



Colonizing the Filipino Palate

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Abstract: Filipino cuisine reflects the rich cultural heritage of the Filipinos. It is an integral part of Filipino culture. However, due to many influences, the taste for Filipino cuisine has begun to be replaced by the preference for foreign food. In many social gatherings, in restaurants, as well as in many households, Filipino food is being demoted to a position of inferiority. Likewise, the way Filipino food is presently prepared has been modified to cater to the foreign taste. We argue that the colonization of the Filipino palate indicates a colonization of a lifeworld. Many Filipinos have lost their understanding of their own culture as they have become attracted to foreign ways. This paper intends to present a Habermasian philosophical discourse of the colonization of the Filipino food as a factor undermining Filipino culture. The first part of the paper will be a brief discussion of Filipino food as a reflection of authentic Filipino culture and how the Filipino cuisine is slowly relegated into the background by the foreign cuisine. The second part of the paper involves a philosophical analysis, utilizing the Habermasian framework, of the effects of the alienation of the Filipino from his or her own lifeworld. In this section, an exposition of how cultural identities are dissolved in the interplay of cultures will be discussed. The preservation of the Filipino lifeworld is crucial to every Filipino. It will determine his or her attitude in confronting personal, national, and global issues now and in the future. While it is true that culture is continuously evolving, we argue that its essentials must remain intact in order to preserve the vitality of the Filipino lifeworld.

Key Words: Culture; Food; Lifeworld; Alienation; Filipino Philosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

The various cultural practices of the Filipino people reveal the Filipino philosophy. (Timbreza 2008) These practices reveal the Filipino's way of thinking, values, and how reality is perceived and constructed. Garcia (2000) states, apropos Timbreza,

a(He) finds this Filipino worldview in the sayings of the old. He gathers adages from all over the Philippines and extracts from them the essential belief-system of the people. (148)

Implicit to a philosophy is a people's culture. Habermas (1979) understands culture as shaped by the lifeworld.¹ For Habermas,

¹ The concept of the lifeworld was introduced by Edmund Husserl (1970) who saw the lifeworld as the sphere of shared experiences of various objects by diverse perceiving subjects with distinct conditions and circumstances. Habermas (1981a) uses it in relation to cultural domination by the dominant mode of production.



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The lifeworld is a reservoir of taken-for-granted practices, roles, social meanings, and norms that constitutes a shared horizon of understanding and possible interactions. The lifeworld is a largely implicit “know-how” that is holistically structured and unavailable (in its entirety) to conscious reflective control. We pick it up by being socialized into the shared meaning patterns and personality structures made available by the social institutions of our culture: kinship, education, religion, civil society, and so on. The lifeworld sets out norms that structure our daily interactions. We don’t usually talk about the norms we use to regulate our behavior. We simply assume they stand on good reasons and deploy them intuitively. (Cherem 2016)

The Filipino lifeworld is, thus, a reflection of the authentic Filipino consciousness – a consciousness which makes the Filipino unique in the world. It is the source of the Filipino identity. Habermas maintains that there can be no “I” without the society. The lifeworld is the house of what people in a society share in common. (Habermas 1981b, 40-42) The Filipino lifeworld is then the shared set of values which gives identity to the Filipino “I.” As such, the preservation of the Filipino lifeworld is crucial to the Filipino. It determines the Filipino’s attitude in confronting personal, national, and global issues. The preservation of the authentic Filipino lifeworld sustains the Filipino identity and rich cultural heritage. For Habermas, a crisis emerges when changes in the structure are induced which are critical to a group’s existence and their identities threatened. (Sitton 2003, 62)

If culture reveals the philosophy of a people, the Filipino food culture therefore, is a rich source of Filipino philosophy. Food culture is a strong indicator of an identity because “identity – religious, national, ethnic – is intensely bound up with food.” (Civitello 2008, xiv) Claude Levi-Straus adds that food communicates messages –the deep structures of the cultural life of people. He adds further, “... food as a form of communication finds most of its applications in the process of defining one’s individuality and one’s place in society. Food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions.” (Anderson 2005, 109-124) Food, therefore, is a language that expresses the content of culture and the identity of a people. (Sapir 1921)

