

# In Defense of the Filipino Diaspora from Mabini's Decalogue: A Philosophical Analysis on the Morality of Nationalism

Martin Joseph Esteves and Athen Elijah Martin Esteves

Page | 38

The concept of nationalism has its fair share of positive and negative perceptions. In the context of the Filipino diaspora, various views and arguments have been used for and against it. Depending on the ideology, the morality of nationalism can be acceptable or not. In its acceptable form, the morality of nationalism is able to push for change, preserve cultures, promote pride in international competitions, and unite people. On the other hand, its negative outcomes lead to conflict with others, cultural ignorance, and a negative view of the diaspora. Being an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) may sometimes feel like a double-edged sword. On the good side, they are receiving better career. On the other hand, some perceive them as people who do not patronize the Philippines and who exchanged their nationalism for a better life. Mabini's "The True Decalogue," also known as his "ten commandments" for the country, has points that imply that Filipinos should prioritize the Philippines' "happiness and honor over one's self." Apolinario Mabini's Decalogue is an appropriate framework for this discussion as it answers ethical questions about morality and nationalism such as: (1) Is the reason for leaving the country a factor in assessing the morality of emigration?, (2) Can emigration be morally justified?, and (3) Is emigration anti-nationalist? This study, therefore, provides a venue to answer these questions. The research is approached from the perspective of analytic philosophy, in particular, the conceptual analysis approach. The authors explicate the issue of the Filipino Diaspora by using Mabini's very famous work: The True Decalogue. This project can be perceived as a genuine discourse on the morality of nationalism.

**Key Concepts:** diaspora, society, rights, the morality of nationalism, analytic philosophy, immigration, migration, national partiality; Filipino Nationalism; Mabini's "The True Decalogue"

## Introduction

The latest stock estimate of Filipinos overseas is 10.2 million. According to the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (2022), of the 10.2M, 4.8M are permanent migrants, 4.2M are temporary migrants (including OFWs), and 1.2M are irregular migrants. These numbers represent roughly 11 percent of the total Filipino population. This established the Philippines as the "second largest labor exporting country in the world" (Bautista, 2002). "Given the loose definition of 'diaspora' as the 'dispersion of people from their original homeland', this phenomenon can be perfectly regarded as the 'Filipino diaspora'" (Dacumos, 2015). Yet despite the statistics "the Filipino state lose little sleep over the status of their expatriate populations. What is primordial is to appeal to a sense of Filipino nationalism as a mobilizing factor for emigration, expatriation, work, sacrifice and... reinvestment" (Camroux, 2008). The prevailing emotion is that emigration is viewed positively, as a means to a better future for the person involved and future generations.

While there had been countless studies exploring the nature of the Filipino diaspora, none had been found that critiques the morality of this act. However, if we analyze the problem philosophically, the prime cause centers on the consciousness of the people who regard diaspora as a simple issue of choice based on the betterment of life. In addition, it is not in the consciousness of the people that being nationalistic is a moral obligation. It is at this juncture, that Mabini's Decalogue plays a very important role. It perfectly fits the Filipino culture of

being God-fearing, where Christianity plays a big part in their everyday lives when Filipinos make their choices. Lying, cheating, stealing, and other actions that are perceived as intrinsically evil, as far as Devine Deontological Theory is concerned, have blueprints embedded in the heart and mind of every Filipino. In contrast, the problem of diaspora is relative to being a moral issue. Predominantly, OFWs and Filipinos who have emigrated are praised and perceived as successful people.

The question of whether it would benefit the Philippines or otherwise remains obscure as far as genuine nation-building is concerned. Perhaps, Mabini is correct in saying that Filipinos are still not free in their consciousness as sovereign people in the truest sense because an internal revolution has not occurred yet. Filipinos are facing the same problem of poverty, unprivileged, and slavery in the hands of foreign power and domination. These are similarly, the same predicaments that Rizal, Mabini, and others faced in the hands of Spanish and American colonialism. Hence, the need for this discourse is necessary. This paper aims to give a comprehensive insight into the morality of nationalism in the context of the Filipino diaspora.

