

Re-threading the Terrains of Filipino Identity through the Native Canopies

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Abstract: This article interrogates the Filipino ontological constructs of *kapwa*, *pakikipagkapwa*, and *loob*, tracing their genealogical and philosophical provenance to elucidate pre-colonial articulations of selfhood and sociability; and thus, contends that Filipino identity is best understood not through colonial nomenclature, but through the recuperation of indigenous ontological constructs. The author argues that the concepts of *kapwa* (shared self), *pakikipagkapwa* (relationality), and *loob* (interiority) constitute a pre-colonial “native canopy” that continues to provide the architectural scaffold for Filipino subjectivity. Through the prism of *Bayanihan*, conceptually contiguous with *bayani*, *bagani*, *berani*, and *wani*, the study foregrounds the axiological and relational frameworks endemic to Austronesian epistemologies, which predate colonial interpellations. The paper proceeds by first critiquing colonial narratives of “primitivism” before examining archaeological evidence, such as the *Manunggul Jar* and *Balangay*, to establish a maritime-based epistemology of interconnectedness. The author then reinterprets the *Sandugo* (blood compact) as a sacred covenant of *kapatiran* (brotherhood) among equals, rather than a ritual of surrender. Finally, the study traces the trajectory of these indigenous values into the contemporary praxis of *kabayanihan* (communal heroism). The scope focuses on Austronesian genealogical roots to offer a significant philosophical framework for modern national identity. By recuperating these indigenous epistemic formations, the paper seeks to reconstruct a decolonized Filipino subjectivity, rearticulating the *kapwa-loob* nexus and examining the continued operationalization of *kabayanihan* within contemporary sociocultural praxis.

Keywords: *kabayanihan*, *bagani*, *bayani*, *kapwa*, *loob*

Introduction

The question of Filipino Identity is a very polarized subject to discuss, or even touch because, due to several factors, we have no unified and consensual ontologico-existential standard that will serve as the architectural scaffold of (national) Identity. Teodoro Agoncillo, a renowned historian, believed that we lack a singular, unified history. Our past is fragmented, with the histories of Caviteños, Ilocanos, Bisaya, Bicolanos, and others existing in isolation, each developing largely apart, reflecting the deep regional divides within the archipelago. This motto of ‘nation/identity building’ was only triggered because of and after the execution of Gomburza in Bagumbayan. Our islands are packed with many cultures, ethnic groups, languages, religion, etc.¹

¹ See Ferdinand Blumentritt, *An Attempt at Writing a Philippine Ethnography*, trans. by M.N. Maceda (Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1980), originally published in 1882. N.B.: It was during the 19th century that another classification of the people of the Philippines came into being, this time divided into Negritos, Proto-Malays (or

Today, our sense of national identity and participation in nation-building remains relatively shallow, partly as a legacy of the nineteenth-century Eurocentric project of nationalism, which originally sought to justify wars in the name of the nation. This fragility is further compounded by persistent economic challenges, while our approaches to nationhood often mirror the patterns set by America. Whether it is a product of past colonial rules/cultural imperialism or of the natural familial belongingness of the Filipinos, it is certain that we are mostly cornered by the question of what makes us Filipinos.² This question starkly contradicts the identity created by centuries of foreign narratives, often loaded with bias and prejudice. In the pre-colonial Philippines, the archipelago has often been described by foreign observers as “backward” compared to other parts of the Far East, lacking organized political structures and governed through fragmented, localized communities. Colonizers have often described the people of the Philippine Islands as lacking “*elaborate political organization*.”³

In his *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, Antonio de Morga explicitly hinted at the inferiority and being backwards and ‘heathens’ (*gentilidades*); that prior to conversion, we are in a state of ‘darkness’ brought by our ‘pagan religions.’

Sujetadas las islas, con la soberana luz del santo Evangelio, que en ellas entró, se bautizaron los infieles, desterrando las tinieblas de su gentilidad, y mudaron sus nombres en el de cristianos. Y dejando también las islas el que tenían (2), tomaron (con la mudanza de ley y bautismo de sus Naturales) el nombre de Islas Filipinas, en reconocimiento de las grandes mercedes que recibieron de la Magestad de Filipo segundo nuestro señor; en cuyo felice tiempo y gobierno, fueron conquistadas (3), favorecidas y regaladas, como obra y hechura de sus reales manos.⁴

What de Morga appeals here, to the *lector* specifically, is to portray Spain as a savior and bringer of light and organized political system under the Spanish Royal hands. As an important piece of history, many of its aspects predominantly reflect a Eurocentric view, wherein native societies are represented as being more primitive. The book perfectly explains the technologies, governance, and culture of Filipinos that subtly shapes the thoughts of the readers that Filipinos are ‘inferior’ to the Spanish civilization. This colonial misrepresentation and cognition that our ancestors are inadequate reflects through how we view ourselves up until today.

Indonesians), and Deutero-Malays (or Malays). Among the principal proponents of this classification were J. Montano in 1886 and F. Blumentritt in 1882.

² Niels Mulder, “Filipino Identity: The Haunting Question,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32:1 (2013): 55–80; 57-59. N.B: For the readers who find the question of identity would really benefit from delving into the works of national heroes such as José Rizal and Emilio Jacinto, for pretty important proponents of the topic at hand. However, for this discussion, the author have chosen to temporarily leave out their contributions to instead delve into redefining Filipino identity through the most prominent cultural concept of *Pakikipagkapwa*, seen through the lens of Bayani/Bagani.

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A Short History of the Far East* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946) 277-278.

⁴ Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (París: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1890), 30. Translation: After the islands had been subdued by the entry there of the conquering light of the holy Gospel the heathen were baptised, the darkness of their paganism was banished, and they changed their names for Christian ones. The islands, also, abandoned their old name, taking (with the change of religion and the baptism of their inhabitants) the name of Philippine Islands¹, in recognition of the great favours received from his Majesty Philip the Second, our lord, in whose happy reign and under whose government they were conquered, protected and favoured as a task accomplished by his own royal hands.

In this sense, the *Doña Victorina Syndrome* is an embodiment of the enduring legacy of sustained low self-esteem or self-contempt embedded in centuries-long colonization and internalized foreign values. Named after a character in José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Doña Victorina embodies the tragic mentality of those who abandoned their identity for installed ideals-thoughts. This is exemplified in her distaste of her skin color and her marriage with a white Spaniard for the sake of social promotion. This syndrome manifests through doubting one's capabilities for achievement, tendencies of belittling, lack of mutual respect, and the failure to utilize rich cultural resources. All these contribute, in turn, to the underdevelopment of Philippine society since these negative self-perceptions impede the growth of individuals and collectives.⁵

Given these, the *hermeneutical rearticulation*—the ongoing process of reinterpreting and reshaping the Filipino sense of self in response to evolving realities—that the author, and many others historians and scholars alike, have been committed to do ever since will be the serving defense frontier as to why this study is important.

Rethinking the word “Filipino”

When getting a balanced framework of the Filipino, one should ask, “*where do we begin?*” For now, the laying of historical and archaeological facts is necessary.

Ruy López de Villalobos on November 1, 1542, sailed from Barra de Navidad, equivalent to modern-day Mexico, for an expedition to the Philippine Islands. Under this voyage, Villalobos named the islands “Felipinas,” in honor of the Crown Prince, Don Felipe of Spain, who would later ascend the throne as King Felipe II. This appellation was conferred circa 1543. In Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, Villalobos originally gave the name to some various islands, the appellation “Felipinas.” Eventually this name spread to the whole archipelago.⁶

Furthermore, one should be careful enough to clarify that Ferdinand Magellan did not “discover” the Philippine Islands—they had already been there long before his arrival in 1521. This kind of claim shows a Eurocentric and imperialistic mentality favored towards European narratives, living through the rich heritage and lifestyle of the indigenous peoples. Indeed, as Teodoro Agoncillo emphasized,⁷ one should understand that Magellan *came* to the Philippines, highlighting that there were already societies and flourishing traditions existing on the islands. That is the opposite of a heretofore largely hegemonic historical discourse about these people, which often minimized the supposed agency of colonized people in favor of magnifying imperial achievements.

