ETHNICITY, REGIONALISM, AND LANGUAGE

Historical Development of Ethnic Identities

Philippine society was relatively homogeneous in 1990, especially considering its distribution over some 1,000 inhabited islands. Muslims and upland tribal peoples were obvious exceptions, but approximately 90 percent of the society remained united by a common cultural and religious background. Among the lowland Christian Filipinos, language was the main point of internal differentiation, but the majority interacted and intermarried regularly across linguistic lines. Because of political centralization, urbanization, and extensive internal migration, linguistic barriers were eroding, and government emphasis on Pilipino and English (at the expense of local dialects) also reduced these divisions. Nevertheless, national integration remained incomplete.

Through centuries of intermarriage, Filipinos had become a unique blend of Malay, Chinese, Spanish, Negrito, and American. Among the earliest inhabitants were Negritos, followed by Malays, who deserve most of the credit for developing lowland Philippine agricultural life as it is known in the modern period. As the Malays spread throughout the archipelago, two things happened. First, they absorbed, through intermarriage, most of the Negrito population, although a minority of Negritos remained distinct by retreating to the mountains. Second, they dispersed into separate groups, some of which became relatively isolated in pockets on Mindanao, northern Luzon, and some of the other large islands. Comparative linguistic analysis suggests that most groups may once have spoken a form of "proto-Manobo," but that each group developed a distinct vernacular that can be traced to its contact over the centuries with certain groups and its isolation from others.

With the advent of Islam in the southern Philippines during the fifteenth century, separate sultanates developed on Mindanao and in the Sulu Archipelago. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Islamic influence had spread as far north as Manila Bay.

Spain colonized the Philippines in the sixteenth century and succeeded in providing the necessary environment for the development of a Philippine national identity; however, Spain never completely vitiated Muslim autonomy on Mindanao and in the Sulu Archipelago, where the separate Muslim sultanates of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Maranao remained impervious to Christian conversion. Likewise, the Spanish never succeeded in converting upland tribal groups, particularly on Luzon and Mindanao. The Spanish influence was strongest among lowland groups and emanated from Manila. Even among these lowland peoples, however, linguistic differences continued to outweigh unifying factors until a nationalist movement emerged to question Spanish rule in the nineteenth century.

Philippine national identity emerged as a blend of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, when lowland Christians, called indios by the Spaniards, began referring to themselves as "Filipinos," excluding Muslims, upland tribal groups, and ethnic Chinese who had not been assimilated by intermarriage and did not fit the category. In the very process of defining a national identity, the majority was also drawing attention to a basic societal cleavage among the groups. In revolting against Spanish rule and, later, fighting United States troops, the indigenous people became increasingly conscious of a national unity transcending local and regional identities. A public school system that brought at least elementary-level education to all but the most remote barrios and sitios (small clusters of
homes) during the early twentieth century also served to dilute religious, ethnic, and linguistic or regional differences, as did improvements in transportation and communication systems and the spread of English as a lingua franca.

**Language Diversity and Uniformity**

Some eleven languages and eighty-seven dialects were spoken in the Philippines in the late 1980s. Eight of these—Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon, Bicolano, Waray-Waray, Pampangan, and Pangasinan—were native tongues for about 90 percent of the population. All eight belong to the Malay-Polynesian language family and are related to Indonesian and Malay, but no two are mutually comprehensible. Each has a number of dialects and all have impressive literary traditions, especially Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilocano. Some of the languages have closer affinity than others. It is easier for Ilocanos and Pangasinans to learn each other's language than to learn any of the other six. Likewise, speakers of major Visayan Island languages—Cebuano, Ilongo, and Waray-Waray—find it easier to communicate with each other than with Tagalogs, Ilocanos, or others.