2. A HABERMASIAN FOOD DISCOURSE

This paper attempts to present a Habermasian discourse on the Filipino lifeworld through Filipino food culture. According to Jürgen Habermas, “the ultimate identification of ‘one society’ depends on the understanding of society’s participants, which takes place in the lifeworld.” (Oddvar and Weigard 2003, 84) The lifeworld embodies the cultural values of people which are revealed in their various cultural practices. The cultural values reveal the identity of people because they serve as the lens of which they understand reality. Food culture, then, is one avenue to understand the identity of a society.

This paper’s problematique revolves around Filipino cuisine as a reflection of the rich cultural heritage of the Filipinos. Much of Filipino culture revolves around food and its geosocial loci – the kitchen and the dining table (wherever it may be placed). Unfortunately, due to many influences, the Filipino cuisine has begun to be replaced by the preference for foreign food. In many social gatherings, in restaurants, as well as in many households, the Filipino food has been demoted to a position of inferiority. Likewise, the way Filipino food is presently prepared has been modified to cater to the taste of the foreigner (or to the foreign taste in the Filipino). Many Filipinos have lost interest in their own culture as they have become attracted to foreign ways. Habermas famously refers to this as “the colonization of the lifeworld,” comparing this process with the destruction of local meaning-giving cultures by an imperial power pursuing its narrow designs (Oddvar and Weigard 2003, 88).

The Filipino’s alienation from the authentic lifeworld poses threats and problems. It threatens to destroy institutions founded on Filipino values erected by a Filipino lifeworld by way of the palate. The transformation of the Filipino consciousness to a foreign frame of mind leads to ineffective measures to combat



existing socio-political problems and challenges hounding the country at present. The alienation from one's own lifeworld "leads to a widely perceived loss of meaning and weakening of social solidarity..." (Honneh and Joas 1991, 255-256) Further, Quito argues that "... we believe that it is the philosopher's task to discover this distinctly Filipino spirit. While this spirit cannot be easily expressed in words, it can be discerned in the Filipino sense of values which, after all, colors his actions and his attitudes." (1990, 754)

3. FOOD IN THE FILIPINO LIFEWORLD

Filipino food expresses a lifeworld wherein lies the source of Filipino values and identity. It speaks of the Filipino's understanding of identity, place, and role in the universe, while he/she relates with his/her fellows. We reflect then on what we will refer to in this paper as the Filipino foodscape as a focal point in our discussion of culture as integral to the Filipino lifeworld.

A foodscape has been defined as "the multiplicity of sites where food is displayed for purchase, and where it may also be consumed... (including) supermarket chains, fast food outlets, independent supermarkets, restaurants, specialty food shops, local (though increasingly corporate-controlled) convenience stores, farmers' markets and street food." (Winson 2004) However, the term has expanded to cover "the farms and gardens where food is grown, and the spaces and places where food is discussed, from classrooms to the Internet. Foodscapes are social constructions that encompass the cultural ideals of how food relates to places, people and food systems." (Jonston, Biro and MacKendrick 2009) Thus, the term now includes the geopolitical dimensions of food, its cultural foundations, and as the multiple discourses built from and around it as well. Foodscape discourse has subsequently delved into the philosophical/political debate on food, health, and the body and has not escaped the perennial issues of class, social and economic inequalities, and structural change. (Panelli and Tipa 2009)

In table 1 (below), Doreen Fernandez (1994) provides a starting point for sketching the Filipino foodscape. She identifies the characteristics of a pre-colonial Filipino food, clearly showing an originality of taste. Although the pre-colonial Filipino food originated from the Malay cultural matrix, Besa and Dorotan (2006, 12) assert that "through the course of its unique history, the Philippines has developed distinct culinary preferences of its own" – a clear indication of a unique Filipino lifeworld.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Origin | Malay Cultural Matrix (Mainland and Island Southeast Asia) |
| Ingredients | vegetables, fish, meat, spices, and condiments from the landscape |
| Method of Cooking | boiled, roasted on coal, simmered in vinegar |
| Popular Food | Sinigang, Kinilaw |