⁵ Felipe M. De Leon Jr., “Defining the Filipino through the Arts: From Specialistic Innocence to Participatory Consciousness,” in *Philippine Humanities Review* 13:1 (November 2015) 3-41; 19-20.

⁶ Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, 4; 256. Luzon, Mindoro, Tendaya, Capul, Burias, Mazbate [Masbate], Marinduque, Leite [Leyte], Camar [Samar], Ybabao, Sebu [Cebu], Panay, Bohol, Catenduanas [Catanduanes], Calamianes, Mindanao and others of less renown.

⁷ Antonio C. Hila, “The Filipino Point of View in Historical Interpretation as Articulated by Teodoro A. Agoncillo,” in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 2:1 (May 2001) 111-138; 114-115. N.B.: Agoncillo jocularly used to criticize the statement that Magellan “discovered” the Philippines, labeling it a colonial point of view promoted by Spanish chroniclers to point out Spain's magnificence. He argued that the Philippines had already been known to many Asian nations long before the coming of Magellan, and contested the claim by Gregorio F. Zaide of “rediscovery” was even more wrong because it postulated a miraculous re-emergence of the islands. Agoncillo proposed instead: it would be more correct to say that Magellan and the Spaniards simply came to the Philippines in 1521, reflecting a more authentic Filipino view of history instead of the glorified Spanish narrative.

The very word, however, that is supposedly meant to encompass the identity under scrutiny in this debate—and indeed in many debates preceding it—is not something of our making. It is a heritage of colonialism and oppression. This original disjuncture, this vast and unsurpassable chasm between the imposed name and the people it is meant to describe, raises the question of whether it even can be totally bridged. Teodoro Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People* might be of a great help with regards to resolving an insurmountable problem. In the seventh section of the second chapter, "From Indio to Filipino," Agoncillo starts off with the Ilustrados in Paris, who, in October 1889 signed their names as "*The Filipinos*" and addressed their statement to "*Our Dear Mother Country, Spain.*"

When a people is gagged; when its dignity, honor, and all its liberties are trampled; when it no longer has any legal recourse against the tyranny of its oppressors, when its complaints, petitions, and groans are not attended to; when it is not permitted even to weep; when even the last hope is wrested from its heart; then. . .! then. . .! then. . .! it has left no other remedy but to take down with delirious hand from the altars the bloody and suicidal dagger of revolution!⁸

A nomenclature demands a reclaiming of identity while at the same time suggests the lengthy struggle that would be hooked up to its colonial roots. Reclaiming the Filipino identity is something born out of resistance and historical rupture. Nonetheless, the question of identity is more than mere labels; indeed, it points to an existence of values in competition with the current conditions and treatment—in short, *a la* state of *ontological deprivation*. Whether this hidden essence lies in the *pakikipagkapwa* or is in some other ideal that the Ilustrados and revolutionaries sought to revive and propagate is something that must, prior to tackling *bayani*, come up later. Despite these complexities, the past and recent efforts to rename the country from Philippines to Maharlika, historically referring to the noble or warrior class in pre-colonial Philippines, proves that perhaps the project of identity is still alive today. However, it also proves how such discourse can be perceived and/or manipulated, depending on one's political affiliations, as a form of political "rehabilitation."⁹

Is it then proper to claim that Filipinos have an innate epistemic faculty to domesticate foreign elements, may it be symbolic, cultural, or material, from being something unmistakably our own, even when the latter came from an adversary? Consider, for instance, the culinary culture today that is mixed both from Asia and Europe, or festivals like the Ati-Atihan which are a mix of Christianity and native practices, and so on. As the Venetian Scholar Antonio Pigafetta recounted in his observations of the early encounters with Raja Humabon's wife Hara Humamay (baptized as Juana):

While the priest was dressing, I showed her an image of Our Lady, a very beautiful child Jesus made of wood, and a cross; thereupon, she was seized with contrition, and, weeping, asked for baptism... She asked us to give her the little child Jesus to keep in place of her idols; and then she went away.¹⁰

⁸ Quoted in Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People; Eighth Edition* (Quezon City; R. P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1990) 102. N.B.: The repetition of "then...! then...! then...!" builds a powerful crescendo, signaling that when all avenues for peaceful redress are closed, the only option remaining is revolution; it rather frames revolution as the tragic, yet inevitable consequence of extreme tyranny.

⁹ Ana Roa Ramos and Marlon Ramos, "What's in a Name? 'Maharlika' Evokes 'Time of Mythmaking,'" *INQUIRER.net*, December 4, 2022, <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1701010/whats-in-a-name-maharlika-evokes-time-of-mythmaking>>.

¹⁰ Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage Round the World (1519–1522) An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, ed. and intro. by Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (London; The Hakluyt Society, 2011) 50.

The journal shows how quickly the image was integrated into their spiritual practices, suggesting a form of *syncretism* between indigenous and Catholic beliefs. This depicts that, in the Philippines, culture, religion, and identity are fluid or adaptive and continually shaped rather than static. This fluidity of religion and culture opened and expanded the possibility of altering the indigenous religions. For this purpose, the author will attempt to retell this story of history as we continue the discussion about our identity.

Sigaw sa Pugad Lawin epitomizes the Filipino ability to reclaim identity, where the fight against Spanish rule turned a foreign imposition into a rallying cry for national unity and self-determination. For over three centuries, the lives of Filipinos were influenced by Spanish colonialism, creating a lasting narrative of oppression. This call for rebellion was not just an outburst of anger but a powerful declaration of Filipino independence and dignity. By tearing their cedula, Bonifacio and the Katipuneros boldly rejected the idea of Spanish "motherhood" over the Philippines. This act shattered the illusion that Spain was a caring protector, revealing a painful reality: Spain was a conqueror, thriving on the labor and submission of a people deprived of their rights and humanity.

Moreover, this rebellion also redefined the Filipino idea of heroism, or *kabayanihan*, shifting it from mere submission to a selfless commitment to the common good. True heroism was no longer about appeasing foreign powers but about standing up for one's people, willingly facing hardship to secure freedom for all. As the document highlights, a hero responds to the cries of the oppressed, not for fame or reward, but out of genuine and enduring love for the nation. By heeding this call, the Katipuneros illuminated a path of hope and resistance, encouraging their fellow Filipinos to believe in their own strength and take pride in their cultural and national identity. This act, therefore, served a dual purpose: reclaiming both the people's dignity and their right to self-determination, igniting a revolution that would reshape the concept of Filipino heroism for generations.

The adage "History is written by the victors" highlights how historical accounts, especially those concerning our ancestors, are often shaped by Eurocentric perspectives. Such narratives were crafted to glorify European conquerors and their empires. It emphasizes the daring exploits of circumnavigators and portrays colonial expansions as heroic achievements, while marginalizing the experiences and voices of the colonized. As such, History is inherently subjective, shaped by the author, the era, and prevailing political forces. This makes constructing a precise genealogical mapping of our past challenging, yet not impossible, requiring careful interpretation and critical engagement with available sources. Before written records could be made, oral traditions also served to pass on history, laws, epics, songs, and chants within pre-colonial societies. It was the community oracles, or *babaylans*, who played the central role in this undertaking within a certain *datu's nasasakupan* (chieftain's subjects). Though the Austronesian ancestors left behind few written records, some artifacts—that are mute and void of text, except perhaps for heavy meanings—carry ideas. These may indeed encapsulate what Filipino identity is, which written history alone cannot achieve. For now, I leave you the less-popular Manunggul Jar. A burial jar with a cover featuring a *bangka* (boat or ship) with two souls aboard the boat, the one steering while the other sitting in a position of a corpse.¹¹

¹¹ Robert B. Fox, *The Tabon Caves: Archaeological Explorations and Excavations on Palawan Island, Philippines* (Manila: National Museum, 1970) 112-114. Also quoted in Xiao Chua's, a public Filipino historian, essay entitled *ART AS A*

Maritime and Relational Ontologies

Manunggul Jar

The Manunggul Jar is one of the most extraordinary Neolithic artifacts unearthed in 1964 from the Tabon Cave Complex in Lipuun Point, Palawan, a testament to the profound symbiosis between pre-colonial Filipino artistry, cosmological beliefs, and ritual practices.¹² Its profundity lies not merely in its form but in the esoteric cultural narratives it encodes, revealing a civilization imbued with sophisticated spiritual and metaphysical ideations. The jar is unparalleled in artistic skill, and in its expression of Austronesian religiosity, maritime culture, and funerary customs. The Manunggul Jar is, in Robert Fox's analysis, an introduction into Philippine archaeology that is innovative, an isolated object representative of a Southeast Asian funerary aesthetic. In opening a passage for the soul to the transmundane, the lid of the jar decoratively represents a "*ship-of-the-dead*" in a manner most intimately tied to maritime culture¹³ (perhaps this is why we refer to corpses as *yumao*; departed, as if they are in a state of journey). The figures, posed to evoke current ethnographic burial traditions, are testament to a continuity of mortuary practices from ancient to modern. The folded arms of the figures, their banded heads, and the precisely carved boat all come together to form a complex visual allegory for death: *a maritime voyage*.