### **On the Morality of Nationalism**

Nationalism is an ideology that emphasizes loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation or nation-state and holds that such obligations outweigh other individual or group interests that concern themselves with loyalty to the nation (Britannica, 2023). As good as it may sound at first, nationalism has several problems when it is understood wrongly.

First, it may not promote goodwill with other neighboring nations as nationalism aims to promote the nation's interests first and foremost over any group or country. This may result in a nation disregarding international policies on something so long that they would attain what they are interested in. Second, a nation's actions that will yield negative effects will be justified by nationalists, as they may debate that the action was done in pursuit of the "national interest" (Weiss, 2019). According to Glover (1997), there exists two histories of Nationalism: a struggle and a conflict. The former causes a country to be free from another country or another colonial power. On the other hand, the latter results in quarrels that culminate in wars. Williams (2008) defined moral universalism as the idea that certain systems of ethics can be applied to everyone, no matter their race, religion, color, nationality, or culture. The concept of moral rights and moral duties can be applied to the universalist morality of nationalism. A different situation would appear with the particularist morality of nationalism, that is the standard that an act would result in one's nation's self-determination and upholding loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to a nation.

The instrumentalist morality of nationalism pushes the idea that an act of nationalism is moral if it would benefit the country of the actor. On the other hand, the non-instrumentalist morality of nationalism is saying that an act of nationalism is moral if it would benefit, or not harm, the totality of the human race. With the wide variety of acts of nationalism from country to country, the morality of nationalism allows these acts to be subject to checks and balances, and be assessed for the betterment of the whole society. Moreover, morality can be applied in a country with a rich history of nationalist acts and nationalism embedded strongly in its culture and people.

The Philippines has been an independent and sovereign state for not more than 100 years if we take into account the Commonwealth government of Manuel L. Quezon in 1935 and the Republic government of Manuel A. Roxas in 1946. Before these years, there were a lot of battles for its independence. Jose Rizal was instrumental in giving the people of the Philippines, identity when they had none, helped the Philippines be an independent state, and supported Philippine Independence (Ramones, 2008).

### **Text, Issues, and Moral Orders**

In the pages that followed his draft for the constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, Apolinario Mabini published what he called, “The True Decalogue,” a reformulation of the Ten Commandments into a “Filipino national ideology” (Roxas-Lim, 1999). Mabini expressed that these are “proposals for the internal revolution for the people to adopt as their moral and behavioral guide, and for the external revolution for the revolutionary government to espouse as the framework of governance” (Gealogo, 2019). An external revolution pertains to what is commonly identified as an uprising against an existing powerful institution, wherein the end goal is the “overthrow of an unjust and oppressive system” (Roxas-Lim, 1999). In a paper delivered by Roxas-Lim in 1999, it was stated that a revolution requires more than violence. Mabaquiao (2018) further defined an internal revolution to be the alteration of “those features of our consciousness responsible for making us easy victims to our colonizers”. Internal revolution then, is a prelude to external revolution, which is accomplished by completely altering one’s state of mind. Mabini intended the Decalogue to serve as a “guide for Filipinos carrying out the internal revolution” (Mabaquiao, 2018).

The relevance of Mabini’s Decalogue to this endeavor is that it will serve as the anchoring framework in establishing the validity and factuality of a “morality of nationalism,” and provide a “systematic and well-grounded framework for why Filipinos should love their country as a matter of obligation” (Mabaquiao, 2018). In addition, Mabaquiao also mentioned that since the Decalogue’s “content centers on the moral justification of nationalism,” it can be further said that “the Decalogue is one philosophical treatise on the morality of nationalism.” That being said, the interpretation of Mabini’s decalogue can be used as an ethical guide in assessing the morality of the Filipino diaspora. “(T)he *Decalogo* remains relevant to our contemporary society in the throes of demoralization” (Roxas-Lim, 1999).