Language divisions were nowhere more apparent than in the continuing public debate over national language. The government in 1974 initiated a policy of gradually phasing out English in schools, business, and government, and replacing it with Pilipino, based on the Tagalog language of central and southern Luzon. Pilipino had spread throughout the nation, the mass media, and the school system. In 1990 President Corazon Aquino ordered that all government offices use Pilipino as a medium of communication, and 200 college executives asked that Pilipino be the main medium of college instruction rather than English. Government and educational leaders hoped that Pilipino would be in general use throughout the archipelago by the end of the century. By that time, it might have enough grass-roots support in non-Tagalog-speaking regions to become a national language. In the early 1990s, however, Filipinos had not accepted a national language at the expense of their regional languages. Nor was there complete agreement that regional languages should be subordinated to a national language based on Tagalog.

The role of English was also debated. Some argued that English was essential to economic progress because it opened the Philippines to communication with the rest of the world, facilitated foreign commerce, and made Filipinos desirable employees for international firms both in the Philippines and abroad. Despite census reports that nearly 65 percent of the populace claimed some understanding of English, as of the early 1990s competence in English appeared to have deteriorated. Groups also debated whether "Filipinization" and the resulting shifting of the language toward "Taglish" (a mixture of Tagalog and English) had made the language less useful as a medium of international communication. Major newspapers in the early 1990s, however, were in English, English language movies were popular, and English was often used in advertisements.

Successful Filipinos were likely to continue to be competent in Pilipino and English. Speakers of another regional language would most likely continue to use that language at home, Pilipino in ordinary conversation in the cities, and English for commerce, government, and international relations. Both Pilipino, gaining use in the media, and English continued in the 1990s to be the languages of education.

**The Lowland Christian Population**

Although lowland Christians maintained stylistic differences in dress until the twentieth century and had always taken pride in their unique culinary specialties, they continued to
be a remarkably homogeneous core population of the Philippines. In 1990 lowland Christians, also known as Christian Malays, made up 91.5 percent of the population and were divided into several regional groups. Because of their regional base in Metro Manila and adjacent provinces to the north, east, and south, Tagalogs tended to be more visible than other groups. Cebuanos, whose language was the principal one in the Visayan Island area, inhabited Cebu, Bohol, Siquijor, Negros Oriental, Leyte, and Southern Leyte provinces, and parts of Mindanao. Ilocanos had a reputation for being ready migrants, leaving their rocky northern Luzon homeland not just for more fertile parts of the archipelago but for the United States as well. The home region of the Ilongos (speakers of Hiligaynon) included most of Panay, Negros Occidental Province, and the southern end of Mindoro. Their migration in large numbers to the Cotabato and Lanao areas of Mindanao led to intense friction between them and the local Muslim inhabitants and the outbreak of fighting between the two groups in the 1970s. The homeland of the Bicolanos, or "Bicolandia" was the southeastern portion of Luzon together with the islands of Catanduanes, Burias, and Ticao, and adjacent parts of Masbate. The Waray-Warays lived mostly in eastern Leyte and Samar in the Eastern Visayas. The Pampangan homeland was the Central Luzon Plain and especially Pampanga Province. Speakers of Pangasinan were especially numerous in the Lingayen Gulf region of Luzon, but they also had spread to the Central Luzon Plain where they were interspersed with Tagalogs, Ilocanos, and Pampangans.

As migrants to the city, these lowland Christians clustered together in neighborhoods made up primarily of people from their own regions. Multilingualism generally characterized these neighborhoods; the language of the local area was used, as a rule, for communicating with those native to the area, and English or Pilipino was used as a supplement. Migrants to cities and to agricultural frontiers were remarkably ready and willing to learn the language of their new location while retaining use of their mother tongue within the home.

**Muslim Filipinos**

Muslims, about 5 percent of the total population, were the most significant minority in the Philippines. Although undifferentiated racially from other Filipinos, in the 1990s they remained outside the mainstream of national life, set apart by their religion and way of life. In the 1970s, in reaction to consolidation of central government power under martial law, which began in 1972, the Muslim Filipino, or Moro population increasingly identified with the worldwide Islamic community, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia, Libya, and Middle Eastern countries. Longstanding economic grievances stemming from years of governmental neglect and from resentment of popular prejudice against them contributed to the roots of Muslim insurgency.