The arrival of foreign influences introduced some developments in Filipino cuisine (see table 2) (Fernandez, 1994, pp. 224-226). Foreign ways of cooking and foreign ingredients have been adapted by the Filipinos, indicative of the evolution of the Filipino lifeworld as reflected in its evolving foodscape. The introduction of non endemic plants into the colonial agricultural system also had its effects as new types of food found their way into Filipino kitchens. However, in the past, despite the entry of foreign influences, Filipino food has sustained its vigor; the essence of Filipino cuisine was preserved. The Filipino cultural foodscape resisted its colonization.

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Raymond Sokolov states that the Philippines, in contrast to other cultures, was able to sustain its indigenous food. (Besa and Dorotan, 2006, p. 12) Foreign food influences were indigenized to fit the Filipino palate. The Filipino food has sustained its essential character described by culinary experts as:

Filipino food has a deep and complex taste that has been described as *linamnam*. Literally “deliciousness” yet signifying much more, it is the root of the word *malinamnam*, which is how a Filipino might describe the savory and fragrant quality of a dish. (Barretto, et al. 2013, 13)

“[The developments in] the Filipino cuisine is a sum of Philippine history, from the indigenous food of the prehistoric era, to the influences of Southeast Asian cooking brought by trade, and the colonial influences brought by conquest. In recent years, because of domestic migration, tourism, national food businesses, and through the mass media, regional dishes have gone beyond their borders and become part of the national table,” say several analysts (Barretto, et al. 2013, 10)

But such has been the thrownness of the Filipino in history. The interfacing of cultures as an effect of Philippine historical drama may have altered the Filipino lifeworld but that aspect of the lifeworld (which will be shown in the next section) is reflective of how the Filipino spirit has remained foundational to its culture.

Table 2. Foreign Influences on the Filipino Foodscape (Fernandez 1994)

| Influences | Contributions to Filipino Culinary Culture |
|------------|--|
| Chinese | Soybeans, curds, certain pork and beef cuts, pansit mami, bihon, sotanghon, siopao, siomai, crullers, and cooking with oil in a wok |
| Spanish | stuffed capons, beef rolls, the stews of meats, the sausages and vegetables (<i>cocido</i> , <i>pochero</i>), <i>leche flan</i> , <i>brazo de mercedes</i> , <i>sans rival</i> |
| American | frozen and pressure-cooked foods, foods portable and quick |
| Others | pizza, <i>sukiyaki</i> , Mongolian barbecue, roast beef |

4. THE FILIPINO FOOD AS THE EXPRESSION OF FILIPINO LIFEWORLD

Filipino food is a fusion of the Filipino environment and the Filipino’s circumstances and conditions. Doreen Fernandez (1988) asserts that Filipino food reflects the Filipino’s relation to his environment, to his fellowmen, and to the world.

The Filipino’s relationship to the environment as shown by food indicates Filipino simplicity and an intimate relation with nature. For the Filipino, food is a gift from nature; hence, nature or the environment must not be abused by consuming more of what is needed in order for it to continuously provide. In relation to this, The *Apuy*, a ritual in the Mountain Province in the Cordillera, would have natives offer sacrifices to the spirit of the field to appease the spirit to avoid the loss of grains as they are carried from the fields to their village. Another aspect of food culture is how Filipinos are capable of adapting to various situations as shown in the manner of cooking which rests on what is available. Exemplifying the Filipino’s flexibility in terms of rules; i.e., the Filipino is willing to deviate from established rules to accommodate existing conditions. (Fernandez, 1988, pp. 10-12)

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Likewise, the Filipino's relation to his fellowmen is revealed in the Filipino's use of *sawsawan* (sauce). The use of *sawsawan* reveals a communal and participatory relation. The simple cooking methods is to give way to the use of *sawsawan*. It gives an opportunity to the eater to infuse the flavor or specific kind of taste in the food. The Filipino food, therefore, manifests a democratic nature and an indiscriminating attitude towards his/her fellowmen. As Fernandez, (1988, pp. 14-15)

Our simple cooking methods - boiling, steaming, roasting, sour-stewing - do have flavors built in, but they are simple and basic, and invite "consumer participation."...What does it all mean? That the chef and the eater, the creator and the consumer, are on equal footing; that eating is an act of creation in which both participate, an experience in which both are creators and critics.

