

# Food Fight! Cross-cultural Conflict in a Polish Blogger's Post about Filipino Food

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Agness Walewinder, a Polish travel blogger, detailed her unpleasant experience in the Philippines and vowed that she “would rather go hungry than eat Filipino food again”. Her diary entry went viral on social media, infuriating Filipinos who criticized her poor research skills and bad restaurant choices.

This study analyzed 247 blog comments from the controversial blog entry, using concepts in Face Negotiation as an explanatory framework. The analysis underscored the differences between the individualistic tendencies of Western countries and the collective outlook of Asian countries. It found that the new media domain provided an equalizing environment where facework interaction strategies are more fluid, and the use of emoticons and text-based arguments compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues. The investigation of blogs and other cultural products of new media opens up a new understanding of how people from different cultures “save face”, communicate and manage conflict in an intercultural setting.

**Keywords:** *cross-cultural communication, Face-Negotiation theory, communication technologies, online environment, intercultural conflict*

A Polish traveller's recent blog post antagonized Filipino netizens. Agness Walewinder's (2014) blog post, “I Would Rather Go Hungry Than Eat Filipino Street Food Again!”<sup>1</sup>, detailed her unpleasant culinary experience in places like Banaue, Cebu, Bohol, Manila and the Northern provinces. She described how local Filipino food was “packed with salt, sugar[,] and oil” (para. 11), and how it gave her and her companion, Ces, “stomachache and diarrhea” and “[a] massive migraine, mood swings[,] and heartburn [sic]” (para. 12). She went on to write about the “poor quality of food” (para. 13), the culprit responsible for the “vast majority of Filipino kids and young people (who) are overweight” (para. 13). Not surprisingly, Walewinder's travel blog, *eTramping.com*, first went viral on social media and was then featured on the local news. Infuriated Filipinos criticized the tourist's poor research skills and bad food choices. Her bog post accumulated 690 responses from people of diverse backgrounds. Although some comments expressed sympathy for Walewinder's experience and even agreement with her observations about Filipino food, most of the commenters were

Filipinos expressing anger and disappointment with the blogger's writings in defense of their beloved cuisine and culture. The heated online exchange in the comments section of the controversial blog entry is ripe with material for a cross-cultural analysis.

This study used concepts from Stella Ting-Toomey's (2005) Face Negotiation Theory to analyze 247 blog comments about Filipino food to explore how people from different cultures "save face" in an online environment. Though face negotiation continues to be a valid and well-researched topic, face negotiation in the information age presents a whole new set of norms, practices, and challenges in intercultural communication. The lack of nonverbal cues and the fluidity of identity complicate conflict resolution in computer-mediated communication. Walsh, et al.'s (2003) exploratory study of facework and conflict styles in online learning environments offers a qualitative investigation of self-construal, or one's self-image, in a non face-to-face communication medium. They concluded that "a computer-mediated learning environment may enhance facework and conflict resolution" (p. 120), and that regardless of cultural heritage, majority of the participants in the study believed that establishing a positive, knowledgeable, and independent self-image, or self-construal, is crucial in an online course.

By studying eBay buyers and sellers, Brett et al., (2007), analyzed the role of language in determining the likelihood of conflict or dispute resolution in an online context. They emphasized that computer-mediated communication is "notoriously devoid of social cues" (p. 86) and so people must characterize others based on the content and linguistic features of the words they use. Another study by Canelon & Ryan (2013) focused on the influence of facework behaviors in online discussion boards to determine the effect of gender on relationships. Using an online discussion board about a controversial topic, they observed that for males, the facework behavior exhibited are more direct and controversial, as opposed to females who are indirect and confrontational. Their quantitative assessment of discussion board posts showed that "gender and facework behavior interact in influencing discussion outcomes" (p. 110).

Food blogs are interesting products of convergence, not only because it merges content from a host of cultures, but also because it merges old and new media: "A unique convergence is occurring in food blogging: while the food blogosphere was born in the realm of new media (the Internet) it must by nature of its subject rely on the offline food world, as well as traditional media spheres such as print and television" (McGaughey, 2010, p. 69). The food blog becomes a social discourse of conversations about people with common interests. In particular, it "promotes the continuation

of a conversation from the offline world in the virtual world” (McGaughey, 2010, p. 76).