The following is the English version of the Decalogue, and the same will be used as the main reference for this study:

- (I). Thou shalt love God and thy honor above all things...*
- (II). Thou shalt worship God in the form which thy conscience may deem most righteous and worthy...*
- (III). Thou shalt cultivate the special gifts which God has granted thee, working and studying according to thy ability, never leaving the path of righteousness and justice...*
- (IV). Thou shalt love thy country after God and thy honor and more than thyself...*
- (V). Thou shalt strive for the happiness of thy country before thy own, making of her the kingdom of reason, of justice, and of labor...*
- (VI). Thou shalt strive for the independence of thy country...*
- (VII). Thou shalt not recognize in thy country the authority of any person who has not been elected by thee and by thy countrymen...*
- (VIII). Thou shalt strive for a Republic and never for a Monarchy in thy country...*
- (IX). Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...*
- (X). Thou shalt consider thy countryman more than thy neighbor...*

## **Nationalism on Moral Order**

In Mabini's Decalogue, love for God, self-respect, and personal flourishing were given the highest importance in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd commandments. The message is very clear as regards people's duty to their country. He identified many attributes that are very important in reforming people to be nationalistic and patriotic. In addition, the 9th and 10th commandments delineated the concept of thyself, thy neighbor, and countrymen, placing the love of countrymen higher than the two others.

*"Thou shalt love thy country after God and thy honor and more than thyself: for she is the only Paradise which God has given thee in this life, the only patrimony of thy race, the only inheritance of thy ancestors and the only hope of thy posterity; because of her, thou hast life, love and interests, happiness, honor, and God."*

In reference to the first attribute, it may be that Mabini was referring to Filipino values which are inherent in the Philippine culture. Generally, religious followers want to be able to enter the kingdom of God or paradise (Abad, 2001). If Filipinos will be taught that the Philippines is "the only paradise which God has given thee in this life." It necessarily follows that to abandon the Philippines and settle in a foreign country is a clear act of disobeying the 4th commandment, hence, a semblance of anti-nationalism, as far as Mabini's Decalogue is concerned.

In reference to the second attribute: "the only patrimony of thy race," subjective implication suggests that Mabini was referring to the Filipino concept of family and ethnicity. Filipinos give much value to the concept of family. Respect for parents is no doubt and may be said that it is second to how Filipinos respect God. Even today, big networks such as Channel 5 and 2, would capitalize on the Filipino culture's concept of family by using the terms "*kapamilya*" and "*kapatid*." Indeed, patrimony and race are very important values to Filipinos. If Filipinos will be taught that the Philippines is "the only patrimony of thy race", it follows that to abandon the Philippines and settle in a foreign country is a clear act of disobeying Decalogues' 4th commandment. Hence, such an act is a semblance of anti-nationalism, as far as Mabini's Decalogue is concerned.

From both the third and fourth attributes, Mabini was referring to the Filipino concept of wealth, abundance, and progress in the family. The concept of "*pamana*" (inheritance), resonates with honor and happiness in the hearts of the Filipino people. In fact, those members of the family who were stripped of their inheritance were perceived as dishonorable. Even the family practice of "hand me down" is a clear demonstration of how Filipinos would value the practice of family inheritance.

Filipinos also value the idea that the whole family should be part of every occasion or any semblance of progress. Notice that in most provinces, when one family is celebrating an occasion, it is not only that all distant family members and relatives are invited but also the entire barangay or community are attending the celebration. This is how progress is extended in the family and progress is existentially shared by this practice.

If Filipinos will be taught that the Philippines is "the only inheritance of thy ancestors" and "the only hope of thy posterity," it follows that to abandon the Philippines and settle in a foreign country, is a clear act of disobeying Decalogues' 4th commandment, hence, such an act is a semblance of anti-nationalism, as far as Mabini's Decalogue is a concern.

### **On Filipino Diaspora**

Moving on to the Filipino diaspora, let us define what diaspora is. According to Sheffer (2003), the simplest political science definition of diaspora is a group of people who have the same ethnonational origin who voluntarily or forcibly migrated from their place of origin to another place, settled in that new place, and retained contact with their place of origin. Overseas

Filipino workers are Filipinos, who chose to work in a different country from their homeland Philippines, in hopes of having better employment, salary, and opportunities. They are considered to be our modern-day heroes as they contribute to the economy of the Philippines through remittances and they endure hardships just to provide for the needs of their families and give them a comfortable life (DOLE, n.d.).