Thus, the vessel stands as a dialectic between the material remains of the deceased and the immateriality of the soul, navigating its way through the liminal waters of the afterlife. Additionally, it captures our way of life connected and not divided by the vast waters of our archipelago. This maritime culture was salient within prehistoric Southeast Asia and is highlighted by the boat motif of the jar. The sea was not just a physical feature, but an existential axis of life, trade, and communication. Austronesian-speaking peoples developed a proto-maritime culture that allowed such expansive migrations across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Thus, our geographical landscape extended to our metaphysical consciousness. We saw that everything is interconnected, with this binary seen-unseen, material-immaterial, everything should be in harmony.¹⁴

Furthermore, the Manunggul Jar gives a glimpse into the ontological structures of pre-colonial Filipino *animistic* religiosity, where *kaluluwa* is the rule that governs the transition from life to death (*pagyao*). The intricacy of the design of the jar involves not only the deceased but also the boat as an animate entity, reflecting a cosmology in which human and nonhuman entities are assigned

VESSEL OF HISTORY: *Emotional Reflections on Culture, Nation and the Manunggul Jar*. His projects can be accessed through various platforms such as his personal Wordpress channel and Youtube.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁴ Francisco Alcina, *La historia de las Islas Indios Visayas*, trans. P.S. Lietz, *The Muñoz Text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands 1668*, Part I, Book 3 (Chicago: Philippine Studies Program, Department of Anthropology, [n.d.]), 162, Photoduplication Service, Ateneo de Manila Libraries, Kab. 9. Quoted in Maria Bernadette, "Bangka, Kaluluwa at Katutubong Paniniwala," in *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57:1 (January 2005) 35-36. N.B.:As Francisco Alcina noted, the rituals of harmony between humans and nature were so abundant that he could not even begin to document millions of superstitions about cutting wood and shaping it. For example, they would count the knots on a piece of wood and determine its placement on the boat, believing this would affect the vessel's fate. Such rituals reflect the deep reverence that early Filipinos had for nature, ensuring that every aspect of their maritime life was aligned with the unseen forces that governed their world. This meticulous attention to natural balance reveals the intricate symbiosis between culture and environment, a testament to how essential harmony was to their very existence.

sentient. This animism, far from the reductionist interpretations of Western colonial scholarship, represents a world full of life forces, even when an ordinary boat is somehow coming alive.

Ang paniniwala sa kaluluwa ng mga bagay na likas at likha ay sumasaklaw sa mga Malay na naniniwalang 'tao, mga hayop at ibon, halaman, mga isda at buwaya, mga bato, sandata, pagkain, damit, palamuti, at iba pang obheto' ay may kaluluwa (Skeat 53). Sa gayon, ang bangka ay mayroon ding kaluluwa, at hindi lamang isang sakayan ng kaluluwa tungo sa kabilang buhay sa paggamit nito sa paglibing. Ang buong proseso at ritwal sa paggawa ay nakaugat sa paniniwala sa kaluluwa na nagsisimula sa paniniwalang ang puno na pinagmumulan ng kahoy para sa bangka ay mayroong kaluluwa. Itong kaluluwa ng bangka ang nagbibigay ng mabubuting katangian ng bangka.¹⁵

This belief in the agency of objects and spirits finds parallel in the funerary practices of several indigenous communities in the Philippines, where rituals surrounding death and burial underscore a deep respect for the natural world. The Manunggul Jar, then, is not merely an artifact of cultural history but a linking object of the *seen* and the *unseen*, encapsulating the indigenous Filipino *ethos* of interconnectedness between the human soul and the natural environment.

Funerary artifacts show a deep maritime culture about our ancestors because they believe that the boat delivers the soul to the afterlife. An example of this is the boat-shaped coffin designs which are popularized in Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Masbate, and in Cordillera. They believe in the idea that the journey of the soul travels through a boat across the water.¹⁶ These boat-coffins not only serve the purpose of transition into afterlife, but it also indicate that there is respect to nature that is shown with rituals in burial. In company with these boats, grave artifacts often show souls onboard in order to drive the message home between the world of the living and spiritual realm. Further, there is the use of urns or jars and coffins shaped like boats containing bodies—emphasis on their souls is indicated here. Although funerary practices vary in their multicultural and ethnically diverse backgrounds, most of them point to a deeper commonality that transcends individual traditions and emphasizes their faith in higher powers and ancestor spirits that continue to watch out for the living. So, this unifying trend in diverse practices is a testament to deep-rooted connections from different communities, reinforcing instead a collective identity grounded in respect for nature and reverence for the dead.

Our maritime identity echoes well *pakikipagkapwa*, vis-a-vis the recognition of shared humanity and interconnectedness between people. In his essay *Loob ng Tao*, Albert Alejo said:

Sa ibabaw ng tubig, ang mga isla ay tila magkakahiwalay, subalit kapag ikaw ay sumisid, lahat pala'y magkakaugnay. Dito nabubunyag ang loob bilang kapwa. Sa pagmamalay sa malalim na kaisahan ng lahat ng tao sa larangan ng loob—dito nakabatay ang posibilidad ng mapaglikhang pagbabago ng

¹⁵ Maria Bernadette, "Bangka, Kaluluwa at Katutubong Paniniwala," *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57, no. 1 (January 2005) 35-36. Translation: The belief in the soul of natural and man-made objects encompasses the Malays' view that 'humans, animals and birds, plants, fish and crocodiles, stones, weapons, food, clothing, ornaments, and other objects' possess a soul (Skeat 53). Thus, the boat also has a soul, and is not merely a vessel for the soul to transition to the afterlife during burial. The entire process and ritual of its construction are rooted in the belief in the soul, beginning with the understanding that the tree from which the wood for the boat is sourced possesses a soul. This soul of the boat imparts positive qualities to it.

¹⁶ See Rosa C. P. Tenazas, "The Boat-Coffin Burial Complex in the Philippines and Its Relation to Similar Practices in Southeast Asia," in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 1:1 (March 1973): 19, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29791037>>.

daigdig. Gayon din naman, sa pagkawasak ng ganitong pagkakaisa guguhon ang munti mang pag-asa kahit sa pinaka-indibidwal na paninindigan.¹⁷

This metaphor lights up how our *loob* is not a simple space but a vast, meaningful expanse of connection. Every person's *loob* reflects a bigger community where the essence of *kapwa* shines, deep knowing of being together. Viewed through this prism, we realize that the maritime heritage may itself have embodied some elements of *pakikipagkapwa* through the spirit of exploration and navigation. This serves as a testament of the cultural link between the archaeological past and the ethnographic present.¹⁸ The currents of the sea could unite the lands (and also the unseen) and our collective experiences in creating mutual understanding as a transformation that would breathe creativity into our world.

Balangay

Archeological evidence reveals that although *Homo luzonensis* inhabited the islands 67,000 years ago, it was the Austronesians who were the ancestors of the people who created the maritime culture of the Philippines. They arrived by crossing the vast waters of Southeast Asia and the Pacific in kayaks (*balangay*). This innovation enabled them to establish trade routes, intermarry, and migrate over long distances from the Philippines to Polynesia, even as far as Madagascar and South America.¹⁹ Thus, the Austronesian world became a network of interlinked cultures sharing not only material artifacts but also linguistic and navigational knowledge.