While food blogs about Filipino cuisine abound, one particular blog by a Polish traveller piqued Filipinos’ interest. Agness Walewinder, a Polish backpacker, travelled to the Philippines looking forward to the taste of “fresh exotic fruits and veggies, grilled seafood, smoked meat and fish (and plenty of *balut*” (para. 7). She described Filipino food as “a melting pot of influences” (para. 3) from Spaniard colonizers and Chinese immigrants. She wanted to try traditional dishes such as *lechon*, *longganisa*, *torta*, and *adobo* in street stalls and local *carinderias* [eatery]. Unfortunately, her experiences with local fare put a damper on her enthusiasm. In her entry “I Would Rather Go Hungry Than Eat Filipino Street Food Again!”, she complained about “old and gross” fruits bought at a local market, the difficulty of finding traditional Filipino dishes, and the stomachache, dizziness, and exhaustion she experienced after sampling local food. The post was replete with images of food, including a curious-looking hot dog sandwich from 7-11, which Walewinder claimed was the Filipino *longganisa*. The bottom line, according to Walewinder, was that “Based on our experiences, Filipino food did not live up to our expectations at all” (Walewinder, 2014, para. 20). Face-Negotiation Theory explained how individuals deal with the conflict that erupted when Walewinder’s blog post gained popularity.

### **Face and Culture: Goffman, Ting-Toomey, and Hofstede**

Several theories and models explain the concept of face and facework (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lim and Bowers, 1997). However, their focus on general facework behaviors, such as request situations or politeness, means these theories and models have not been adequately applied to conflict situations.

Face negotiation theory, set forth by Stella Ting-Toomey, provides an “organizing and explanatory framework for conflict behaviors” (Oetzel, 2003, p. 600). It describes how individuals manage facework on a cultural level. The study of conflict in a cross-cultural setting becomes more important in an increasingly multicultural, globalized world.

The concept of face and facework best applies to strategies adopted by individuals and groups to manage their identity or identities. Ting-Toomey (2005) drew on the work of Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman, who made substantial contributions in the study of face-to-face interactions, and defined “face” as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman, as cited in Canelon & Ryan, 2013, p. 111). Face is “an identity resource in communication that can be threatened, enhanced,

undermined, and bargained over—on both an emotional reactive level and a cognitive appraisal level” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 73). This is why people are involved in “facework,” or specific behaviors, whether verbal or non-verbal, which maintain or restore the threatened face. The theory proposes that collectivist cultures prefer avoiding, yielding, and compromising styles, while individualistic cultures favor forcing and problem-solving styles (Ting-Toomey, 1998).

In understanding cultural similarities and differences in conflict negotiation, an important explanatory framework is found in Hofstede’s (as cited in Ting-Toomey, 2005) *Dimensions of Cultural Variability*. Face negotiation theory assumes that these dimensions shape the orientations, movements, and styles of facework strategies. Members of “individualistic” cultures, found in most northern and western regions of Europe and North America, use “self-oriented” facework while “collectivist” cultures, common in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, and the Pacific Islands, prefer “other-oriented” facework (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Applying this framework to the current study, one can consider how Filipinos, who are highly collectivist in nature, will typically work to resolve conflict in a way that defends the group face, or Filipino culture and identity. On the other hand, a member in an individualist culture, such as Polish blog writer Walewinder, will find a way to defend individual face, even at the expense of the group face.

Negotiating conflict involves some strategies that serve different functions. In his study of conflict styles, Rahim (2001) created several categories: dominating, avoiding, integrating, comprising, and obliging, all of which Ting-Toomey (1998) incorporated in her face negotiation theory. “Dominating” facework uses defensive strategies to win the conflict, emphasizing the importance of assertion and using direct tactics to threaten the other individual’s face. An “avoiding” conflict style emphasizes the preservation of harmony by not dealing directly with the issue at hand, and saving the face of the other to avoid embarrassment. The third style, “integrating,” considers the self and the other, and includes “mindful listening, intentional reframing, collaborative dialogue, and mutual interest problem solving” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 79). In a “compromising” conflict style, a “give-and-take solution is reached that accommodates both self- and other-face and would characterize independent self-construal” (Walsh, 2003, p. 114). Finally, an “obliging” conflict style privileges interdependent self-construal, where one’s face is surrendered or sacrificed at the expense of the other’s face.

Although five-style model was helpful in describing conflict styles, Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) claimed it was “reflective of an individualistic,

Western interpretation of what constitutes appropriate and effective conflict communication” (p. 54). Thus, Ting-Toomey et al. added three (3) more conflict styles: emotional expression, third-party help, and the Conflict Style Dimension (CSD) scale. “Emotional expression” refers to individuals’ strategies using negative feelings, such as anger and resentment, to guide responses to conflict. Using an outsider, or a person not directly involved in the conflict, to mediate and resolve the issue constitutes “third-party help.” Finally, individuals who react to conflict in an indirect, roundabout way are described best by the “passive-aggressive approach.”

