# SOCIOLOGICAL MUSINGS ON Collective Memories and Shared Identities: The Case of the Philippines<sup>2</sup>

Clarence M. Batan, PhD<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This research commentary offers preliminary sociological musings on the collective memories and shared identities in the Philippines. It provides insights drawn from select research data and stories and argues on how the interrelated contexts, cultures, and Catholicity provide the social imaginary of Filipino collective memories and shared identities. This also highlights Jose Rizal's theory of the colonial Philippines in understanding the memory-making processes as a byproduct of coloniality and globalization. In so doing, the paper unravels a glimpse of the country's socio-historical engagements, tensions, and negotiations with her historical memories and the under-appreciated multicultural social identity. In conclusion, this paper provides an insight on a systematic documentation of how shared identities emerge from collective memories of faith, histories, culture, and social change.

Keywords: Sociology, collective memories, shared identities, cultures, Catholicity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Clarence M. Batan, PhD is Professor of Sociology, and a Research Associate of the Research Center for Social Sciences and Education in the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines. He was the Principal Investigator of the *National Catechetical Study (NCS) 2021: Pastoral Action Research and Intervention (PARI) Project* where some research data described in this current paper was based on.

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#### Interrogating the Concepts of Memory and Identity Sociologically

In general, a rich array of social science literature dealt with the concepts of memory and identity extensively. Specifically, these concepts mainly interrogate the questions on how human beings remember and construct identities (Aho, 2016; Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Biernat, 2018; Conway, 2010; Hatfield, 1998). Across disciplinal lines, these concepts are popular subjects of discourse because of their theoretical power to understand the dynamics of cultures, change, and societies such as in historical studies (for example, Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Hogan, 2011; Megill, 1998), political science (for example, Hedmen & Sidel, 2000; Yean, 2021), and, economics (for example, Kehily, 2009).

As a sociologist, the *problematique* that first comes to mind when one examines conceptually, memory and identity, is the question of the "social." That is, on how these concepts unravel the dynamics of social processes as by-products of relations between or among individuals dealing with varying histories, cultures, and socioeconomic and political structures. This inquiry point is best articulated by fellow social scientists in terms of *collective memories and shared identities* (Barash, 2016; Cordonnier et al., 2022; Knapp, 1989b; Nagano, 2013).

In this research commentary, I follow this interest in offering a sociological understanding of memory and identity, first as a collective, and second, as a shared social activity. I shall do this by proposing some preliminary ideas as byproducts of my "musings" drawn from my multifaceted training and research in the subfields of the sociology of children, youth, work, education, and Filipino Catholicism. Methodologically, my discussion uses research stories relating select empirical findings and sociological insights.

This examination flows through three working conceptual dimensions: contexts, cultures, and Catholicity to describe a sociology of collective memories and shared identities in the Philippines. I argue that the intertwining relations among these conceptual dimensions provide a social imaginary of Filipino collective and shared identities. Thus, unravelling a glimpse of the country's socio-historical engagements, tensions, and negotiations with her historical memories and under-appreciated multicultural identity (Aguas, 1987; Never & Albert, 2021).

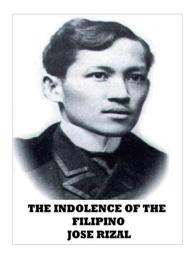
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#### Contexts

My initial attempt to understand the Philippine collective memories and shared identities is by looking at our socio-historical past. This exercise intends to provide *context* in order to have a historical grip of the societal conditions that make up our contemporary Philippines.

One distinct feature of our country that does not invite any contradiction is that the Philippines of today is a by-product of centuries of colonization (Decena, 2014; Lacson, 2004) by Spain, the US Americans, and Japan, for a brief but also disastrous time. Correspondingly, the memories of Filipino people are robbed-off of our pre-colonial histories (Alatas, 2014). As such, there is always a fascination with recovering long lost socio-historical memories (Um, 2012; Yu, 2008) in a hope that we can redefine our Filipino social identity (Aguas, 1987; Bernad, 1971). Thus, this led me to question how, in the context of the Philippine experience, are collective memories constructed and how shared identities emerge from a multi-colonial past?

Rizal, our 19<sup>th</sup>-century national hero may be instructive in this regard. Alatas (2014, 2017) argues that he may have been the first systematic social thinker in our region due to his writings on the state of colonial Philippines. A case in point is Rizal's (1890) writing on the indolence of the Filipinos where he strongly argues against the idea of the backwardness of the Filipinos on their alleged indolence by the Spanish colonizers. Rizal's agenda was clear to turn the Spanish argument on its head by showing the backwardness of the Filipinos was in fact a consequence of colonial rule. I see this as a lucid example of the power of socio-historical structures in the memory-making processes of how



collective memories are historically constructed, and how such idea of a group of people, such as the Filipinos, may be seen as a collective - lazy and indolent.