Moros were confined almost entirely to the southern part of the country--southern and western Mindanao, southern Palawan, and the Sulu Archipelago. Ten subgroups could be identified on the basis of language. Three of these groups made up the great majority of Moros. They were the Maguindanaos of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Maguindanao provinces; the Maranaos of the two Lanao provinces; and the Tausugs, principally from Jolo Island. Smaller groups were the Samals and Bajaus, principally of the Sulu Archipelago; the Yakans of Zamboanga del Sur Province; the Ilanons and Sangirs of Southern Mindanao Region; the Melabugnans of southern Palawan; and the Jama Mapuns of the tiny Cagayan Islands.
Muslim Filipinos traditionally have not been a closely knit or even allied group. They were fiercely proud of their separate identities, and conflict between them was endemic for centuries. In addition to being divided by different languages and political structures, the separate groups also differed in their degree of Islamic orthodoxy. For example, the Tausugs, the first group to adopt Islam, criticized the more recently Islamicized Yakan and Bajau peoples for being less zealous in observing Islamic tenets and practices. Internal differences among Moros in the 1980s, however, were outweighed by commonalities of historical experience vis-à-vis non-Muslims and by shared cultural, social, and legal traditions.

The traditional structure of Moro society focused on a sultan who was both a secular and a religious leader and whose authority was sanctioned by the Quran. The datu were communal leaders who measured power not by their holdings in landed wealth but by the numbers of their followers. In return for tribute and labor, the datu provided aid in emergencies and advocacy in disputes with followers of another chief. Thus, through his agama (court—actually an informal dispute-settling session), a datu became basic to the smooth function of Moro society. He was a powerful authority figure who might have as many as four wives and who might enslave other Muslims in raids on their villages or in debt bondage. He might also demand revenge (maratabat) for the death of a follower or upon injury to his pride or honor.

The datu continued to play a central role in Moro society in the 1980s. In many parts of Muslim Mindanao, they still administered the sharia (sacred Islamic law) through the agama. They could no longer expand their circle of followers by raiding other villages, but they achieved the same end by accumulating wealth and then using it to provide aid, employment, and protection for less fortunate neighbors. Datu support was essential for government programs in a Muslim barangay. Although a datu in modern times rarely had more than one wife, polygamy was permitted so long as his wealth was sufficient to provide for more than one. Moro society was still basically hierarchical and familial, at least in rural areas.

The national government policies instituted immediately after independence in 1946 abolished the Bureau for Non-Christian Tribes used by the United States to deal with minorities and encouraged migration of Filipinos from densely settled areas such as Central Luzon to the "open" frontier of Mindanao. By the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Ilongos, Ilocanos, Tagalogs, and others were settling in North Cotabato and South Cotabato and Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur provinces, where their influx inflamed Moro hostility. The crux of the problem lay in land disputes. Christian migrants to the Cotabatos, for example, complained that they bought land from one Muslim only to have his relatives refuse to recognize the sale and demand more money. Muslims claimed that Christians would title land through government agencies unknown to Muslim residents, for whom land titling was a new institution. Distrust and resentment spread to the public school system, regarded by most Muslims as an agency for the propagation of Christian teachings. By 1970, a terrorist organization of Christians called the Ilagas (Rats) began operating in the Cotabatos, and Muslim armed bands, called Blackshirts, appeared in response. The same thing happened in the Lanaos, where the Muslim Barracudas began fighting the Ilagas. Philippine army troops sent in to restore peace and order were accused by Muslims of siding with the Christians. When martial law was declared in 1972, Muslim Mindanao was in turmoil.
The Philippine government discovered shortly after independence that there was a need for some kind of specialized agency to deal with the Muslim minority and so set up the Commission for National Integration in 1957, which was later replaced by the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities. Filipino nationalists envisioned a united country in which Christians and Muslims would be offered economic advantages and the Muslims would be assimilated into the dominant culture. They would simply be Filipinos who had their own mode of worship and who refused to eat pork. This vision, less than ideal to many Christians, was generally rejected by Muslims who feared that it was a euphemistic equivalent of assimilation. Concessions were made to Muslim religion and customs. Muslims were exempted from Philippine laws prohibiting polygamy and divorce, and in 1977 the government attempted to codify Muslim law on personal relationships and to harmonize Muslim customary law with Philippine law. A significant break from past practice was the 1990 establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which gave Muslims in the region control over some aspects of government, but not over national security and foreign affairs.

