

# Indolence of the Filipino in the Realm of System of Objects: A Critical Theory Approach

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**Abstract** – The arrival of Dr. Jose Rizal on June 26, 1892 created a stir in the society so much so that the Spanish colonial authorities kept an eye on him. This was also because Rizal was a staunch critique to the government. All his life, Rizal dedicated it to the improvement of the lives of his countrymen. But this was not how the government saw it. Prior to his return to the Philippines, he was already publishing articles in the *La Solidaridad* especially the *Indolence of the Filipinos* that depict the plight of the Filipinos and how the Spaniards ruled the country.

This paper attempted to look at the work of Jose Rizal *the Indolence of the Filipinos* using the critical approach in Jean Baudrillard's *System of Objects*.

Contrary to what the Spaniards saw in the Filipinos – as *indolent or lazy*, Rizal saw it as a product of a functional system produced by colonial domination; an atmosphere created by the Spanish authorities to subdue whatever resistance poised by the indios or the inaction of the Filipinos because of the created belief that has been sown in their consciousness that the colonizers are mighty and they could not do anything but to serve them; or that they were as good as plowing and tilling the land only; pray and work for the church to obtain the reward of heaven.

It is interesting to note that the findings will lead us to the realization that, even though these two great thinkers/writers existed one after the other, Rizal's works and his life was dedicated to the cause of helping his country move from the realities of the dominated to non-dominated – from slave to freemen; from uneducated to educated and lastly from simple indios to nationalist Filipinos. These social dynamics shown in Rizal's *Indolence of the Filipinos* were also the realities found in the discussion of Baudrillard's *Systems of Objects*. And only in breaking the code of status, as what Baudrillard called it, can the real societal structure of free and intelligent Filipinos help make the country better which is the ultimate project of Rizal's life, our national hero.

**Keywords** – Atmosphere, Functional System, Indolence, System of Objects.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Jose Rizal had a lot of works that could enlighten the Filipino mind, and help us examine the existing condition of society in his time. One of his works is *The Indolence of the Filipino* [1] which will be used in this paper as a basis in examining the society using Jean Baudrillard's *System of Objects* [2]. The analysis of the society will be the basis for the link of Rizal's life in Dapitan as a solution to the problems which the society has as described in the *Indolence of the Filipino*.

For those who are familiar with the life of Dr. Jose P. Rizal, one would agree that the work he published in *La Solidaridad* [3] entitled *The Indolence of the Filipinos* is an analytical study about the Philippine society during the Spanish regime. Aside from being critical about the society,

Rizal wrote it in order to defend the Filipinos from the charge that they were born indolent [4]. It is in this context that I will attempt to mirror it with how Jean Baudrillard's examination of people in relation to the objects around them and the system of human relationship that result there from.

In Jean Baudrillard's work entitled *The System of Objects* [5], he was really emphasizing Objects per se like the chair inside the house, the bed, kitchen, etc. All of these he was critical on how the system, meaning the object in relation to other objects, as well as how man relate to objects around him through time. He elucidated the meaningfulness of object through time.

Dr. Rizal acknowledged that indolence was present and existing, that there were Filipinos who were indolent, but he believes that it is caused. It is in his examination of the society that Dr. Rizal, our national hero, was able to support his contentions.

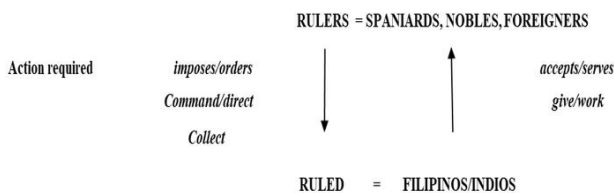
A re-reading of Rizal's exposition on the Philippine colonial society could be possible using Baudrillardian's critical theory approach found in his work *The System of Objects*. This will validate at the end the attempt to consider the work *Indolence of the Filipinos* of Dr. Jose P. Rizal as a critical appraisal to the existing society of his time. (10)

## II. THE FUNCTIONAL SYSTEM

Functional system refers to the traditional environment that includes the arrangement of furniture offering a faithful image of the familial and social structure of a period [6]. In the Philippine setting, there is a certain structure which is defined by the society that is "created" by colonial Philippines. Natives then observe certain folk beliefs without knowing their significance. These acts were interpreted by the Spaniards as acts of the devil. Rizal further point out that the stupidity of some, the crimes of others, and one's shortcomings as devil's act too. Thus, in the Philippines one who seeks the origin of his ignorance beyond the accepted beliefs met a worse fate. The church would give specific prescription on how people would behave in the society. For instance, a women's duty was depicted as one who must serve her family and must serve the church through prayers, novenas, etc. Rulers influence people. Rulers are seen with servants. This translates to the consciousness that despises physical or manual labor as not fitting to the nobility and aristocratic pride. If the commoner cannot be alleviated from poverty, at least Filipinos would try to imitate mannerism of the rulers. Filipinos as being ruled would have the desire to be equal with the rulers [7].