Interestingly, this sociology of knowledge-making and knowledge productions when institutionalized, in government, educational, and even church spaces, evolve social mechanisms for the social reproduction of these knowledges as collective memories (Barash, 2016; Jedlowski, 2001; Packard, 2009; Walker, 2018). These socio-historical and economic factors shape the lives of the collective (Grindstaff, 1999; Nemedi, 1995; Olick & Robbins, 1998). One strategy to overcome such discriminatory and stereotypical memories about a country or a group of people is by employing what Mills (1959) call as the "sociological imagination". He defines this as having a quality of mind that endeavor understanding the intersection between biography and history.

My analysis of the indolent Filipinos where I unearthed the concept of historical violence using sociological imagination may serve as an illustrative example. In this work (Batan, 2021b) I offered an articulation of the contemporary lazy indolent Filipinos called *istambays* (on standing by) using Rizal's theory of the colonial Philippines.

In this theoretical examination, I observed the familial-faith dynamic (Batan, 2010, 2012) that protects the *istambay* from the mal-effects of unemployment in a country where the economic structures are persistently weak in providing decent access to both education and livelihood to her citizens (Batan, 2016). I also observed in Rizal's writing, his interest at highlighting how practice of religious rituals remains strong and argue about its survival in our colonial past (Batan, 2021b), seemingly presenting a distinct way of seeing "religion", which I call as sociology of Catholicism in colonial Philippines. This is a salient point in understanding our collective memories.

To wit: "Key to Rizal's writings is his insistence of presenting the problem of Filipino indolence as being intertwined with the history of Catholicism in the context of colonialism. Rizal's way of doing a sociology of Catholicism is not simply a critiquing of our Catholic faith" (Batan, 2021b) but rather unravelling how the structures of colonialism (where Catholicism as a religion was used as a conduit for abuses) can powerfully distort collective memory-making processes. A vivid example of this is the phenomenon of indolent lazy Filipinos during Rizal's time that relatively persists in the stereotypical images of contemporary *istambays*.

Collective memories, therefore, are to be dealt with caution, critical mindedness, and historical contextual analysis to be freed from socio-historical distortions, misrepresentations, and revisionisms (Knapp, 1989a; Nemedi, 1995; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Such distortions are evident even in Rizal's time like the "fake news" and "made-up truths" littering our Internet and social media world of today. This demonstrates how collective memories and shared identities are historically constructed and negotiated against the perpetuated malpractice of memory-making processes (Araújo & dos Santos, 2009; Bankoff, 2001; Tupas, 2008).

#### Cultures

An examination of "cultures" relative to the Philippine social landscape is another fascinating sociological dimension to muse about shared identities. I use the concept of cultures here as pertaining to the shared values, attitude, and way of life, with emphasis on the integrated pattern of inheriting, socializing, and constructing of knowledges and practices across generations (for more extensive definition, see Turner, 2006).

Some culturally fascinating facts about the Philippines are the following: Firstly, the Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7000 islands which shape her varying human geographies and cultural traits. Secondly, there are more or less 187 languages in the country depending on the kind of classifications (Aguas, 1987; Constantino, 1976). There are more than 100 ethno-linguistic groups constituting our indigenous peoples' groups. Thirdly, globalization has produced a distinct cultural phenomenon of Filipino diaspora in terms of overseas employment and emigration. To date we have about two million overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and the number of Filipinos opting to emigrate in various parts of the world to seek opportunities abroad. In a sense, this constitutes what may be regarded as living cultural memories of contemporary Philippines (Aguila, 2015; Yu, 2008).

This leads me to question: How do integrated cultural patterns shape our collective memories? And how do shared identities emerge from these cultural engagements?

I now draw attention to our five-year project, the National *Catechetical Study 2016-2021: Pastoral Action Research and Intervention (PARI) Project*<sup>3</sup> which documented the state of Catechetical Ministry (CM) in the Philippine Catholic Church. The study examined five CM dimensions such as the lives of (a) catechists – those teaching fundamental lessons about the Catholic faith; (b) catechetical leaders – usually functions as CM formators and coordinators; (c) the catechized – those who received catechetical instructions; (d) catechetical formation



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The project accomplishments may be accessed through the website: www.ncs2021pariproject.com. The research monograph, Katekista Findings and Insights can be downloaded online through this link - https://www.ncs2021pariproject.com/katekista-findings-insights .

practices; and (e) catechetical human resources including some inquiry on the relations of Filipino culture and Catholicism (Batan, 2021a).

This points to the insight that on the one hand, the Catholic faith has indeed, for five centuries, shaped our value system on family, community, and respect for others but on the other, this should also be perceived as shared human values across nations and religions that also points to our precolonial cultures and dispositions (Bernad, 1971; Rizal, 1890, 1972). Also, as Filipino Catholics continue to celebrate religious events, these may be seen as suggestive of how religious values inform and shape the humanity of Filipinos, our collective memories and shared identities now being transported and translocated across the world through migration and diaspora (Kulska, 2020).