There were social factors in the early 1990s that militated against the cultural autonomy sought by Muslim leaders. Industrial development and increased migration outside the region brought new educational demands and new roles for women. These changes in turn led to greater assimilation and, in some cases, even intermarriage. Nevertheless, Muslims and Christians generally remained distinct societies often at odds with one another.

**Upland Tribal Groups**

Another minority, the more than 100 upland tribal groups, in 1990 constituted approximately 3 percent of the population. As lowland Filipinos, both Muslim and Christian, grew in numbers and expanded into the interiors of Luzon, Mindoro, Mindanao, and other islands, they isolated upland tribal communities in pockets. Over the centuries, these isolated tribes developed their own special identities. The folk art of these groups was, in a sense, the last remnant of an indigenous tradition that flourished everywhere before Islamic and Spanish contact.

Technically, the upland tribal groups were a blend in ethnic origin like other Filipinos, although they did not, as a rule, have as much contact with the outside world. They displayed great variety in social organization, cultural expression, and artistic skills that showed a high degree of creativity, usually employed to embellish utilitarian objects, such as bowls, baskets, clothing, weapons, and even spoons. Technologically, these groups ranged from the highly sophisticated Bontocs and Ifugao, who engineered the extraordinary rice terraces, to more primitive groups. They also covered a wide spectrum in terms of their integration and acculturation with lowland Christian Filipinos. Some, like the Bukidnons of Mindanao, had intermarried with lowlanders for almost a century, whereas others, like the Kalingas on Luzon, remained more isolated from lowland influences.

There were ten principal cultural groups living in the Cordillera Central of Luzon in 1990. The name Igorot, the Tagalog word for mountaineer, was often used with reference to all groups. At one time it was employed by lowland Filipinos in a pejorative sense, but in recent years it came to be used with pride by youths in the mountains as a positive expression of their separate ethnic identity vis-à-vis lowlanders. Of the ten groups, the Ifugao of Ifugao Province, the Bontoc of Mountain and Kalinga-Apayao provinces, and the Kankanays and Ibaloi of Benguet Province were all wet-rice farmers who worked
the elaborate rice terraces they had constructed over the centuries. The Kankanays and Ibalois were the most influenced by Spanish and American colonialism and lowland Filipino culture because of the extensive gold mines in Benguet, the proximity of Baguio, good roads and schools, and a consumer industry in search of folk art. Other mountain peoples of Luzon were the Kalingas of Kalinga-Apayao Province and the Tinguians of Abra Province, who employed both wet-rice and dry-rice growing techniques. The Isnegs of northern Kalinga-Apayao Province, the Gaddangs of the border between Kalinga-Apayao and Isabela provinces, and the Ilongots of Nueva Vizcaya Province all practiced shifting cultivation. Negritos completed the picture for Luzon. Although Negritos formerly dominated the highlands, by the early 1980s they were reduced to small groups living in widely scattered locations, primarily along the eastern ranges of the mountains.