Maritime culture fostered an appreciation for the interconnectivity of the islands and its people. The Austronesians were not only good ship builders but also in the art of stellar navigation. They named constellations such as Orion's Belt, *malatic*, and the Big Dipper, *bubu*, indicating a worldview deeply embedded in nature and the cosmos. These stellar guides further entrenched their perception of the world as a connected space, with shared experiences and knowledge passed down through generations.

Isa ang bituin sa mga penomena sa langit na pinahalagahan ng mga Pilipino. Binuo nila ang mga talampad o konstelasyon ayon sa mga bagay na pinapahalagahan nila sa buhay. Nakita nila ang hugis ng mga bagay na ito sa mga bituin kaya mula sa lupa at dagat karilang iniakyat ang mga ito sa langit. May mga paliwanag sa anyo ng mga mito na nagsasalaysay kung bakit napunta ang mga ito sa langit at kung bakit kumikilos ang tao ayon sa gabay ng mga ito. Habang itinatak nila ang sariling kabihasnan sa langit, naimpluwensyahan naman nito ang kanilang pag-iisip at pagkilos sa lupa.²⁰

¹⁷ Albert E. Alejo, "Loob Ng Tao," in *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South* 6:1 (May 2018): 17, <<https://doi.org/10.13185/2865>>. Translation: On the surface of the water, islands appear to be apart, but if you dive deeper, you will see that they are connected. This is where *loob* is revealed as *kapwa* (my fellow human being). In being conscious of the deep unity among all men in the field of *loob*—the possibility of a creative transformation of the world lies here. In the same manner, in the destruction of this kind of unity, even the slightest hope in even the most individual of commitments also crumbles.

¹⁸ Robert B. Fox, *The Tabon Caves...*, 112.

¹⁹ Florent Détroit et al., "A New Species of *Homo* from the Late Pleistocene of the Philippines," in *Nature* 568:7751 (April 2019): 181–86, <<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1067-9>>, 181, 185. See also Peter Bellwood, James J. Fox, D. T. Tryon, and Australian National University, *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006).

²⁰ Dante L. Ambrosio, "Balatik: Katutubong Bituin ng mga Pilipino," in *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57:1-4 (2005): 3. Translation: A star is one of the celestial phenomena valued by Filipinos. They formed constellations based on

This advanced navigational and boat-building technology made the Austronesians the true people of the seas centuries before European colonizers arrived in Southeast Asia. The finding of a 1,600-year-old boat in Butuan,²¹ as well as other remnants of boats, shows how this technology helped in commerce and diplomacy. One artifact that speaks of this interconnectedness is the Laguna Copperplate Inscription, which gives more evidence of the diplomatic relationship between early Filipino communities and kingdoms as far as Indonesia.

The *balangay* is not just a watercraft meant for travel but also acts as an adhesive that would bind communities together. On the open seas, stability was the reason for these tight-knit groups or villages and communities that take their names from it. The *barangay*, as it still is used in the local governance units that are found today, originated from this shared maritime heritage. In other words, the boat was literally and symbolically structured as a form of social cohesion.

Since being normally led by a chieftain, the class of *balangay* structure was very hierarchical to show the roles and tasks in the community at large. The head would be the chieftain or *datu*, an authority with both political and military powers to lead not only the governance but warfare within the community. Beneath the chief were the freemen or nobles who normally acted as advisers and fighters. They took a hands-on role in plundering and protecting their community. Commoners are composed of skilled laborers, fishers, and cultivators who helped to nourish and sustain the economic status of the *balangay*. Lastly, there are the slaves, or at least those people classified for doing menial laboring and working under a master, usually with them trading for protection and for keeping alive.

This highly reflects the *bayanihan spirit*, which, in turn, refers to collective heroism. Regarding its difference from the western notion of heroism, it fundamentally revolves around the concept of cooperation and communal fraternity vis-a-vis *pakikipagkapwa* or *kawanggawa*. Ultimately, the *balangay* symbolizes more than just seafaring prowess; it reflects the relational culture of cooperation, shared heritage, and the deep ties that bound these island people to one another. In this sense, through their boats, the Austronesians traversed seas but built bridges between cultures for survival and prosperity across the vast Pacific world. The *Balangay*, as a boat and a symbol, reveals profound insight into the relational culture of our Austronesian ancestors. This connection is not merely metaphorical but very practical, for in the design of the *balangay* lies the essence of community and collaboration crucial to early seafaring and settlement. The boat itself, made without nails but with wooden pegs, speaks of the complex skills and cooperation that defined the first

the things they cherished in life. They saw the shapes of these things in the stars, so they raised them from the land and sea to the heavens. There are explanations in the form of myths that narrate why these things ended up in the sky and why people act according to their guidance. As they imprinted their own civilization in the heavens, it, in turn, influenced their thoughts and actions on earth.

N.B.: For instance, the constellation Orion in the Western world, but differently interpreted by ancient Filipinos. In the center of this figure is a triad of stars: Zeta, Epsilon, and Delta Orionis. Although the ancient Greeks regarded the three stars as the belt of a huntsman, Filipinos considered them as a sharp arrow ready to strike. Other stars that made up the body of the huntsman, Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, Saiph, and Rigel were considered a bow and the sword was the string of the bow. Orion, to the Filipinos was not a man, but an object: an instrument of ballista armed boar trap called *balatik*. This constellation was known generally across the archipelago by similar names, such as *balatik* for the Bagobos and Tagalogs, *bayatik* for the Mandayas, and *belatik* for the Manobos.

²¹ Jesus T. Peralta, "Ancient Mariners of the Philippines," in *Archaeology* 33:5 (September/October 1980): 47, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41726497>>.

people of the archipelago. At this point, the ritual of blood compact or *Sandugo* shall be discovered first to expound how balangay(s) can be turned into *bayan(s)*.

Sandugo

The bayan or community or town did not just suddenly appear in pre-colonial Philippines. It is actually a political construct derived from economic units such as the *barangay*, which was primarily familial or clan-based. The *barangay*, which was once considered to be the smallest political unit of the time, is now known by scholars to be a kinship group or economic entity.²² A *datu* is like a chief who exercises authority over this unitary and extended family unit. However, in cases where various datu are trying to organize a stronger political organization, they would carry out the ritual of *sandugo* or *pacto de sangre*. This group of leaders was said to have forged their brotherhood through cutting their skin and mixing their blood with wine, making a *bayan*, the higher political unit that had a paramount leader that was named a *lakan* or *raja*. Thus, this *sandugo* was more than an alliance; it symbolized an unbreakable fraternal bond between individuals and communities representing a form of shared destiny.

The blood compact (*sandugo*) is an ancient practice. The most profound *pakikipagkapwa* of the Filipinos of old, the *sandugo* is a sacred and strong bond for the greater good of those who have become united by blood. In the old culture, two individuals may have a blood compact in order to become siblings — i.e., cut from the same umbilical cord. It may also be a union among many, to carry out one objective as siblings. The most prevalent kind is the blood compact that seeks to receive a “stranger” or an “outsider” into one’s own group.²³

This interpretation of bayan as a fraternity further deepens the significance involved in the performance of ritualistic practice of *sandugo*. While it is certainly also an agreement made at some level of political bargain, it takes the form of a pledge sealed in a ritual that is meant to consecrate a kind of trust and loyalty to one another. Also, the *sandugo* was meant to foster peace between *barangays* or tribes, hence the allegiance is made not merely between the two datu but between the tribes they represent.²⁴ Once admitted into this fraternity, one receives not just an allegiance for datu, but as brother, to the siblings as well and become bound together in this new bayan social structure, bonded by their blood—no less, in ways permanent.

When the Spaniards, led by Ferdinand Magellan and later Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, encountered the *sandugo* ritual, they participated without fully grasping its cultural and deep spiritual implications. Antonio Pigafetta have written about their experiences involving the blood compact, one of which is the celebrated *sandugo* between Legazpi and Rajah Sikatuna in 1565.²⁵ Sharing blood meant a relationship for native Filipinos, and this meant the acceptance of the Spaniards by the

²² William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 6.

