies in Filipino students in her study. Thus, the dimensions may be considered as part of the participants' social representations of being Filipino. Also, the dimensions reflect the participants' idea of a prototypical (stereotypic) Filipino.

While there was a seeming consensus in the content of Filipino identity, I also found that the salience regarded for each dimension varied across individuals and cultural groupings. The different groups tended to highlight certain dimensions and aspects of the representations that they considered as integral to being Filipino (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dimensions and aspects of Filipino identity considered as integral across participant groups

Group	Dimension	Aspects
Manila	Kamalayan	Pride in being a Filipino
Batangas	Kinalakhan	Language
Cebu	Kamalayan	Awareness and acceptance of self as Filipino
Iloilo	Kinalakhan	Cultural practices
Christians from Mindanao	Kinalakhan	Cultural practices
Muslims from Mindanao	Pinagmulan	Being a citizen of the Philippines

Participants from Manila and Cebu had a tendency to emphasize the consciousness dimension while Batangas, Iloilo and Mindanao Christian participants considered the cultural aspects as most important. Meanwhile, the Muslim participants regarded their citizenship as the only important criterion for being a Filipino.

I also looked into aspects that the participants considered as non-integral in their definitions of being Filipinos. The responses were revealing. Manila and Cebu participants regarded the proficiency in Filipino as non-integral in their idea of a Filipino while Muslim referred to cultural beliefs, traditions and practices as unimportant in their classification.

What do these findings suggest? Conaco (1996) interpreted this heterogeneity as identity confusion among her study participants. However, I am more inclined to favor the motivational aspect of self-categorization by Abrams and Hogg (1990):

*"We are driven to represent the context dependent social world, including the self, in terms of categories which are most accessible to our cognitive apparatus and which best fit relevant, i.e., subjectively important, useful, meaningful, similarities and differences in stimulus domain."*

The similarities in the themes or dimensions represent those ideas that are most accessible to the participants' cognitive apparatus (the idea of a prototypical Filipino). However, the differences accorded to the salience of each dimension reflect the attempts by the participants to select which are subjectively important. In the case of Manila and Cebu participants, the fact that by their own admission, their language, ideologies and practices are more American-oriented did not prevent them from categorizing themselves as *loob* by highlighting the consciousness dimension (acceptance of and pride in being a Filipino). Meanwhile, the Muslim participants regarded themselves as *loob* based only on their membership in the state. They de-emphasized the cultural dimension largely due to the difference in religion.

This suggests that the participants were motivated to highlight those dimensions that made them closer to the prototypical Filipino and to de-emphasize the dimensions that distance them from this ideal. This could also indicate that the notion of being Filipino is still a relevant identity among the participants. This finding echoes the results of Conaco's (1996) study.

**Babaw at Lalim (Surface and Depth):  
Filipino-ness as an ethical standard**

While Filipino represents the social category, "*pagka-Filipino*" (being Filipino or Filipino-ness) denotes an evaluative aspect of being a member of that social group. Filipino-ness refer to the quality of being Filipino. From the discussions, two levels of

Filipino-ness (qualities) were identified by the participants. I used the labels that the participants actually used in the discussions: "*Pilipino sa pangalan*" (Filipino in name or nominal Filipino), and "*Pilipino sa puso*" (Filipino by heart).

When asked to define what they meant by "*Pilipino sa pangalan*", the features enumerated by the participants corresponded to an image of a passive citizen. This individual may accept or recognize that he or she is a Filipino but may not be involved in activities that highlight the identity.

According to Covar (1995), the kind of *puso* one has signifies the strength of one's personal conviction. In this sense, a "*Pilipino sa puso*" is someone who considers Filipino-ness a conviction (*pananindigan*). Thus, the use of the term "*Pilipino sa puso*" suggests that Filipino-ness has become internalized or integrated with the *loob*. In the previous section, *loob/labas* was used in the context of category membership. In this section, *loob* refers to those ideas that are deemed important and relevant in relation to the self, while *labas* may be considered as irrelevant and unimportant. While it is appropriate to assume that "*Pilipino sa puso*" have deemed their Filipino-ness as *loob* and thus, an important aspect of their identity, it may be too hasty to say that Filipino-ness is *labas* and therefore irrelevant among "*Pilipino sa pangalan*."

I would argue that nominal Filipinos, due to a recognition of the self as Filipino, also makes Filipino-ness a part of their *loob*. However, there seems to be a qualitative difference or gradation of this kind of integration into the *loob*. Again, I turned to Covar (1995) for some answers. He used a Manuvu jar as a metaphor for Filipino personhood. According to him, it has three elements: *loob*, *labas* and *lalim* (depth). While Covar used *lalim* as a distinct aspect of *pagkatao*, I used *lalim* to signify the gradation of integration into the *loob*. Thus, *Pilipino sa pangalan* would imply a superficial (*mababaw*) integration and *Pilipino sa puso* would suggest a deeper (*malalim*) integration into the *loob*.