Ting-Toomey (2005,) suggests four (4) face movements or opportunities an individual uses to save face in a conflict:

1. If there is a high level of concern for both self-face and other-face, the result is “mutual-face protection.”
2. If there is a low level of concern for both self-face and other-face, the result is “mutual-face obliteration.”
3. If there is a high level of concern for self-face but a low level of concern for other-face, the result is “self-face defense.”
4. If there is a high level of concern for other-face but a low level of concern for self-face, the result is “other-face defense.”

Eight (8) conflict communication styles and the different face movements are important indicators of an individual’s reaction to a text; the communication styles also explore content topics or domains individuals operate within during particular communication situations. According to Ting-Toomey (2005), these are the following:

1. Autonomy, the need for others to respect an individual’s privacy and boundaries, and to acknowledge an individual’s independence.
2. Inclusion, or the need to be recognized as friendly, cooperative, and willing to adjust to certain situations.
3. Status refers to content related to physical appearance and attractiveness, power, reputation, and financial capabilities.
4. Reliability, which is the need for others to approve of the individual’s trustworthiness and consistency in words and actions.
5. Competence describes qualities such as leadership, intelligence, expertise, and skills in problem solving.
6. Moral, or the need for others to respect an individual’s sense of integrity, dignity, and honor.

Face movements, conflict communication styles, and face-content domains were used as categories to code the comments from Walewinder's blog entry. From 690 blog comments, 247 (with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error) were manually coded, and several individual quotations from commenters were highlighted and discussed.

Of the 247 blog comments, 139 were written by female individuals and 108 were written by male individuals. With regard to nationality, 119 comments belonged to Filipinos, 66 commenters did not indicate their nationalities, and the rest (62 comments) belonged to individuals from Western countries (Poland, Norway, Great Britain, Austria, and the United States). It is important to note that a handful of the comments were from Agness Walewinder herself, as she defended herself and answered questions about her experience in the Philippines. Interestingly, there were hardly any other Asian nationalities aside from Filipinos.

### **Face Orientation and Movements**

According to Ting-Toomey (2005), individuals engaging in facework may be concerned with three things: "self-face," or the primary concern for one's own image, "other-face," or the consideration of the other party's image during conflict, and "mutual-face," which is the concern for both parties' image and the "image" of the relationship. Judging from the comments section in Walewinder's blog post, the individuals, most of whom are Filipinos, engaged in other-face or mutual-face concern, consistent with the value dimension of collectivism. Collectivist cultures such as the Philippines emphasized the "we" identity over the "I" identity, which is evident in this comment from Nathan (2014):

HI Agness, I am sorry you were not able to enjoy your stay in our country (Philippines). I am also sorry that your experience with our food left you disappointed. You had a budget of 25 Dollars (approx. 1,025.00 pesos) but you ate at places were [sic] locals with only 1.25 dollars (50 pesos) budget ate. That is why you were not able to experience authentic Filipino dishes. We like sweet food because we like to be happy and that translates to our being accommodating and friendly. As for the other foods [sic], it's a matter of preference. If you happen to come back to the country, look me up and I might be able to hook you up with real Filipino foodies that [sic] will give you a really gastronomic experience the Filipino way that will be within your budget. That is an invitation. Anyway,

I respect your point of view and enjoy your blog. Keep it up and have a great day. (para. 13)

Beyond the individualism-collectivism cultural pattern, another value dimension manifest in the intercultural conversation of the comments section was “power-distance,” the way that cultures treat status differences and hierarchies. Economic woes and the third-world status of the Philippines was a frequent topic among commenters, who felt that Walewinder was not aware of the economic realities of the Philippines when she chose to “eat like a tramp”. Filipino netizens reminded her that the sizeable gap between the rich and the poor affect the local food culture.