²³ Ma. Bernadette Abrera, *Ang Numismatika ng Anting-Anting: Panimulang Paghawan ng Isang Landas Tungo sa Pag-unawa ng Kasaysayan at Kalinangang Pilipino* (Lunsod Quezon: Publikasyon Bilang 2, Programang Kaalamang Bayan, Tanggapan ng Dekano, Dalubhasaan ng Agham Panlipunan at Pilosopiya, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1992). See also/quoted in Clemen C. Aquino, “Mula sa Kinaroroonan: Kapwa, Kapatiran and Bayan in Philippine Social Science,” in *Asian Journal of Social Science* 32:1 (2004): 105–139, 127, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685310432301833>>.

²⁴ William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994) 156.

²⁵ Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage Round the World (1519–1522) An Account of Magellan’s Expedition*, 43, 63–64.

community founded on equality and brotherhood. However, the Spaniards arrived at the ritual with an entirely different mindset: to them, it was an opportunity for solidifying sovereignty over the archipelago. To the Spanish colonizers, the *sandugo* became a seal of domination, not a relation of kinship.

Now, in the solemn ritual, native and foreigner would consecrate the friendship that eluded earlier efforts. But, though blood had blended, minds remained apart. To the Filipino, the blood compact was an agreement between equals, a pledge of eternal fraternity and alliance. In the same instant that Tupas and Legazpi now drained their cups, it was clear on the other hand that to the Spaniard this was a ceremony between victor and vanquished foe. . . .²⁶

Just as the Filipino chiefs had extended brotherhood, this was for the Spaniards surrender to their dominion—a precedent that set up many centuries of colonization. John Schumacher notes, the ilustrados such as Paterno, Rizal, and Del Pilar would later present this pact as a contract between equals, wherein the Filipinos swore allegiance to Spain. But this was a justifiable cause for Filipinos to pull out of the *pacto de sangre* since Spain did not uphold their side of the agreement, an argument Bonifacio would later use in the 1896 Revolution that the Filipinos were free from Spanish sovereignty.

The true meaning of the *sandugo* was renewed by Andres Bonifacio in the Philippine Revolution. Bonifacio invoked *sandugo* in establishing the *Kataas-taasang Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (KKK). He did this symbolically with a similar ritual when initiating new members into the Katipunan; this means uniting (and perhaps renewing) Filipinos and not just political allies to become brothers and sisters from the same country. He wanted to reclaim the term of *sandugo* away from the distorted meaning given to it by colonial usage but instead adapted it as the signification of the common Filipino struggle of freedom from oppression.

The application of *sandugo* by Bonifacio was a manifestation of the national kinship, an imagery for the sense of unison in which Filipinos could be bounded by common blood and dedication to Inang Bayan. For Bonifacio, the blood compact was not only a re-enactment of an ancient tradition but also a symbolic assertion that the Filipino people were bound together by more than mere political expediency—they were siblings in the same fight for freedom.

Gayon man sila'y ipinailalim sa talagang kaulagian ng mga tagalog na sinaksihan at pinapagtibay ang kanilang pinagkayarian sa pamamagitan ng isang panunumpa na kumuha ng kaunting dugo sa kanikanilang mga ugat, at yao'y inihalu't ininom nila kapua tanda ng tunay at lubos na pagtatapat na di mag tatakil sa pinagkayarian. Ytoy siang tinatawag na "Pacto de Sangre" ng haring Sikatuna at ni Legaspi na pinaka katawan ng hari sa España.²⁷

²⁶ Ferdinand Marcos, *Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People*, vol. 2, part 1: *The Formation of the National Community (1565–1896)* (Manila: Ferdinand E. Marcos, 1976) 45. Quoted in Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "The 'Pacto de Sangre' in the Late Nineteenth-Century Nationalist Emplotment of Philippine History," *Philippine Studies* 58:1/2 (2010): 81–82.

²⁷ Andres Bonifacio (attrib.), "Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog," in *Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Himagsikan*, ed. by José P. Santos (Manila: n.pub, 1935), 6–7. In Jim Richardson, *The Light of Liberty: Documents and Studies on the Katipunan, 1892–1897* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013) 189–190. Translation: The Spaniards, however, were required to follow the custom of the Tagalogs, and to bind their agreement by means of an oath, which consisted of taking blood from each other's veins, and then mixing and drinking it as a token of their sincere and wholehearted pledge not to betray the agreement. This was called the "Blood Compact" of King Sikatuna and Legazpi, the representative of the King of Spain (191).

In fact, at the core of the *sandugo* ritual are *pakikipagkapwa* and *kapatiran*, the most important Filipino cultural values. *Pakikipagkapwa* is an important Filipino ethic that means relating to others as equals and recognizing common humanity. In the context of the *sandugo*, it means forming a bond of mutual respect, loyalty, and unity-values that shape the interpersonal relations of the Filipinos to this day. Brotherly is the term, the meaning behind *kapatiran*, a kinship amongst Filipinos that extends beyond the blood family to be embraced by those bound by shared struggles and aspirations in communal life. The metaphor extends even to the notion of the *ship of state*, emphasizing unity, cooperation, and collective progress toward a common goal. Today, the values embodied in *sandugo*, *pakikipagkapwa*, *kapatiran*, *bayanihan!*, and the shared journey of Filipinos as one people in the *same boat*, continues to shape the Filipino identity, grounded in deep sense of community, solidarity, and shared destiny.

Meanwhile, *Kalayaan*, or freedom, carries a multi-layered meaning deeply embedded in the psyche of the Filipino. While *kalayaan* was the term used to refer initially to freedom or independence, it had the connotation of wholeness or oneness. As Reynaldo Ileto explained in his *Pasyon and Revolution*,

(Propagandists) like Bonifacio, Jacinto, and perhaps Marcelo H. del Pilar built upon the word *layan* or *laya*, which means “satisfaction of one’s needs,” “pampering treatment by parents” or “freedom from strict parental control.” Thus, *kalayaan*, as a political term, is inseparable from its connotations of parent-child relationship, reflecting social values like the tendency of mothers in the lowland Philippines to pamper their children and develop strong emotional ties with them. Childhood is fondly remembered as a kind of “lost Eden,” a time of *kaginhawaan* (contentment) and *kasaganaan* (prosperity), unless one was brought up in abject poverty or by an uncaring (*pabaya*) stepmother. In “*kalayaan*,” revolutionists found an ideal term for independence that combined separation from a colonial ruler (i.e., a mother who showed cruelty instead of love) and the “coming together” of people in the Katipunan. Katipunan is *kalayaan* in that it is a recovery of the country’s pre Spanish condition of wholeness, bliss and contentment, a condition that is experienced as *layan* by the individual, who is thus able to leap from the “familial” to the “national.”²⁸

In this sense, *kalayaan* can also be interpreted in the context of *kaginhawaan*, or well-being, which is closely related to the concept of *layan*. This quest for *kaginhawaan* expresses a collective dream, an aspiration for society by individuals who can strive there to meet their simple desires free from the inhibitive grip of colonial power. For Bonifacio, *kalayaan* means escaping the cruel mother's frown of the metaphor, a mother, the Spanish regime had been to the Filipinos, who was reluctant to give them even that much comfort emotionally and otherwise. Accordingly, *kalayaan*, individual and collective alike, signifies a regained co-harmony in society—a unity as one's relations are nurtured back like how it was with a mother. This is how Bonifacio has so aptly defined *kalayaan*; under the “light of truth,” this awakening of Filipino consciousness about their inherent dignity and the collective responsibility to forge a nation rooted in unity and mutual care.

