

## Scholarly Exploration of Nationalism: A Retrospective View

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### Abstract:

The paper embarked on a scholarly exploration, seeking to unravel the intricate dimensions of nationalism and enhance our collective understanding. Through qualitative methodology—specifically contextual analysis—the study vividly examined the interpretations of influential thinkers regarding this complex concept. Topics spanned from “Nationalism and Its Relationship to a Nation” to “Theoretical Perspectives on Nationalism” and “Filipino Nationalism: Historical Context, Critical Issues, and Developments.” The analysis revealed that nationalism, as a subject, underwent extensive scholarly debate and analysis, reflecting its multifaceted nature and profound impact on nation-building and identity formation. In retrospect, the discourse surrounding nationalism encompassed diverse perspectives, ranging from its role in political and social transformation to its enduring influence on human history.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, History, Filipino Nationalism, National Consciousness

### Introduction:

Nationalism, as we understand it today, began to take shape at the end of the 18th century. Prior to this period, loyalty was often tied to local rulers, religious institutions, or empires. However, several key developments fueled the rise of nationalism. The American Revolution (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789–1799) marked pivotal moments in this transformation. These revolutions challenged existing hierarchies, questioned the divine right of kings, and emphasized the rights of citizens. In the United States, the idea of a nation built on democratic principles gained prominence, while in France; the revolutionary cry of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” resonated, emphasizing national identity. The 19th century is often referred to as the “age of nationalism” in Europe, as the concept spread across central, eastern, and south-eastern

regions of the continent. During this period, ethnographic principles began to influence state boundaries. As the 20th century dawned, nationalism blossomed in Asia and Africa, where colonized nations sought independence,

challenging imperial rule and demanding self-determination (Anderson, 2006; Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Orwell, 2018).

In the Philippines, nationalism took root during the Spanish colonial era, which began in 1565 and unified the archipelago into a single political entity. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in the Philippines, there was no unified Philippine archipelago; it was ruled by different government systems like Datu, Rajah, and Sultan. Initially, the term “Filipino” referred to Spanish criollos (Creoles) born in the Philippines. However, economic changes, education, and secularization

contributed to the birth of Filipino nationalism. This movement culminated in the Philippine Revolution of 1896, led by the ilustrado elites, which was the first nationalist revolution in Asia. Independence from Spain was declared on June 12, 1898, at the Aguinaldo Shrine. Following World War II, the Philippines experienced a surge of nationalism during the post-war era (1946–1972), marked by strong patriotism and pride in the country (Agoncillo, 2002; Zaide, 1984; Pianko, 2010).

This analytical paper delves into the multifaceted dimensions and nuances presented by various scholars in their interpretations of nationalism. By examining their viewpoints, we gain valuable insights into the concept of national identity. As we navigate the realm of social transformation, it becomes crucial for both academia and Filipinos to recognize these different lenses through which nationalism is viewed. Such awareness fosters a comprehensive understanding of the roots and complexities of national identity. Hence, this paper aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do divergent scholarly perspectives on nationalism contribute to our understanding of national identity?
2. What role does historical context play in shaping nationalist ideologies and their impact on social transformation?

### **Methodology:**

The study employed qualitative methodology, specifically contextual analysis to vividly understand the complex structure of the interpretation of the various scholars on the concept of nationalism. The author conducted a contextual analysis of works by Agoncillo, Guerrero, Zaide, Iletto, Gellner, Rousseau, and Bonikowski, focusing on the theme of nationalism.