Lastly, the Filipino food also expresses his/her relationship with the world. The influences brought by the foreigners were indigenized and incorporated with the Filipino cuisine. (Fernandez, 1988, pp. 17-18) Indeed, the Filipinos are accommodating without compromising their identity. This characteristic of the Filipino food indicates that Filipinos are lovers of order and harmony, reflective of our hospitable quality known all over the world. Citing Quito in her work, Garcia (2000, p. 170) shows that:

The Filipino believes in *pakikisama*, or smooth interpersonal relationships. *Pakikisama*, which literally means "to live well with others" is a spirit of camaraderie pushed to an extreme. This means that because one lives in a community, one should discard all tendency to oppose. Instead, one should agree with the rest of the community for the sake of harmony. Hence, the Filipino, as a general rule, does not "rock the boat"; he is willing to go along with the rest to preserve peace and assure smooth interpersonal relationships...

The Filipino understanding of his/her environment, fellowmen, and the world speaks of the Filipino lifeworld which has become the foundation of Filipino values and identity – A Filipino worldview. Being the shared world with others, the lifeworld is also the foundation of Filipino solidarity and integration. This makes the lifeworld a fragile and sensitive aspect of humanity. The corruption of the lifeworld results to the erosion of Filipino values and identity which can affect Filipino social and political principles and systems.

5. THE COLONIZATION OF THE FILIPINO PALATE

The interfacing of culture with others makes is a major factor in cultural changes. This form of influencing is made possible by many interrelated socio-political, cultural and religious factors. With the emergence of technologies; like the television, the internet, etc., the interfacing of cultures has become intense and rapid. Food, which is an expression of culture, endures the same condition.

The challenge of the culinary realm is that like other aspects of culture, it is dynamic. It is in particular a component of life constantly subjected to unrecorded improvisation, the stress of market supply with its introduction of new ingredients, the rivalry of changing social indices, and the development of a new "common taste" conditioned by convenience food and cooking ingredients for mass consumption. New generations are unfamiliar with the finest examples of native cuisine, the sense of fineness giving in to crudeness in texture and roughness of seasoning for the majority. (Sta. Maria 2006, 20)

Recently, Filipino cuisine has begun to be replaced by the preference for foreign food. In many Philippine restaurants and during special occasions at home, more prominent are foreign dishes - usually Spanish, American, and Continental - "with occasionally a token of native dish." (Fernandez, 1994, pp. 20 &

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226) Likewise, the way Filipino food is presently prepared has been modified to cater to the foreign taste. More and more Filipino families are 'eating out' or preparing instant recipes, eschewing the traditional cook-in at home where preparation is a solidarity event and the lengthily tedious food chores such as preparing the vegetables, slicing meat, fetching water, cooking various recipes, and washing the dishes are divided among several members of the family – with only the actual dining involving all participants in a culminating full-family festive culinary affair.

Habermas (1981b) theorizes a two-fold process to explain these transformations that come slowly but come they do in due course. First, new products infringe on our familiar patterns of consumption and as more and more individuals develop a taste for them, they are integrated into our daily consumption patterns and practices. Second, the transformation of families from agricultural rootedness to industrial employment has effected the detachment or the 'uncoupling' of the traditional system of production (that is, families producing their own food) from the lifeworld of food. In other words, when Filipinos were producing their own food from their own gardens and their own kitchens, lifeworld and system were one – unified in what we call the Filipino cultural cuisine reflective of Filipino values and beliefs. But once these two were 'uncoupled,' the Filipino became open to the attractions of the foreign food production and distribution system, that is, characterized by convenience, mass and standardized production, artificial processing, biological rationalization and modification, and – of course – all designed to maximize profit.