Understanding *Bayani*

Two major concepts in the Filipino indigenous beliefs are *ginhawa* and *kaluluwa*. These two concepts explain what a person is, as well as how well-being exists, in relation to the spiritual realm and its interaction with the living world. In this case, *ginhawa* is in the body (physical well-being),

²⁸ Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979) 87.

while *kaluluwa* symbolizes the soul (moral well-being), pointing to a holistic worldview in which material and spiritual existence are intertwined. This duality residing in a person's *kalooban* intertwine to the rituals including the *anito* (ancestors' spirits) and *pagpupunas* (rubbing rituals), as applied to the Filipino worldview. In this regard, the person is held to be compounded of two basic parts—the physical or outer body *panlabas* and the inward essence or inner self, *panloob*. On one hand, within the *panloob* rests the *kaluluwa*, a person's source of spirit and moral living. This force governs not just the mind but also stands on good or evil. The body is, on the other hand, believed to have *ginhawa*, a kind of life force allegedly contained in the liver.²⁹

Ginhawa forms part of physical well-being, which is, broadly speaking, comfort, health, and vitality. Zeus Salazar expresses *ginhawa* as not being free from illness but rather a condition of having a 'sense of balance, peace, and ability to live fully.' Filipino people always aim to attain *kaginhawaan*,³⁰ it is a *teleological endpoint* as in the semantics of existentialism, and this is not the same as *kayamanan* (wealth) but an all-around state of well-being. One may well be rich without experiencing *kaginhawaan*, demonstrating how even the body had to find harmony with the soul.³¹

The connection between the two is very important: it is only when a person's *kaluluwa* finds alignment with righteousness and goodness that *ginhawa* thrives. Whenever the balance of the *kaluluwa* is upset, such as when it becomes distracted or displaced, it brings about illness or discomfort, usually in children. That realization highlights the traditional Filipino belief that physical health coincides with spiritual health. This worldview explains the grammatical structure of the term "*nausog*" in Filipino indigenous belief, which happens when the *kaluluwa* and *ginhawa* fall out of alignment within the *kalooban*—whether through internal imbalance or the influence of a negative force, the affected individual will become ill.

Who is responsible for bringing *kaginhawaan* to the community, ensuring that the alignment of spiritual and physical well-being is restored? A *bayani*, *berani* in Malay, *wani* in Javanese,³² or warrior-hero, would bring *kaginhawaan*, a feeling of well-being and prosperity, to his community because of the activities of *pangangayaw*, which is raids against enemy tribes. Decapitating the rival warriors was part of this practice since the *gahum* (power or spiritual force) was believed to reside in the head of the enemy. By leaving home carrying the heads and other booty of war, the *bayani* not only reinstated power in their community but also prestige in its honor. These acts of violence were not devoid of ritual intentions; the warriors prepared spiritually beforehand to justify their mission. The *bayani's* raid must be fair and for rectifying the wrong, a broader sense of moral and social duty.

Tutungo sila sa ibang bayan, mangangayaw o kakayaw—pupugutin ang ulo ng mga kalabang mandirigma. Naroon kasi sa ulo ng mga mandirigma ang gahum o kapangyarihan ng mga ito, at iuuwi

²⁹ Zeus A. Salazar, "Faith Healing in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective", in *Asian Studies* vol. XVIII (Quezon City: UP Asian Center, 1980) 35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Consuelo J. Paz, ed., *Ginhawa: Well-being as Expressed in Philippine Languages*, in *Ginhawa, Kapalaran, Dalambati: Essays on Wellbeing, Opportunity/Destiny, and Anguish* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008), accessed October 29, 2024, <<https://infocus.philartsvenicebiennale.org/?p=380>>.

³² Zeus A. Salazar, "Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino," in *Bagong Kasaysayan: Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, 2 (Lungsod Quezon: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1997) 8-9. Quoted in Michael Charleston "Xiao" B. Chua, "BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown," in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1 (August 2022): 166-181, 167.

ang mga ulong ito at mga kagamitang nakuha sa bayan upang magbigay ng ginhawa, at sa kanilang pagwawagi, nagbibigay sila ng dangal sa bayan. Hindi basta-bastang ginagawa ang pangangayaw ng mga bagani, nagsasagawa sila ng mga rituwal upang maging karapat- dapat ang kanilang misyon. Kumbaga, dapat ito ay makatuwirang pagkilos upang itama ang isang mali.³³

The *bayani* acted as the defender of the community, and so they practiced *pangangayaw*, or headhunting. Although it was violent, this was claimed to be necessary for gaining the fertility of the land, the reproduction of animals, and the continuation of the lineage of the community. In this respect, then, the *bayani* is not a warrior in the modern, militaristic sense but rather a very vital figure in safeguarding the communal life force, *ginhawa*. It was a sacred duty that was above all acts of bravery: to defend the *bayan* so that the life and well-being of generations could be continued.

The concept of a *bayani* is a multifaceted concept, with each province or local region having unique interpretations and practice through which heroism could be gauged. By broad definition, the term refers to a warrior-leader with valor during fighting and wedded to the defense of the community. Among the Tagalog and Visayan societies, upward mobility for a *bayani* or *bagani* was measured by the number of enemies whom the individual had killed in battle.³⁴ It was oftentimes the case that such opponents were believed to be of a superhuman nature aided and abetted by deities like *Tagbusaw*, god of war. The more enemies a warrior defeated, the higher the warrior was in rank, hence increased respect and honor. These several ranks introduced the title of *manildad* for warriors who had killed one or two enemies. This hierarchy then ascended to *lunugum* for those who would themselves kill enemies within their homes, especially exalted, where this was signified by the observation of black robes/garments.

Regional terms also reflect distinct interpretations. In Maguindanao, the term *barani* specifically referred to bravery and heroism, while in Sulu, *balani* implied courage and inherent worth. Unlike other communities that viewed heroism mainly as martial prowess, some regions placed significant emphasis on *bayani* as a community servant or *lingkod-bayan*, embodying honor, humility, and selflessness.

Hindi siya [ang bayani] uring naghahari at nangingibabaw kundi totoong lingkod-bayan, isang supertaong hindi maaaring magkaiit ng tulong sa sinumang nangangailangan at hihingi nito. Obligado siyang tumulong sa nangangailangan nang walang hinihintay na kapalit.³⁵

³³ Michael Charleston “Xiao” B. Chua, “BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown,” in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1, 166-181, 168. Translation: They will journey to another village, engaging in raids—decapitating the heads of enemy warriors. This is because the power or authority of these warriors resides in their heads, and they would bring home these heads and the items taken from the village to provide relief. In their victory, they bring honor to their community. The raids of the bagani (warriors) are not done recklessly; they perform rituals to ensure that their mission is worthy. In essence, it must be a justifiable act to correct a wrong.

³⁴ Spanish conquistadors have named certain native groups from the Philippines who bore body graffiti, known as *batik*, which was a mark of victory in wars and honors brought to their clans. In the Filipino context, this has adapted as *batikan*, referring to someone who is an expert or proficient in any endeavor.

³⁵ Ricardo Ma. D. Nolasco, “Kabayanihan: Ang Salitang Bayani sa Kasaysayan at Lipunan,” in *Diliman Review* 45:2-3 (1997): 15. Translation: He [the hero] is not the type who rules or dominates, but rather a true public servant—a superhuman who cannot refuse help to anyone in need who asks for it. He is obligated to assist those in need without expecting anything in return.

This societal expectation highlighted that true heroism extended beyond warfare; it also included qualities like wisdom, justice, and the protection of social harmony. The *bayani*, therefore, was not just a warrior but a guardian of cultural values and a model of leadership, crucial in maintaining both the physical and moral well-being of the community.

The *barangay* was formed for an increased production in agriculture for the survival and prosperity of its people. In the organization of Filipino society, therefore, *ginhawa* or *kaginhawaan/kaginhawahan* means not a mere condition of personal comfort but the general view toward the improvement of the total well-being of the community. This communal focus is reflected in the interconnected roles of the *datu* (chieftain), the *babaylan* (priestess), the *panday* (craftsman), and the *bayani* (warrior).³⁶ Each of these figures had a unique responsibility toward ensuring the overall flourishing of the *barangay*.

The term *bayani* is deeply rooted in the concept of *bayan*, which refers both to the people and the territory they inhabit. Unlike the Western notion of the individualistic hero (*h  roe*), who is celebrated for singular acts of valor and nobility, the *bayani* operates within a collective framework. Central to the *bayani's* identity is that the welfare of the community is not just individualized acts of courage or strength but the ability to contribute towards the common good. It is in this communal concept of *kabayanihan* that the precolonial setup best exemplifies with all the different societal roles geared toward ensuring the *kaginhawaan* of the entire *barangay*.