### **Result and Discussion:**

#### ***Nationalism and Its Relationship to a Nation***

The definitions of nationalism and its relationship to a nation have been widely debated among scholars, evolving in various forms. Nationalism

is typically described by considering language, culture, ethnicity, state institutions, and territory. However, different organizations and individuals interpret these principles differently. Smith (1995) highlights this complexity, noting that:

*“There are many definitions of the concept of nation, ranging from those that emphasize purely 'subjective' factors like attitudes, perceptions, and sentiments to those that emphasize 'objective' factors like language, religion, customs, territory, and institutions.” Rousseau, a well-known philosopher, viewed nationalism as an expression of the three core desires of contemporary humanity: autonomy, unity, and identity” (Smith, 1995)*

The subjective factors are internal and personal aspects that shape how individuals identify with a nation, whereas objective factors are external and tangible elements that can be observed and measured. A well-known philosopher, Rousseau believed that nationalism is driven by three fundamental desires of modern humans: autonomy, unity, and identity. Autonomy refers to the desire for self-governance and independence, unity to the desire for a sense of togetherness and solidarity among people, and identity to the desire for a distinct and recognizable identity that differentiates one group from another. In essence, Rousseau saw nationalism as a way for people to achieve these core desires through forming a nation (Cohler, 1970; Smith, 1995).

Kundra's (2019) observations on the evolving nature of a nation highlight how nationalism and national identity are fluid concepts shaped by various factors, including race, language, religion, and political aspirations. These perspectives align closely with the Philippine context, where the process of nation-making is ongoing and complex, given the country's rich diversity and colonial history. In the Philippines, the historical efforts of prominent figures like Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, and Andres Bonifacio significantly contributed to the formation and expansion of Filipino nationalism. Through their writings, acts of defiance, and leadership in revolutions, these leaders played essential roles in articulating

Filipino identity and unity against colonial oppression. However, as Quibuyen (2002) critically examines, their contributions were also shaped by the specific socio-political contexts of their times, which influenced their visions for the nation and the paths they chose to pursue.

Similarly, Meadows (1970) sheds light on how the nationalist revival in the Philippines encountered various challenges, including internal divisions and the significant aftermath of colonial rule. The fragmentation within the nationalist movement often mirrored the broader societal divisions, including those based on class, geographical location, and even ideological lines. Moreover, the influence of colonialism profoundly impacted the nation's development, instilling a legacy of dependence and shaping the country's political, economic, and social systems in ways that have had lasting effects on its nationalist pursuits and as a country with a rich history of colonial encounters with Spain, the United States of America, and Japan, has forged a profound sense of sovereignty. The tyranny and control imposed by these different colonizers not only left lasting marks but also contributed to the emergence of a concrete national identity among its people.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Nationalism:**

Gellner (1998) believed that nationalism was a powerful force necessary to transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. Similarly, Zaide (2013) indirectly presents factors that contributed to Filipino nationalism, such as the awakening of people's consciousness following the execution of GomBurZa and the negative propaganda by the Peninsulares against Filipinos and Indios. Significantly, a nation's sovereignty violation occurs when divided into multiple states, preventing any single state from being recognized as the national entity. This sense of nationalism was absent in precolonial Philippine society, likely due to the country's archipelagic nature. Each island viewed itself as distinct from the rest of the archipelago, which hindered the development of a unified national identity.

Gellner (1998) emphasized that nationalism is particularly sensitive to situations where the leaders of a political unit are not from the same country as the majority of the population. It can happen if a national region becomes part of a more extensive empire or a local minority group seizes control. In Filipino nationalism, this theory helps explain why national identity emerged as a reaction to Spanish colonial rule, where the leaders were foreign and did not represent the local population. Hence, it eventually led to various movements, including the Katipunan and other propaganda movements in the later years of Spanish Colonization. While some sought to break away from Spanish sovereignty and establish an independent state, liberal reformers supported maintaining the Philippines as a Spanish colony.

Feelings of nationalism are influenced by the extent to which political and national entities adhere to or violate the principle of congruence. When this principle is violated, it leads to anger, whereas adherence results in feelings of contentment. Despite initial appearances, this emotion can aid the formation and growth of nationalist movements. The principle can be disregarded if a state does not include all its citizens within its political borders or contains a significant population from other countries (Gellner, 1998). Recent scholars have further explored the complexities of nationalism. Bonikowski (2016) discusses how nationalism is a political project and a cognitive, affective, and discursive category deployed in daily practice. This perspective highlights the variability of meanings attached to the nation within and across populations over time, influencing political beliefs and behaviors, including support for exclusionary policies and authoritarian politics.