In *Toward a Rational Society*, Habermas (1971) explored the role of technology in the domination of the lifeworld. His account is eminently useful in this reflection on palatal transformations as information and communication technologies have been significantly responsible not only for the arrival of foreign menus and dietary options to Filipinos but their increasing market accessibilities as well. The culture industry in food may well be an offshoot of Adorno and Horkheimer's enlightenment dialectics but Habermas (as the last critical theorist) proves to be the inheritor of this intellectual strand as well. The food industry is a well-oiled system of modern production (with its biotechnologies, genetic modification thrusts, and landuse space-maximizing modalities), advertising (with its consumer-psychological profiling and experimentations), and marketing (with its global, multi-cultural and multi-lingual networks of hyperstores, supermalls and mega-centers).

Science and reason have been employed in this global assault on the traditional lifeworld. Advertising in today's high-tech media epitomizes what Habermas (1971) called "the manipulation of electoral, consumer, or leisure time behavior," (55) exemplified by the seemingly consumer-friendly labels declaring the levels of sugar percentages that cater to the rational health conscious eye of the beverage consumer and the indicative levels of fat and sodium in burgers and processed meat toward which the eye of the fast-food but healthconscious addict always focuses. And, of course, that global brand of the food product will never fail to bring consumers in. When all these are presented in communicatively distorted ways that for Habermas illustrates the non-objectivity and non-politicization of science, the lifeworld may see a dwindling of its already little chances of survival. Can we now, for example, say that we are benefited by the increasing shift of Filipino tastes and preferences for so-called "health foods" and "nutraceutical supplements" when these could be veritably other attacks on the lifeworld by another emergent tentacle of the food industrial system?

This development is indicative of the erosion of the Filipino lifeworld - the lifeworld which has been the force behind Filipino solidarity. According to Habermas, systems have their own self-perpetuating logic that if unnoticed, they will colonize and destroy the lifeworld. (Cherem, n.d.) Citing Ernst Bloch, Jürgen Habermas (1981a, p. 85) agrees that "the rationality of modern science is, in its roots, distorted by capitalism in such a way as to rob modern technology of the innocence of a pure productive force." "The crucial effect of "affluence" in post-war capitalism has surely been to justify the ideology and allow the practice of individualism and to link the acquisition and use of consumer goods to values which emphasize the importance of the search for personal identity and authenticity." (Moorhouse 1983, 422)

Ironically, such an identity today is rooted not in the depth of the meaningful social relationships that had characterized the lifeworld and gave identity to the "I" as a social being but in the shallow dispassionate – and objective – valuation of currency. It is measured by how much the purchase was worth given the unauthentic rationalizations of the material properties of the acquisition. Unfortunately, this is an objectivity that is as illusory as the per se value of the paper or coin on which it is printed or minted.



This is not to say that the lifeworld is characterized by a passive reaction to its colonization. Indeed, colonization breeds its own resistance and Habermas identifies a cultural dimension of reflectivity to cultural changes. People have the capacity to identify ideologically based patterns of language and interpretation. However, the precondition for reflective consciousness is undistorted communication. (Habermas 1981b) This, unfortunately, is becoming increasingly unavailable in today's marketing strategies by food merchants that intentionally hide their corporate intentions and realities behind glitzy consciousness-blinding hyperrealities.

Mikkelson (2011) theorizes that the foodscape relentlessly creeps outward via two trajectories. The first is through the commercial which is best manifested in the rapidly expanding food outlets, fast food and restaurant chains, and convenience stores all over the country. The second trajectory is through public geographic spaces such as government canteens, hospitals, schools and other workplaces. Such is advanced inexorably and relentlessly the colonization of the lifeworld. The catchy and salivating advertisements for McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, soft drinks, liquor, sandwiches, salads, snacks, ice cream and various other imported products (as well as local products with foreign style) exert tremendous influence and an invitation to patronize such to the people especially the young.