In the context of Baudrillard, Such social structure is normal for a specific period. In the *Functional System*, the emphases lie on **unifunctionality, immovability, imposing presence and hierarchical labeling**. What does it

mean? In the system of objects, unfunctionality would mean specific defined role corresponding to an object in a room with other objects of varying functions within the ambit of family [8]. If you are an indio, you contribute to the society by serving the nobles or masters and rulers-the Spaniards or foreigners and the capitalists. Being identified as such behaviors are confined with what the society offers. Immovability on the other hand, simply means Filipinos would have to act according to the prescribe norms in the society. If Filipinos desire to be free and if they insist to think freely, this would be absurd and meaningless. The social structure is determined by the ruling Spaniard:



This is the “sacred structure” during the colonial period. Behaviors outside of this context is meaningless for Spaniards; it is subversive and a sin in the language of the church. Any deviation from the said structure should be confessed and be corrected through an equivalent penance. A good description of this is in the work of Horacio de la Costa [9], *Readings in Philippine History*, which says *Fear God and serve your king*.

How then this desire to become rulers and imitate the way nobles behave leads to indolence? According to Rizal, all these naturally produced aversion to activity and hatred or fear of work [10]. Imposing presence and hierarchical labeling would mean as structure founded on tradition and authority. For example in the dining table, there are specific places for the family members. The father has a specific chair as well as the mother. Although this is not imposed, children carry it with them and adopt it when they have their own family. The chair as an independent object is insignificant but within the system of objects it becomes meaningful and even powerful. It may elicit fear like children must not sit on their father’s chair, etc. Baudrillard would put it as *symbolic values are supplanted by organizational values* [11].

Part II of *The Indolence of the Filipino* describes the Filipino’s way of life during the pre-Spanish Filipinos in contrast during the Spanish regime. By describing how they were during the pre-colonial Philippines, Dr. Rizal proved that indolence among the Filipinos was not hereditary. Rizal, like de la Costa, gave a positive description of the Filipinos in terms of economy, trade and the way they govern themselves in the *Indolence of the Filipino* [12].

The Malayan Filipinos before the coming of the Europeans carried on an active trade, not only among themselves but also with all their neighboring countries... The first thing noticed by Pigafetta, who came with Magellan in 1521, on arriving in Samar-the first Island of the Archipelago they reached-was the courtesy and kindness of the inhabitants (*cortesi e bouni*) and their trade. Wealth abounded in the islands. Pigafetta tells us of the abundance of foodstuffs in Paragua and of its inhabitants

almost all of whom cultivated their own farms (*quasi tutti lavorano I propri campi*).

In contrary, Filipinos during the Spanish era, tend to follow and obey what the government imposes and what the church prescribes. As what Rizal said *his mind conditioned thus, the Filipino follows the most pernicious of all routines-a routine, not based on reason but imposed and forced* [13]. Man therefore in this context is not free at all; the Indio having no other thing in mind but to serve the interest of the bourgeoisies. While on the other hand, in the system of objects a bed is a bed and a chair is a chair in the system of objects; there is no relationship between them so long as each serves only the function it is supposed to serve [14].

### III. ATMOSPHERE

The concept of naturalness is highlighted in the discussion of atmospheric value in Jean Baudrillard’s work. However, there is a prevailing point in his discussion-**MAN’S FREEDOM**.

Atmosphere is the systematic cultural connotation. This can be understood at the level of objects. This idea leads now to the reality that man is not free with respect to these objects, nor are these objects free with respect to man. *Man’s relationship to objects becomes subject to a social dialectic which is basically that of the forces of production* [15]. Unconsciously, people are consumed by this signification. In the value of play, colors for example have psychological and moral overtones. A person will ‘like’ a particular color or take it as his favorite. In the 2010 Philippine presidential election, candidates had their own color: RED for presidential candidate Gordon, GREEN for Teodoro, Orange for Villar, YELLOW for Aquino, etc. Although they have created this personification and meaning to colors, they are also trapped with this color. It would be meaningless for them when they choose to change from one color to another especially in times of the campaign period. In relation to voters, they are already conditioned that these particular colors are signs of their candidates; it also means the political platforms their candidates propose and advocate. As Baudrillard explains, color may be dictated by an event, a ceremony or a social role; it may be the characteristic of a particular material-*wood, leather, canvas or paper*. Tradition confines colors to its own “parochial meanings and draws the strictest of boundary-lines about them” [16].