For instance, during Ferdinand Marcos's era of martial law in the Philippines, Filipino nationalism was manipulated as a political project to foster a sense of unity and support for the regime's authoritarian policies. The government utilized nationalist rhetoric to justify its actions, claiming they were necessary to maintain order and progress. This manipulation of nationalism

capitalized on the affective and cognitive dimensions, appealing to the Filipino people's sense of identity and unity to foster support for the regime's agenda, including its exclusionary policies and authoritarian practices. Hence, the discursive aspect of nationalism, as seen in Bonikowski's framework, can be observed in the way nationalist sentiments have been used to differentiate "true" Filipinos from those considered as others, often leading to divisive and exclusionary politics. One great example is the historical tensions between Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao and the predominantly Catholic central government. Nationalist discourses have, at times, painted a monolithic picture of Filipino identity that marginalizes Muslim Filipinos, portraying them as counter to the nation's unity. It has influenced political beliefs and behaviors in the country, fostering a sense of exclusion and sometimes contributing to conflict.

### **Filipino Nationalism: Historical Context, Critical Issues and Developments:**

According to Agoncillo (2002), nationalism plays a significant role in shaping the national consciousness of the Filipino people. This consciousness enabled Filipinos to forge their national identities by understanding their colonial history with Spain, United States of America, and Japan. He argues that Filipino sentiments are influenced by their shared language, culture, traditions, and historical experiences. The conflict between Muslim Filipinos and the government has affected Filipino attitudes, and this issue may persist in modern Philippine society.

The evolution and expression of Filipino nationalism have indeed been influenced by the archipelago's precolonial setup, where the existence of small, independent barangays underlined a fragmented socio-political landscape. This intricate mosaic of separate communities, each with distinct languages, cultures, and governance systems, presented foundational challenges to the emergence of a unified national identity. Against this backdrop of diversity and division, the seeds of Filipino nationalism began

to germinate in the late 19th century, catalyzed by various internal and external pressures.

The entry of Spanish colonialism imposed a foreign unifying structure over the archipelago, ironically setting the stage for the eventual push towards a cohesive national identity. The imposition of Spanish rules necessitated communication and alliances among diverse communities, inadvertently fostering a sense of shared fate among the people inhabiting the Philippine islands. This period also marked the intensification of economic exploitation and social injustices, which, coupled with the advent of global trade, gradually altered the local economic landscape, contributing to the emergence of an educated and economically capable middle class known as the ilustrados. These ilustrados, who had access to liberal European ideas and education, began to assess critically and subsequently question the legitimacy and justice of Spanish colonial rule (Agoncillo, 2002; Zaide, 2013).

Furthermore, the Spanish tactic of favoring and then persecuting the clergy led to significant discontent within religious ranks, particularly following the execution of the three Filipino priests, Gómez, Burgos, and Zamora (Gomburza). This event galvanized nationalist sentiments among Filipinos. Their martyrdom highlighted the racial injustices of the colonial regime, sowing seeds of nationalistic fervor that would later find expression through literature, organizations, and revolutionary actions aimed at asserting Filipino identity and autonomy. The role of literature and intellectual discourse, spearheaded by figures like José Rizal and Marcelo H. del Pilar, cannot be overstated in its contribution to the nationalist movement. These intellectuals criticized Spanish colonial governance through their writings and articulated visions of a united Filipino identity and nation, transcending the archipelago's traditional divisions.