Moreover, the employment of science and technology in food production has led to further layers of invasive control. The consumer is bombarded and overwhelmed by such levels of information and data on nutrition and the increasingly sophisticated techniques of production that they find it easier to abandon reflective and critical thinking and succumb to the assault of the information overload through a blind acceptance of what is advertised. Furthermore, mass production crowds out traditional items in the marketing menu as they come cheaper and more abundantly in various labels that hide false choices. Slowly, maybe even unconsciously, with the items in the food menu being slowly replaced, the consumers' dietary options are slowly transformed. Mahoney (2015, 215) notes that, "the structural influences flowing from market and administrative systems may not be consciously experienced by individuals in their lifeworld but they are present and real. These influences actualize the 'colonization' of the lifeworld by the system."

The Filipino's turning away from Filipino food and the corresponding increased appetite for foreign tastes and preferences, whether willful or unconscious, reflects the degree of the success of the capitalist system in the national mode of production. Strategies of production and distribution (like tactical product displays on eye-level selves and more accessible aisles) will have, of course, varying levels of impact on consumer (i.e. Filipino) consciousness but there are those who, without exposure to the reflective skills acquired through critical pedagogy, will inevitably fall into the new colonial patterns of consumption. Habermas states that a crisis occurs when a foreign system's encroachment becomes near total and it now dominates a lifeworld which will further lead to its destruction. (Sitton, 2003, p. 62). While the lifeworld determines the Filipino attitude in confronting personal, national, and global issues in the future, the continuing colonization of the Filipino lifeworld requires a change of logical orientation of the self, of the others, and of the world. Having been equipped with a foreign consciousness, the Filipino will have to address various matters from a foreign framework.

6. A DISCONTENT OF GLOBALIZATION

To be sure, the invasion of the Filipino table and palate by non-Filipino food products may simply be one inevitable consequence of globalization and, by accepting their entry, Filipinos are in one way adapting to a new international system (Friedman, 1999). After all, even in any street in the United States, "one can find grapes from Chile, apples from New Zealand, oranges from Brazil, processed meats and cheeses from Europe, and even "organic" fruits and vegetables from Central America." (Lacy, 2000, p. 19) *Balut* can now also be ordered in a New York restaurant (Rappler, 2015). One may argue therefore that the internalization of Filipino food comes as the global village democratizes itself including its tastes and preferences. Global communities are the better off because of this, as peoples experience other cultures and gain higher levels of understanding about each other.

Indeed, some have even advocated the adoption of an international commensal community where nations share each other's food items through a global system of commercial exchange where they can benefit



from each other's agricultural products. They advocate some kind of a foodshed of products where the international community can share not just products but knowledge and skills of production. Say the advocates, "The commensal community should confront and address the need not just for equitable access to food, but also for broader participation in decision-making by marginalized or disempowered groups." (Klopenburg et al., 1996, p. 37)

However, these alternative viewpoints miss the point that global corporate linkages in food production and consumption separate local communities not only from their food but also from the local knowledge of how their own food is grown, processed, and prepared. As such, the base of their lifeworld is altered to conform to international standards. Commensal communities also are still linked to the global corporate food chain and ultimately reduce exchanges to commercial transactions and products as well as food production and consumption, and the knowledge of these themselves to exchangeable (i.e. marketable) commodities. (Lacy, 2000)

7. CONCLUSION

The Philippines, at present, displays a gruesome face to the world. Relations between communities have been marked by misunderstanding, compounded by economic, political, and environmental concerns. Obviously, there is an indication of a difficulty figuring out effective solutions to such concerns.

What makes it difficult for Filipinos to find suitable and appropriate solutions to the current problems? Certainly, one can find the answer in the colonization of the Filipino lifeworld as reflected in the case of the Filipino palate. Until the collective Filipino consciousness reflected in the Filipino lifeworld is restored, no effective solution will be realized. Citing the historian Michael Stürmer, Habermas (1988, 28) asserts that "in a country without history, he who fills the memory, defines the concepts and interprets the past, wins the future." Furthermore, Habermas (1995, 851) states: "Citizens share a political culture shaped by a particular history. The constitutional principles are, without any harm to their universalist meaning, can be interpreted from the perspective of this political culture, which provides at the same time the base for constitutional patriotism. Solidarity is the best solution to all socialpolitical problems and the best way to sustain solidarity is to preserve the lifeworld."

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