Ang pinakabuod ng lahat ng pagkakaibang ito ay makakatas sa indibidwalismo at preokupasyon ng h  roe sa sariling "persona," kung ihahambing sa bayani na nakapaloob sa kanyang sariling grupo at nakatuon lamang at tangi sa pagpapaibayo ng interes ng grupo...Ang kilos naman ng bayani ay batay sa ugaling bayan, kung saan mas pinahahalagahan ang pagpapakita ng kababaang-loob at ang pagiging katulad lamang ng ibang kasama...³⁷

In this regard, *bayani* comes closer to the western term of patriotism than being a hero. Patriotism derives from the Latin *patria* or homeland.³⁸ It refers to someone who shows care for the betterment of his country and its people. The Filipino *bayani* exhibits the same faith in carrying out action directed to enhance *ginhawa* for the greater good rather than for individual glory. As such,

³⁶ Zeus A. Salazar, *Kasaysayan ng Kapilipinuhan Bagong Balangkas* (Lunsod Quezon: Bagong Kasaysayan, 2004), 12-13.

³⁷ Zeus A. Salazar, "Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino," in *Bagong Kasaysayan: Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, no. 2, 36,39. Quoted in Michael Charleston "Xiao" B. Chua, "BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown," in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1, 166-181, 170. Translation: The very essence of all these differences can be distilled into the individualism and preoccupation of the h  roe with their own 'persona,' in contrast to the *bayani* who is embedded within their own group and focused solely and exclusively on advancing the interests of the collective... The actions of the *bayani*, meanwhile, are based on ugaling bayan (communal custom), where greater value is placed on demonstrating humility and being just like one's fellow companions...

³⁸ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, Eight Edition (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), 153. N.B.: Here, Agoncillo translates *bayani* as "patriot" rather than "hero." In the Katipunan, the third grade, called *Bayani* (Patriot), wore a red mask and a sash with green borders, symbolizing courage and hope. Translation: The essence of all these differences can be distilled from the individualism and the hero's preoccupation with their own "persona," in contrast to the *bayani*, who is embedded within their group and solely focused on advancing the group's interests... The actions of the *bayani* are guided by community values, where humility is emphasized, and being just like any other member of the group is highly valued...

while the *bayani* may turn to warfare or defense, this is a means always to the *bayán*—the land and people.

Ginhawa, on the other hand, becomes one of the historical events where Filipinos saw it in a different light. For over three centuries, the Filipinos endured colonial subjugation, which fundamentally disrupted their way of life. In this context, *ginhawa* became a lens through which Filipinos assessed the legitimacy of colonial rule. The Spaniards, claiming to be the bearers of civilization and religion, positioned themselves as the granters of well-being. However, this notion of well-being was often contradicted by the lived experiences of the colonized. In *Gising na mga tagalog!!!* Emilio Jacinto lamented that the Philippines had inherited nothing but enslavement and negation from Spain; hardship and misery, a clear negation of the precolonial sense of *ginhawa*.

....¿Hangang kailan, hangang kailan, mga tagalog, sisikat ang araw ng inyong lakas kasabay ng inyong kaginhawahan? ¡Ay! kung nakikita ang inyong kalagayan, puso'y nagpuputuk, mata'y nagdidilim, dugu'y kumukulu at kusang napapahyaw ang tapat na dibdib:- ¿Diyata, mga kapatid? ¿diyata't kayo'y mamamalagi na sa ganitong kabulagan at kaalipinan?³⁹

The *Katipunan* was a revolutionary movement that espoused the tension between colonialism and the Filipino longing for *kaginhawahan*. Founded by Andrés Bonifacio in 1892, the movement described the suffering experienced under Spanish rule in the same language of *ginhawa*. In this light, the *bayani* took on a new role as not only the defender of the *bayán* but also as a symbol of resistance against colonial oppression. The revolutionaries of the *Katipunan* appropriated the term *bayani* to refer to those who fought for the liberation of the Philippines.⁴⁰ For them, restoring *ginhawa* to the Filipino people meant overthrowing the oppressive colonial regime and reclaiming the autonomy of the *bayán*. Despite these debates, however, one fact persists: the *bayani* is ever and always connected with *bayán's* best interest. In connection with the Philippine Revolution and the notion of *bayani*, all *bayani* strives to ensure there is restoration or improved *ginhawa* for the common good of all people concerned.

This interconnection between the *bayani* and the community is further exemplified in *bayanihan*, a term that, although believed to originate from *bayán*, is linguistically founded on *bayani*. It gives credence to the thought that true communal effort arises from the heroism and solidarity of individuals. *Bayanihan* is said to have derived from the word *bayán*, community or nation, but evidence in linguistics discredits such claim. The term comes from *bayani*. Therefore, etymologically, *bayanihan* connotes the spirit of *bayani* in heroism in unity and solidarity in the performance of communal tasks.

Base sa mga sinaunang diccionario , ang salitang 'bayan' ay cognate o kaangkan ng 'bayani' at 'bayanihan' (Lianes at Veneración 2001:159). Ang 'bayani' ay isang mandirigmang hindi naghihintay ng gantimpala sa kanyang paglilingkod bayan, maliban na lamang sa pagtanggap sa kanya ng kanyang mga kababayan bilang isang marangal na indibidwal (Lianes at Veneración 2001). May kaugnayan din ang salitang 'bayan' sa 'pagbayani,' o sa tinatawag natin ngayong 'bayanihan,' na nangangahulugang

³⁹ Emilio Jacinto, “¡Gising na, mga Tagalog!,” October 23, 1895, *Archivo General Militar de Madrid: Caja 5677, leg. 1.83*. In Jim Richardson, *The Light of Liberty: Documents and Studies on the Katipunan, 1892–1897* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013) 50. Translation: When, Tagalogs, when shall the sun blaze, when shall you be strong and your suffering end? Ay! Seeing your situation makes the heart burst, the eyes cloud over, the blood seethe, and the righteous breast howl with rage. Is that not so, brothers? Or will you remain blind and enslaved? (52)

⁴⁰ See Nicholas P. Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1971) 126.

pagtulong sa kapwa ng walang hinihinging bayad (Lianes at Veneración 2001). Ang bayanihan ay ang pagtutulong-tulong ng mga magkakapit-bahay upang sa pamamagitan ng kanilang pinagsama-samang lakas ay mairaos kaagad ang isang gawain tulad halimbawa ng paglilipat ng bahay (Lianes at Veneración 20).⁴¹

While *bayanihan* does not hail from the word *bayani*, its meaning remains the same and deepens with its central thrust on *pakikipagkapwa* and collective action. In *bayanihan*, people are not working for the community but become *bayani* to unite and carry out shared acts of service and help. This reinterpretation frames *bayanihan* as a more beautiful and profound concept, not merely communal work for the *bayani*, but rather as being imbued with the heroic and cooperative spirit of the *bayani*. Thus, it can be concluded that *bayanihan*, both as a heroism and collective endeavor, is oriented towards the good of the other. It has its lexical weight when examined closer with our modern philosophy of *kapwa* which, as reiterated by Agoncillo, *bayani* is a patriot, someone who sacrificed the most for the common good and with cooperation.

From Canopies to Identities

The lexical concepts of *pakikipagkapwa* and *loob*, found in Filipino culture, form foundational building blocks that influence everything ranging from social interaction to individual identity. *Pakikipagkapwa*, loosely translated, refers to engagement with others but says more than recognition of another person—it is rather an action indicative of an intensive recognition of interconnectedness and shared humanity. Unlike the English term “others,” which in its very construction shows a division between self and other, *kapwa*, and *pakikipagkapwa* as the moral actuality of *kapwa* as *potentia*, foregrounds togetherness among self and others and fosters sympathy and sense of community. It makes them see themselves as being part of something more: some kind of social bondage in which one’s welfare is tied to others. It enforces a belief of shared responsibility to tend to one another, knowing that the struggles of one are the struggles of all.