Rizal's novels, for instance, played a pivotal role in awakening Filipino national consciousness by portraying the injustices of colonial rule and advocating for social reforms. The formation of

reformist and revolutionary groups like La Liga Filipina and later the Katipunan further underscored the transition from disparate community identities to a unified nationalistic movement. The Katipunan, led by figures like Andrés Bonifacio, mobilized broad sections of the Filipino populace, bridging regional, linguistic, and class divides to oppose Spanish rule collectively. This movement culminated in the Philippine Revolution, which, despite its initial failures, marked a significant milestone in the Filipino quest for independence and laid the groundwork for the eventual establishment of the Philippine Republic (Agoncillo & Guerrero, 2002).

Filipino nationalism emerged from a complex interplay of economic, social, and intellectual factors during the 19th century, transforming the fragmented archipelago into a nation with a common cause against colonial subjugation. This evolving national consciousness was shaped by the legacy of precolonial barangay independence, the adversities of colonial rule, and the leadership and vision of the country's revolutionary forebears and intellectuals.

Nationalism is closely linked to politics, social transformation, and human history. However, Iletto (1985) chose not to include it within the scope of nationalism. Instead, he applied national awareness within the framework of historical analysis. He argued that:

*“The heroic efforts of a few individuals driving social upheavals should not be discussed retrospectively. Instead, the focus should be on the general populace and their deeper connection to the process of nation-state formation”* (Iletto, 1985).

Even after the rise of nationalism in the Philippines, unity remained elusive among Filipino revolutionaries and reformists. Iletto noted that the Principalia, or the elite class, opposed the Katipunan movement, indicating that the time had not yet come for a unified nationalist front despite the growing desire to free the Philippines from Spanish control.

Despite some beliefs that the 1896 revolution successfully overthrew the Spanish government, the reality is that the United States subsequently occupied the archipelago. Iletto aimed to challenge the comforting views of nationalism, particularly the historical foundations of the various forms of nationalist consciousness that Filipinos claim to have. He emphasized that the majority of the population has ingrained patterns of historical consciousness, starting from precolonial times through the arrival of the Spaniards, Americans, and Japanese and continuing with the establishment of the new society. The purpose of these concepts is to encourage Filipinos to become more knowledgeable about the historical patterns they learn in school or through various resources.

When viewed historically, these concepts have further immersed Filipinos in that consciousness, sometimes to the point where individuals are unaware of their distinct interests and the call of their environment.

Iletto's critical questions on nationalism revolve around the idea that the republic cannot be viewed in isolation as a stage in the evolution of democratic structures or popular consciousness. He highlighted the age-old problem of trying to bring order to what representatives in the pueblos and provincial capitals saw as chaos. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the factors that contributed to our current historical sequence rather than focusing on a small number of unrepresentative individuals. Understanding history in the context of power struggles within the realm of knowledge is crucial. Since then, we have become complacent, failing to recognize that we might be reproducing the historical constructs of our competitors. The more we understand this history, the better we can respond to the needs of those in power and groups with particular interests.

Does Filipino nationalism still exist? There is no doubt that many Filipinos, young and old, still harbor feelings of nationalism and patriotism in their hearts and minds. The ideas that were presented during the later generations are still present today. We are not a nation without a set of

guiding principles. Numerous historical examples of Filipinos risking their lives to defend their homeland, the war against tyranny, the Philippine Revolution, the Philippine-American War, and even the Second World War took place in the Philippines. During the First World War, our contributions were relatively minor. In addition to their service in the Korean War, our Battalion Combat Teams members also served in the Vietnam War. We witnessed AFP units taking part in UN Peacekeeping Missions regularly. The nation's problems are the absence of strong leadership and coherent policy, as well as leaders who lack both nationalism and patriotism in their character. Leaders who give the impression that they are going in the right direction. People in positions of authority whose true colors are red, not yellow, white, or blue, leaders making empty promises and using empty slogans, leaders who put on the appearance of supporting democracy but whose true goal is to establish a fascist government led by one individual.