Two insights come into play here. First, while our NCS research captured the collective memories of selected Filipino catechized respondents, the memories of various Filipino religious, cultural, and linguistic groups, remain wanting. Second, directs attention to a more seething cultural point of view of recognizing the multicultural nature and social dynamics of our contemporary Philippine society in our state laws and practices (Aguilar, 2019; Jose, 2001; Tiatco et al., 2019). As a sociologist, I am at awe seeing my country being weak in terms of implementing laws and policies relative to our multicultural identities as a country of many nations. To date, the Philippines does not have an explicit law on multiculturalism which maybe the reason why in terms of languages, the country adheres only to English and Filipino (Republic of the Philippines, 1987), the latter having been construed as a new language construction to recognize other languages but this is heavily biased on Tagalog, the language in Northern Philippines and Manila where the most powerful political and economic Filipino elites are based. Regrettably, our country has yet to fully recognize our indebtedness to our own indigenous peoples who should have been regarded as our first nations. Their cultural memories remain muted and voiceless.

These musings engender a social imaginary of a collective Filipino memories and shared identities that are multicultural (Aguila, 2015; Ismail, 2014; Jonsson, 2010), inclusive (Barash, 2016), historically-contextualized (Bankoff, 2001; Martin, 2020), and global (Nagano, 2013; Rüland, 2010; Vatikiotis, 1999). Correspondingly, this social imaginary requires structures and institutions to evolve, time and resources to negotiate, and people as social agents to recognize how cultural histories and memories make up shared identities.

### Catholicity

The last dimension of my sociological musings is about Filipino Catholicity. This notion refers to the capacity of being in conformity with the Catholic faith (Joven et al., 2021). My interest here is to interrogate the following questions: *How does observed Catholicity in the NCS Project impact my understanding of collective memories? What does Catholicity tell me about shared identities?* 

With reference to the earlier NCS data, the role of Catholic Schools was examined to know if they serve as spaces for new evangelization (Batan & de Vergara, 2021). Interestingly, based on the reports of Ecclesiastical Territories in the last ten years, there has been a steady growth in the number of Catholic schools, teachers, and enrollees. Further, these Catholic schools are serious in playing a pivotal role in molding the youth to

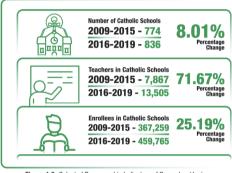


Figure 1.3. Selected Demographic Indicators of Secondary/Junior High School Catholic Schools in the Philippines

become competent members of society, as in the case of the *Archdiocese of Zamboanga* (Batan & de Vergara, 2021, p. 15). I find it liberating to note the Catholic Schools sharing in the collective vision of being social agents of change in a world that is global, pluralistic, and multicultural (Gutierrez, 2007; Inyanwachi, 2007).

Moreover, the NCS reported from a sample of more than 6,000 catechized respondents' perceptions on Catholic schools, issues, social teachings, and, church involvement. Results suggest a relatively high sense of belongingness to the Catholic church, high sense of practice as Catholics, and their reported high level of happiness as Catholics

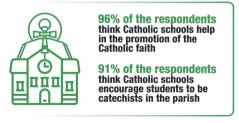


Figure 5.11. Do you think these Catholic schools help in the promotion of the Catholic faith? (n= 4,809) Do you think these Catholic schools encourage students to be catechists in the parish? (n= 4,801)

(Joven et al., 2021, pp. 142, 144). Interestingly, when select catechized respondents were asked about church involvement in politics, more than half think that yes, the Catholic church should be involved (Joven et al., 2021, p. 152). Correspondingly, these respondents reported being aware of the positions of the Church in those identified social issues (Joven et al., 2021, p. 153).

In my view, these findings point to the value on how social change in societies matter in shaping collective memories of particular social identity combinations such as Filipino Catholics or Catholic Filipinos traversing the contemporary world. These select catechized respondents also reported having positive views of the Catholic schools because they promote Catholic faith and encourage venues for catechetical engagements (Joven et al., 2021, pp. 155, 157). The catechized respondents also reported meaningful catechetical experiences growing-up, learning the concepts (such as goodness, love, forgiveness, conscience, morals, etc.), reflecting sets of shared human values that make up collective memories and identities (Joven et al., 2021, pp. 158-159). This observation contradicts the common portrayal of Filipino Catholics in main stream media.

An example of this contradiction is the encroaching fear of secularization as indicated by the decrease in mass attendance and the emergence of what other reports say as "doubtful Catholics" (Dobbelaere, 1981; Nghia, 1996; Sapitula & Cornelio, 2014; Stark, 1999). What were salient in both the literature and NCS findings are two-fold observations. First directs attention to contradictions to what we know about Filipino Catholics; and second, despite being considered a Catholic country, systematic and organized knowledge about the sociology of Filipino Catholics and Catholicism remains wanting.

#### **Concluding Sociological Insight**

The central argument of my sociological musings brings forth critical attention to the building of critical knowledge on the intersections of contexts, cultures, and Catholicities if informed collective memories and shared identities of Filipino Catholics and/or Catholic Filipinos is desired. This interest may bear fruit by building a network of institutes and centers to establish a shared *Catholic Studies Initiative* in the Philippines and internationally. In so doing, a systematic documentation of how shared identities may emerge from studying collective memories of faith, histories, culture, and social change.

This is the *problematique* of what I propose as the social imaginaries of collective memories and shared identities that can be interrogated empirically using the social sciences such as Sociology.

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