The connotation of *loob* in Filipino culture runs deeper than its reduced contents in Western analyses. Its basic sense of innermost self and emotional depth shows incorporation into numerous psycho-social concepts in Filipino culture. As such, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) refers to a kind of relational obligation based on kindness or favor, but this is only a part of the greater contents of the concept of *loob*. Other words such as *sama ng loob* (resentment), *kusang loob* (initiative), and *lakas ng loob* (guts) show how *loob* is infinitely useful for putting complex affective states and intersubjective relations into words. The specific connotations of each of these words are not only telling but also deeply related to the Filipino sense of self and social practice. Reducing *loob* to a mere “debt of gratitude” also risks oversimplifying and distorting the richness of Filipino social reality, thereby itself reproducing colonial mindsets that refuse to see the particularism of local customs and values.

⁴¹ Praksis Miranda, “Konsepto Ng ‘Bayan’ Sa Mga Tagalog Na Awiting Liturhikal,” in *Philippine Sociological Review* 64:1 (2016): 45–78, 51, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44211751>>. Translation: Based on ancient dictionaries, the word ‘bayan’ is cognate or related to ‘bayani’ and ‘bayanihan’ (Lianes and Veneración 2001:159). The term ‘bayani’ refers to a warrior who does not expect a reward for their service to the community, except for being recognized by their fellow citizens as a noble individual (Lianes and Veneración 2001). The word ‘bayani’ is also connected to ‘pagbayani,’ or what we now call ‘bayanihan,’ which means helping others without expecting payment (Lianes and Veneración 2001). Bayanihan involves neighbors working together so that, through their combined efforts, a task—such as moving a house—can be completed quickly (Lianes and Veneración 2001).

In this regard, such understanding of *loob* as an inward/outward/upward movement speaks to the introspective nature of the Filipino spirit: it is the journey that links us to others (*kapwa*) and to *maykapal*, the creator or divine force. This movement, from self, through others, and up to the divine, seems like a maritime reflection of our ancestors. That life itself is merely a continuous voyage, both literal and metaphysical. For instance, the Manunggul Jar has been a striking manifestation of this maritime identity and belief in life as travel. Such a jar, crafted as a burial artifact, is depicted with two figures on a boat, representing the transportation of the dead from this world to the next. This reflects, of course, the seafaring roots of our ancestors and the deep belief that life and death are a cycle towards the divine and the eternal. Moreover, there is the Filipino approach towards death itself in the context of words like *yumao* (the one who has departed) and the more graphic *bangkay* (corpse, which might share etymological roots with *bangka*, boat). The dead “left” or is “like a boat,” suggests that death is not the end but rather a continuation of the journey, a passage from this world to the next, like the figures represented in the Manunggul Jar. This conceptualization of death in some ways reflects a deep connection of the Filipino to the sea as both physical and spiritual frontier. Here, life and death are part of an ongoing cycle of journeys.

Beneath it all lies the historical figure of the *bayani*, which epitomized the substance of altruism and communal duty vis-a-vis *bayanihan* as *kapatiran*. As noted,

(The) bayani is the genteel and harsh knight of the village whose job is to right wrongs or perform revenge on account of another party after the performance of a ritual act.” He may exercise his task either on his own or with only few of his subordinates he commands and answers for. He does not report, however, to any individual official nor citizen. His service is open for anyone citizen-low or high, poor or rich, even a blood kin or not. He cannot decline to perform his office if approached.⁴²

The *bayani* epitomizes an ideal example of ‘selfless service’ by representing honor, justice, and communal support values. From this history, given archetype, we see how it calls out to people to act on behalf of others while underlining the responsibility that falls on the shoulders of every individual within that community to defend and care for one another. In this sense, *bayani*’s willingness to share his effort with every citizen, regardless of status, is conducive to the prevalence of *pakikipagkapwa*. Among the social, political, and economic inequality being promoted here is encouraging people to stand up for the marginalized and the oppressed.

This “realm of action” is an important feature in Filipino spirituality, especially with regards to our understanding of self in relation to others and nature. As maritime people, constantly engaging with new environments and other cultures, Filipinos developed a sense of *loob* that is not static but dynamic, capable of adaptation, growth, and responsibility. This concept of *abot-kaya*, to reach or strive in meeting challenges and responsibilities, embodies the virtues and characteristics that attempt to explain why Filipinos can persevere through life’s trying moments, be it the crashing of waves from the literal ocean or the influx of other metaphorical turbulent spaces of life.

Loob is lived in the realm of action. If the *loob* that could be seen in the abot-malay (ambit or reach of consciousness) and the abot-dama (ambit or reach of feeling) is the breadth and depth of my receptivity, in the abot-kaya (ambit or reach of strength), I respond to the invitation to responsibility, I answer to the

⁴² See Michael Charleston “Xiao” B. Chua, “BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown,” in *Kaniningnan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1 (August 2022): 166–181.

call to make a choice. Here, the breadth of abot-malay and abot-dama is filled and made whole as abot-kaya.⁴³

This framework illustrates how the inner self or *loob* manifests in consciousness, emotional responses, and finally, in one's ability to act with moral responsibility. *Abot-kaya* (or *sa maaabot ng aking makakaya*) is the strength of the individual and the agency able to respond well to the needs of the community, converting awareness and emotions into action. The clear progression from awareness to action talks about what Filipino understanding is all about: this is where social responsibility is not an abstract principle but a lived reality that needs dedication and involvement.

Tied to this notion of *kapwa* is the sense of *loob* or inner self, which in turn stands as a seamless journey inward, outward, and upward-toward the self, others, and the divine. As Mercado puts it:

What is loob, buot, nakem and its other Philippine counterparts? We think that the English translation equivalent is the inner self. This inner self embraces loob as the intellect, will, the feelings. They are also connected to the physical. Kalooban embraces the entire self. It is holistic and interior. It is non-compartmentalized. In other words, kalooban is the inner self.⁴⁴

Understanding *loob* as an inner journey conveys the introspective Filipino spirit, yet it is also a movement that binds us with others (*kapwa*) and to *maykapal*, the creator or divine force. That flow of movement that has been described traditionally as *loob* to self, to others, then to the divine, is parallel to our maritime heritage where we saw life as a full-time voyage, literal and metaphysical. The 'Manunggul Jar' is a strong statement of this maritime identity and of the belief of life as a journey. The burial artifact is this jar, where two figures are shown on a boat, in which the deceased must travel from this world into the next world. This reflects not only the sailing roots of our ancestors but also their deep-rooted belief in the cyclical nature of life and death, a passage toward the divine and the eternal. When the individualistic and competitive forces of society threaten to overwhelm it, *pakikipagkapwa* and *loob* present a different narrative for the meaning of community and collective well-being. They encourage people to look beyond their personal interest, invite them to get deep involvement with others, share their burden, and rejoice in their happiness. Once these values are embraced by the Filipinos, they can cultivate an understanding and cooperative environment that leads to a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Conclusion

For too long, the story of the Filipino has been told through the eyes of others, narratives that often painted our ancestors as "primitive" or "lost" until foreign intervention arrived. But as this paper has shown, our identity was never missing; it was simply waiting to be reclaimed from beneath the colonial layers. Through the *Manunggul Jar*, we see a people who viewed life and death as a shared journey, and through the *Balangay*, we find a society built on the literal and metaphorical

⁴³ Albert Alejo, "Loob as Relational Interiority: A Contribution to the Philosophy of the Human Person," trans. Julia E. Riddle and Albert E. Alejo, in *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South*, May 2018, 34, <<https://doi.org/10.13185/2866>>.

⁴⁴ Leonardo Mercado, "Understanding the Philosophy of Buot-Loob-Nakem," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 6:2 (December 2017), <<https://doi.org/10.57106/scientia.v6i2.75>>.

“boat” of community. These are not just artifacts; they are proofs of a deep-seated belief that we are inherently connected to one another and to the world around us.

This sense of belonging, of *kapwa* and *loob*, is what transforms a political agreement like the *Sandugo* into something far more profound: a sacred bond of brotherhood. By shifting our perspective from the individualistic Western *héroe* to the communal Filipino *bayani*, we realize that our strength has always come from looking inward and toward each other. As we face the uncertainties of a modern, globalized world, returning to these “native canopies” offers more than just historical pride. It provides a compass. By honoring our maritime soul and our tradition of communal heroism, we can build a future that isn't just a shadow of our colonial past, but a vibrant, decolonized reflection of who we truly are.

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