South of Luzon, upland tribal groups were concentrated on Mindanao, although there was an important population of mountain peoples with the generic name Mangyan living on Mindoro. Among the most important groups on Mindanao were the Manobos (a general name for many tribal groups in southern Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur provinces); the Bukidnons of Bukidnon Province; the Bagobos, Mandayans, Atas, and Mansakas, who inhabited mountains bordering the Davao Gulf; the Subanuns of upland areas in the Zamboanga provinces; the Mamanuas of the Agusan-Surigao border region; and the Bila-ans, Tirurays, and T-Bolis of the area of the Cotabato provinces. Tribal groups on Luzon were widely known for their carved wooden figures, baskets, and weaving; Mindanao tribes were renowned for their elaborate embroidery, appliqué, and bead work.

The Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities succeeded in establishing a number of protected reservations for tribal groups. Residents were expected to speak their tribal language, dress in their traditional tribal clothing, live in houses constructed of natural materials using traditional architectural designs, and celebrate their traditional ceremonies of propitiation of spirits believed to be inhabiting their environment. They also were encouraged to reestablish their traditional authority structure in which, as in Moro society, tribal datu were the key figures. These men, chosen on the basis of their bravery and their ability to settle disputes, were usually, but not always, the sons of former datu. Often they were also the ones who remembered the ancient oral epics of their people. The datu sang these epics to reawaken in tribal youth an appreciation for the unique and semisacred history of the tribal group.

Contact between primitive and modern groups usually resulted in weakening or destroying tribal culture without assimilating the tribal groups into modern society. It seemed doubtful that the shift of government policy from assimilation to cultural pluralism could reverse the process. James Eder, an anthropologist who has studied several Filipino tribes, maintains that even the protection of tribal land rights tends to lead to the abandonment of traditional culture because land security makes it easier for tribal members to adopt the economic practices of the larger society and facilitates marriage with outsiders. Government bureaus could not preserve tribes as social museum exhibits, but with the aid of various private organizations, they hoped to be able to help the tribes adapt to modern society without completely losing their ethnic identity.
The Chinese

In 1990 the approximately 600,000 ethnic Chinese made up less than 1 percent of the population. Because Manila is close to Taiwan and the mainland of China, the Philippines has for centuries attracted both Chinese traders and semipermanent residents. The Chinese have been viewed as a source of cheap labor and of capital and business enterprise. Government policy toward the Chinese has been inconsistent. Spanish, American, and Filipino regimes alternately welcomed and restricted the entry and activities of the Chinese. Most early Chinese migrants were male, resulting in a sex ratio, at one time, as high as 113 to 1, although in the 1990s it was more nearly equal, reflecting a population based more on natural increase than on immigration.

There has been a good deal of intermarriage between the Chinese and lowland Christians, although the exact amount is impossible to determine. Although many prominent Filipinos, including José Rizal, President Corazon Aquino, and Cardinal Jaime Sin have mixed Chinese ancestry, intermarriage has not necessarily led to ethnic understanding. Mestizos, over a period of years, tended to deprecate their Chinese ancestry and to identify as Filipino. The Chinese tended to regard their culture as superior and sought to maintain it by establishing a separate school system in which about half the curriculum consisted of Chinese literature, history, and language.

Interruption and changing governmental policies made it difficult to define who was Chinese. The popular usage of "Chinese" included Chinese aliens, both legal and illegal, as well as those of Chinese ancestry who had become citizens. "Ethnic Chinese" was another term often used but hard to define. Mestizos could be considered either Chinese or Filipino, depending on the group with which they associated to the greatest extent.

Research indicates that Chinese were one of the least accepted ethnic groups. The common Filipino perception of the Chinese was of rich businessmen backed by Chinese cartels who stamped out competition from other groups. There was, however, a sizable Chinese working class in the Philippines, and there was a sharp gap between rich and poor Chinese.

Ref.: [http://countrystudies.us/philippines/35.htm](http://countrystudies.us/philippines/35.htm)