As the Filipino diaspora is not residing in their motherland, some implications may be considered. By definition, nationalism states that the interests of the country should be of priority over any other group. From this definition, it can be argued that OFWs chose to work or live abroad for a better opportunity, thus choosing their interest over the nation's interest. The morality of nationalism is a vague topic outside Mabini's Decalogue. Certainly, it is of interest as applying it to the context of the Filipino diaspora would raise thought-provoking discussions.

The concept of diaspora is a central issue in the discussion on the morality of nationalism. By itself, it somewhat shows an act that is against the essence of nationalism. However, it also benefits their country in many ways, such as bumping up the country's economy and even gathering helpful information from different countries that may benefit ours. Thus, diaspora can be analyzed in multiple ways. However, if we take into consideration Mabini's Decalogue as a framework in Filipino morality of nationalism, the Filipino diaspora will be regarded as an immoral act for not being in consonance with the 4th commandment. In the discussion above, Filipino diaspora is a semblance of anti-nationalism. The idea of "*bayan muna bago sarili*" (thy country before self) is also the logical coherence presented in Mabaqiao's work, where he made a hierarchy of commandments in the Decalogue to logically answer conflicting interests of each commandment. Hence, as far as Mabini's Decalogue is concerned as a framework of the morality of nationalism, the Filipino diaspora is immoral.

### On Filipino Nationalism

Apolinario Mabini's most famous work "The True Decalogue" is a set of commandments, and it was presented mimicking the ten commandments of Moses. It was to be adopted as Filipinos' moral and behavioral guide and as the government's framework of governance. Mabini's Decalogue is relevant to the concept of the morality of nationalism as some of its commandments are what nationalism implies. Particularly, the fourth to eighth commandments talk about how the interests and priorities of our country should be put first, sometimes even before our own life, interests, and priorities. Mabini was able to tell Filipinos to fight for the country's self-determination and uphold loyalty and allegiance to the Philippines, all while being aligned with the standards of all types of the morality of nationalism, be it a universal or particularist, or an instrumentalist or not.

In the status quo, a huge number of Filipinos are limited by the need to survive due to the current state of the country. Further, they are deprived of proper education to give them the capability to properly analyze certain situations and assess what the most ethical choice would be. There is a great divide in how different social classes generally would view issues and even nationalism. Due to these, even if the case is that all Filipinos would want to embody nationalism, our present economic predicaments in the Philippines make a big impact on how people take this issue at hand. A significant number of people would not go deeper in the analysis of the topic and would only have the assessment of the morality of nationalism based on the top layer of possibilities, say promised benefits, of actions.

Considering Mabini's Decalogue as a solid framework for the morality of nationalism, the Philippines has experienced unfavorable social outcomes where "love for country" was taken in a very authoritarian context. We take as an example, former president Rodrigo Duterte. Duterte took over the Office of the President in 2016. During his term, he implemented the war against drugs in the country. During the 2021 State of the Nation Address, he stated "*I am a*

*Filipino and I love my country. I do not want my country in disarray because of drugs.*” His statement can be seen as a form of nationalism. By not wanting the country to be destroyed by drugs, it can be said that he speaks allegiance to the Philippines and is against drugs. However, in this drug war, CNN (2022) reports a death toll of 6,248. While other human rights organizations state that this number is an undercount, a huge part of the centrality of nationalism is human life. He holds to his love for the country as the reason for the drug war. But if we look at the bigger perspective, the number of lives taken away from society would clearly violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **On Defences to Mabini’s Decalogue and Filipino Diaspora**

In a relative and contrasting perception of nationalism and Mabini’s “The True Decalogue,” one can say that the Filipino diaspora in fact, display nationalism as they did not violate or is coherent with some of the Decalogue’s commandments. Examining each of them will show us that the Filipino diaspora actually does not violate these rules.