The Philippines' only flaw is its inability to inculcate its constitution and sense of democracy with anything resembling passion. For instance, there are existing enduring stereotypes and biases against Muslims in the Philippines contribute significantly to the marginalization of these communities. These biases often stem from a monolithic and exclusionary notion of Filipino identity that fails to encompass the diverse cultural and religious practices across the archipelago, hence, Muslims in Mindanao are frequently portrayed in a negative light, reinforcing social segregation and hindering mutual understanding between different ethnic and religious groups. The concept of nationalism, particularly in the Filipino context, has historically been constructed around a dominant narrative that emphasizes Tagalog culture and Christian traditions, marginalizing the cultural identities and autonomy of Muslim-majority areas like Mindanao. This has perpetuated a power dynamic where external control and influences have often overridden local autonomy and self-determination (Abrera & Torres, 2016; Akmad & Akmad, 2024).

Filipino leaders, in general, are money launderers, unlike Thomas Jefferson, who supported the cause of the French Revolution. Would they risk their wealth to support a local brawl with the Chinese over the principle of national territorial rights? However, given our nation's current state, they would likely prefer not to. Most Filipinos do not consider themselves nationalistic thinkers who are passionate about their country, and this sentiment is widespread throughout the Philippines. The 2022 national election in the Philippines highlights a disconnect perspectives where historical context seems to have little influence on the national consciousness necessary for shaping a patriotic approach to choosing the right leader. Even the country's national rallying cries appear to lack relevance to many, viewed sometimes as naive or overly nationalistic.

This phenomenon reflects broader societal shifts where immediate concerns, such as economic stability, social justice, and governance, often take precedence over historical narratives or symbolic patriotism. The electorate's focus on pragmatic issues during elections underscores a growing emphasis on tangible outcomes and leadership qualities rather than abstract ideals or historical symbols. The historical perspective on nationalism could be valuable for examining specific aspects of Filipino nationalism. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of uncertainty as to whether or not Filipinos could survive within the current sphere of historical distortion, which contributes to the evaluation of people's perspectives on what constitutes nationalist ideology.

### **Conclusion:**

Nationalism and its connection to the formation and identity of a nation are intricate and multifaceted, influenced by both subjective and objective factors. In Filipino nationalism, historical, cultural, and socio-political elements have been crucial. Significant historical events, such as Spanish colonization and subsequent revolts, sparked the development of a national consciousness among Filipinos. Thinkers like Rousseau highlighted human desires for

autonomy, unity, and identity, while scholars like Smith, Agoncillo, and Gellner examined nationalism from various perspectives, noting its unifying and divisive aspects.

Despite the growth of nationalist sentiment, the Philippines have struggled to achieve a cohesive national identity, partly due to its archipelagic nature and cultural diversity. Modern Filipino nationalism is shaped by historical awareness, political leadership, and public engagement with national issues. However, there is a gap between historical knowledge and contemporary nationalistic fervor, worsened by political and social challenges. Thus, while Filipino nationalism endures, it is hampered by issues of leadership, historical understanding, and socio-political dynamics. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines historical awareness with active, informed participation in national development.

### Recommendations:

Based on the analysis on the various perspectives of scholars about nationalism, several recommendations are offered:

1. Strengthen education about Philippine history and nationalism at all levels. This includes revisiting the curriculum to ensure a comprehensive understanding of key historical events, figures, and movements. Encourage critical thinking and historical inquiry and promote that students should engage with primary sources, diverse perspectives, and nuanced narratives to develop a deeper appreciation for their national heritage. It is necessary to also promote historical literacy beyond formal education—through museums, cultural centers, and public forums—to reach a broader audience.
2. Recognize and celebrate the rich cultural diversity within the Philippines. Acknowledge that Filipino identity encompasses various ethnicities, languages, and traditions. Different institutions should encourage intercultural

dialogue and exchange to highlight shared values and common experiences while respecting regional differences.

3. Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens. Encourage active participation in community development, environmental conservation, and social justice. Promote civic education that emphasizes democratic values, ethical leadership, and social responsibility. Citizens should understand their rights, but also their duties toward the nation while concreting in creating spaces for dialogue between citizens and policymakers.

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3

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