Rizal posed the question, “*how then and in what way was the active and enterprising heathen Indio of ancient times converted into a lazy and indolent Christians?*” [17]. Rizal answered the question manifested in parts III & IV of his work:

A fatal combination of circumstances, some independent of the will despite the efforts of men, others the offspring of stupidity and ignorance, others the inevitable corollaries of false principles, has induced the decline of work, an evil which instead of being remedied by prudence, mature reflection, and recognition of the errors committed by a deplorable policy through regrettable blindness and

obstinacy, has gone from bad to worse until reaching the condition in which we see it now.

Wars, futile expedition and piratical incursions contributed to the inaction of man in the society because workers from the neighboring towns were asked to help. Usually these workers were forced to work by their masters who were the nobles, the government or the church. This situation gave reason to Filipinos to do other things except work. The condition was such that the Filipinos were working but they do not enjoy the fruits of their labor. As for Rizal, man works for a purpose; remove the purpose and you reduce him to inaction [18].

We perfectly knew that before the Spaniards came, Filipinos were already hardworking people, however, it changed when the Spaniards came. There was a societal or moral problem with the relationship between work and the worker. The atmosphere in this case gave reasons for inaction or indolence. The system works in this context: the farmers were forbidden to go to their farms unless they ask permission from the town authorities but seeking for the permit takes time because the municipal office was far from the farmer's place. The land as an object becomes insignificant for the farmer. The concept of "farm land as life" for farmers no longer appeals to the farmers. *To another, the neglect of the farmers by their tillers-many of whom were dragged out of their homes by wars and piracy-was sufficient to nullify the hard labor of so many generations* [19].

The meaning accorded to work and the fruit of the work becomes meaningless. For Rizal, he pointed out this change due to false doctrine by the church. *Many Filipinos were then asking themselves why they have to work when the curate says that the rich man will not go to heaven* [20]. Gambling as offered by the society becomes the consolation for those who despised work. In addition was the imposition *to irrigate his fields during dry season, not by means of canals, but with masses and prayers* [21]. Rizal, in contrast, believed that those who seek for miracles are the laziest, just as spoiled children are the most ill-bred [22]. People were also taught that when one is uncertain of his destiny, one has no choice in life which makes him unfree. This explains why Filipinos during Spanish colonization are no longer the same as those of the time of the discovery, either morally or physically.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Rizal believed that the misfortune of the Filipinos today is that they have become brutes only halfway. The Filipino is convinced that to be happy, it is necessary for him to lay aside his dignity as a rational being, to hear mass, confess, obey the curate, believe whatever he is told, pay whatever is demanded of him, pay and always pay; toil, suffer and keep silent without aspiring to know, or understand without separating himself from his carabao. This image in Baudrillard's discourse would mean that in the language of Functional system, the carabao is tied up with the tiller of the land. The functional value would be the carabao is used as farming instrument. In the atmospheric value, man controls the carabao. Both functional and atmospheric value

is painted in this contrasting element. Filipinos have no freedom and cannot exercise their freedom because they are ruled. The function of the ruler is to govern-everything must be decided upon by the people who ruled, by the bourgeoisies, a relationship of consumption for Baudrillard.

There is a way out of this 'system' by which Filipinos are held captive. The last part of the work gives us the solution where Rizal proposed Education and National Sentiment as the solution for Filipinos to be conscious and break from this structured system created by the rulers. *Without education and liberty-the soil and the sun of mankind-no reform is possible*. No measure can give the desired result [23]. It was clear as an exile in Dapitan how he managed to do something for the People.

Rizal dared to discuss the causes of indolence in the society so that it will serve as the catalyst to effect social change. He did not merely criticize just for the sake of criticizing but to awaken the people's initiative to work towards reforms and towards the attainment of man's goal. This, he showed while he was exiled in Dapitan. It was not because people dominate other people that they can no longer do anything but it is in their willingness to alleviate themselves in their present plight that defines their character.

Man's purpose is not to satisfy the passion of another man. His object is to seek happiness for himself and his fellow men by following the road towards progress and perfection [24]. Remigio E. Agpalo, in his work *Adventures in Political Science*, considers this as a progressive development of human society [25].

Using the ideas of Jean Baudrillard in his work, it helps us understand how the materiality of the objects and the materiality of needs create a system that if examined in the context of human relationship, gives us idea that objects' usefulness vary depending on the cultural milieu and cultural connotation it evokes. In the context of society from where Rizal was coming from, there is nothing but a dominated reality of the Spaniards. And if nothing is done, it will continue forever. This is the reason why Rizal believed in Education as a means to start in building national consciousness because this is the only aspect where people could never be colonized.

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