First, the third commandment, there is a legitimate argument that can be made that the Filipino diaspora does not violate this commandment. Rather, they actually represent the country to the world in a way through their talents and give honor to it. Because of this, it can be said that the Filipino diaspora contribute to the progress of humanity while also representing their nation, the Philippines (DOT/DFA 2023). Loving your country can be in the form of different ways, and staying in it is not the only one. Choosing to live in another country is actually a representation of how someone loves their country of origin as they chose to sacrifice to have better opportunities abroad, which helps them love and appreciate the country more. By being away from the Philippines, the Filipino diaspora could have a deeper love and appreciation for the Philippines.

Lastly, a country not only represents the nation itself, but it also includes its citizens. From this, it can be argued that the Filipino diaspora is making their country happy by getting better opportunities abroad to provide for their loved ones to make them more comfortable and happier. Additionally, representing your country not only in the professional field but also in other fields like sports, arts, and the academe will be in the interest of the country’s happiness as this would help put the Philippines on the global map and expand its identity.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the lack of a venue for exploring Mabini’s Decalogue as a legitimate framework for the morality of nationalism creates a divide in opinions on certain issues. The example of former president Rodrigo Duterte and his drug war shows that a love for the country does not always equate to an instrumentalist morality of nationalism. Apolinario Mabini’s “The True Decalogue ” provides a guide that aligns with the standards of all types of the morality of nationalism. In general, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding Morality of Nationalism in the context of the Philippines because the idea is intricate and varied. It may be perceived that Apolinario Mabini was talking about nationalism in the context of a revolutionary political atmosphere which may not be in consonance with the present time. However, the issue of internal revolution and its conflict with most of our countrymen’s personal ambition by the diaspora remains a serious predicament today.

### **References**

Abad, Ricardo. “Religion in the Philippines.” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3, January 2001, pp. 337-367.

Bautista, Rose Banzon & Cynthia, Maria. “Migrant Workers and Their Environments: Insights from the Filipino Diaspora,” 2002.

Camroux, David. "Nationalizing Transnationalism?: The Philippine State and the Filipino." *Les Etudes du CERI* - n° 152, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales Sciences Po, December 2008, pp. 1-39.

CNN Philippines. "Drug War death toll reaches 6,248 - PDEA", CNN, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2022/5/29/Drug-war-death-toll-PDEA.html>

Dacumos, Rory. *A brief discussion of the developmental impacts of the Filipino diaspora. Development and the Filipino Diaspora*, 2015. 10.13140/RG.2.1.2122.4169. Accessed 13 April 2023.

DOLE. "OFW: ANG BAGONG BAYANI". [https://car.dole.gov.ph/news/ofw-ang-bagong-bayani/#:~:text=Our%20Overseas%20Filipino%20Workers%20\(OFW,comfortable%20life%20despite%20fighting%20homesickness.](https://car.dole.gov.ph/news/ofw-ang-bagong-bayani/#:~:text=Our%20Overseas%20Filipino%20Workers%20(OFW,comfortable%20life%20despite%20fighting%20homesickness.)

GEALOGO, FRANCIS A. "Masonic Parallels in Mabini's True Decalogue and Constitutional Program". *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2019, pp. 95–111. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45171973>. Accessed 13 April 2023.

Glover, Jonathan. *In The Morality of Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Kohn, Hans. "nationalism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Apr. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>. Accessed 13 April 2023.

Mabaquiao Jr, Napoleon M. "Mabini's True Decalogue and the Morality of Nationalism." *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, vol. 17, no.3, 2018, pp. 15-29. Accessed 13 April 2023.

Ramones, Richard John. *Philippine Nationalism: An Analysis of the Development of Philippine National Identity*, 2008. Rutgers College, Thesis.

Roxas-Lim, Aurora. "Apolinario Mabini and the Establishment of the National Church." *Asian Studies*, vol. 35, 1999, pp. 115-128.

Sheffer, Gabriel. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Weiss, Kai. "The Many Problems with the Ideology of Nationalism." *AIER*, 8 Mar. 2021, [www.aier.org/article/the-many-problems-with-the-ideology-of-nationalism/](http://www.aier.org/article/the-many-problems-with-the-ideology-of-nationalism/).

Williams, Melissa. *Moral universalism and pluralism*. 2008.