How would we know if Filipino-ness is superficial or not? Based on Miranda's (1989) formulation, *loob* has *galaw*:

*"Galaw is the personal and personalizing category. Man is personal and personalized in his galaw, as that pagitan between his loob and his labas, be it realized in kilos or concretized in gawa."*

In this sense, the difference in *Pilipino sa pangalan* and *Pilipino sa puso* lie in the activity (*galaw*) of the *loob* or the lack of it. Since Filipino-ness is deeply integrated in a *Pilipino sa puso's* *loob* then it has become personal and personalized, which can only be realized in *kilos* (behavior) and concretized in *gawa* (habit). Thus, the *loob's galaw* is recognized only when it is manifested in the *labas* since: "*Loob can manifest itself only through some form of externalization*" (Miranda, 1989).

Thus, a *Pilipino sa puso* can only be recognized through his or her actions. Jayson, a participant from Batangas, expounds:

*"Parang hindi lang pina-practice yung pagiging Pilipino, nag-aaral siya sa mga kultura sa Pilipinas. Inaalam niya yung pamumuhay ng ibang tao, hindi lang iyong malalapit sa kaniya, parang gumagamit pa siya ng oras para lang matutunan niya yung kultura ng Pilipinas" [...does not only practice being a Filipino, he also studies the culture. He investigates the way of life of other people, not only those who are closest to him. This comes to a point that he devotes a certain amount of time in studying Filipino culture.]*

The following summarizes other responses by the participants as part of the *galaw* of *Pilipino sa puso*.

- Recognizes and accepts the self as Filipino
- Takes pride in being Filipino Recognizes and accepts fellow Filipinos
- Has empathy for fellow Filipinos
- Involved in the affairs of fellow Filipinos

The Filipino-ness of *Pilipino sa pangalan* is also manifested through the *galaw* of their *loob*. Table 2 summarizes the differences between *Pilipino sa pangalan* and *Pilipino sa puso* in terms of *galaw*.

Table 2. Differences between Pilipino sa pangalan and Pilipino sa puso

Kinds of Filipino-ness	Level of integration into the Loob	Manifested "galaw"
Pilipino sa pangalan	Mababaw (superficial)	Recognition and Acceptance of self as Filipino
Pilipino sa puso	Malalim(deep)	Conviction in self as Filipino

I have noticed that Filipino-ness is not simply a description of behaviors associated with those who identify as Filipinos. It was very clear in the discussions, especially among Manila and Cebu participants, that some individuals' Filipino-ness is better than others. Thus, the idea of Filipino-ness invokes some sort of an ethical standard of being Filipino.

Filipino-ness is the identity's performative aspect. The performative is the element that bring impetus to personhood (Tolentino, 2001). In order for an identity to be validated, it has to be performed. Through performance, the identity is rehearsed and strengthened.

What is the relationship of Filipino-ness (identity position) to the dimensions of being a Filipino (representation)? By examining the manifested galaw of both identity positions, it seems that level of consciousness (*kamalayan*) serves as the primary criterion of determining identity position. High level means deeper integration (*Pilipino sa puso*) while low level consciousness (*Pilipino sa pangalan*) may account for superficial integration.

## SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The label "Filipino" functions as a social category. And as such, it is important to identify its boundaries. The meaningful boundaries define the *loob/labas* of the concept of Filipino. Identity as Filipino was found to have three relevant components: *pinagmulan* (socio-political component); *kinalakhan* (cultural component); and *kamalayan* (psychological component). This

supports the position that national identity is more than a political identity. It is possible to think of national identity as three kinds of relationships: relationship with the state; relationship with culture; and relationship with self and others. Also, the extensiveness of the three themes across the cultural groups denotes that these dimensions make up the representation of a prototypical Filipino.

However, the more interesting finding is that individuals and groups place differing emphases on the three dimensions. One possible explanation would be is that they are motivated to highlight dimensions that make them similar to this prototype and at the same time, de-emphasize the characteristics that make them dissimilar from this prototype. This suggests that the national identity as Filipino is important. However, the analysis did not provide an explanation for such a motivation. Would the desire to be similar to the prototypical Filipino imply, as social identity theory would suggest, that the Filipino as a social category has attained a positive status in the eyes of the participants? Unfortunately, this is beyond the study's scope.

Another important implication is that it reveals the constructed-ness of our national identity. Our notion of being Filipino is negotiated and not fixed. This means that our definitions of being Filipino have the potential to be changed depending on a variety of factors: gender, ethnicity, age, political convictions, background, upbringing among others. True, this flexibility may bring about more confusion about our national identity but on a more positive note, this could also provide maneuverable spaces for marginalized groups to participate in a national context: Chinese-Filipinos, Amerasians and other biracials in the Philippines; naturalized citizens; indigenous peoples; and non-Christian groups.

Last, the analysis identified two kinds of Filipino-ness. This is based on the level of identity integration into one's *loob*. A more integrated sense of Filipino identity is called "*Pilipino sa puso*". The individual who has not fully integrated this sense of being Filipino into the self is known as "*Pilipino sa pangalan*."

*Kamalayan* (psychological sense) seems to be the primary determining factor of Filipino-ness. There is a need to explore the function of the other two dimensions in determining identity positions. How do differing emphases on the dimensions impact on the resulting identity positions?

In this study, the relationship between representation and identity position has been explored in the context of Filipino as national identity. It was clear that both the social context and individual subjectivity play significant roles in the direction with which Filipino identities could take shape.

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