The conversation about the blog extended well beyond the topic of food and evolved into a discussion about national identity, social mores, and stereotypes, with emotional Filipinos employing facework strategies to alleviate the damage: “When our face is under attack, emotional vulnerability or anxiety sets in, and associated emotions such as fear, anger, humiliation, guilt, shame, disgust, and contempt follow closely” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 76):

I think what most upsets Filipino [sic], which I am, is your insensitive headline. ‘I would rather go hungry than eat Filipino Food AGAIN! It’s your opinion and that’s fine. But, how would you feel if I went to Poland and ate dirty street food and insulted it just based on that one experience? It’s disrespectful...There are about 171 dialects and 7,107 islands in the Philippines which means, one area of street food should not represent Filipino food. (Donna, 2014, para. 101)

Donna’s comment reflected Ting-Toomey’s (2005) concept of “in-groups,” or “groups of individuals who perceive themselves as sharing some salient attributes (e.g. religious beliefs, values, or language), a strong emotional bond, and an interdependent fate” (p. 87). Filipinos who felt that the harsh comments attacked national identity will feel an affinity with fellow Filipinos. Most netizens who commented on the post identify themselves as being Filipino before making a statement. Should this have been another blog with a less provoking title, it would not have been viewed as, what Ting-Toomey calls, a “face-threatening process,” or FTP.

One of the conditions that shape facework strategies is that “the more important the culturally appropriate facework rule that is violated, the more severe the perceived FTP” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 77). According to one

commenter, “Food represents the culture of a nation, which can be hugely influenced by their past, their values, and their economy” (Rachel, 2014, paragraph number). Many Filipinos see the blog post as an attack not only on Filipino food, but also an attack on Filipino culture and identity. Of the 247 comments, 161, or more than half, engaged in self-face defense strategies, which means that commenters had a high level of concern in defending their own country. A number of comments (33) were engaged in mutual-face protection. Some Filipinos were emphatic towards Walewinder, expressing how they understood her position and agreeing with Walewinder’s observation that Filipino food was too salty and not nutritious enough. However, these comments likewise expressed that Walewinder was out of line to say that she would never like to experience Filipino food again. Thirty-one (31) comments, mostly written by commenters from countries with an individualistic orientation, used an other-face defense. They praised Walewinder and defended her opinion about Filipino food, but they had a low level of concern for their own face.

### **Facework Interaction Strategies**

In negotiating conflict, individuals or groups may resort to verbal or nonverbal strategies to defend or maintain face. On a blog’s comments section, individuals relied heavily on text. The lack of nonverbal cues creates misunderstanding in a multicultural setting. Some commenters were straight to the point, as is the case with individualist cultures engaging in low-context, direct styles of negotiation, while others engage in high-context, indirect styles, indicative of a collectivist culture. While some heated comments from Filipinos indicated defensive strategies to correct false information or change people’s perception of Filipino food, others, like Alexis May (2014), used a congenial tone in integrating facework:

Although I empathize with what you had experienced with the “street” food in the Philippines I think the message that ‘came across’ your entire blog post is what perhaps set off most of the “very sensitive” comments that I also have observed here in the comment section. Perhaps the wording could have been relayed differently? because although I respect others difference of opinions, some things can some off rude. I can understand honesty because I always stand by that but I do it in a way that doesn’t hinder the integrity of someone else’s culture :-). You say that it’s the food you criticized and not the people— but to us Filipinos [sic] our food, our family and our life style IS what represents US



<3 Having said that, I can agree with you in some terms. I can agree that the street foods can be intimidating and was most definitely not the “best” quality of foods...I understand when you said you wanted to get a feel and the vibe of the country by experiencing the street food but if I were to really describe my culture it’s that we are VERY family oriented and THE BEST home cooked meals are really at home <3 Immersing yourself in the filipino culture definitely should start in someone’s home cooked meal and definitely NOT the streets :-)) I hope this gave you some insight :-)) Thank You for making the trip to my homeland :-). (para. 101)

Her use of emoticons such as <3 (heart) and :-) (smiley face) compensated for the lack of nonverbal cues in the message. Her purpose was to provide an insight into Filipinos’ position, create open dialogue, and to foster understanding among cultures. Alexis May’s “conflict” style of emotional expression was also typical in Filipino culture. As previously mentioned, food is not only viewed as a cultural product, but also a source of national pride. Therefore, any sign of disrespect is bound to ruffle some feathers.

Another common restorative facework strategy used by Filipino commenters in response to the blog post was “direct aggression” or domination. The Philippines was generally described as a collectivist culture; according to Proposition 10 of Face-Negotiation Theory, “Members of collectivist cultures tend to use more avoiding conflict styles than members of individualistic cultures” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 85). However, Lauren’s and other posts by Filipinos who adopted a more assertive or aggressive conflict style (100 comments out of 247) reflected the changing dynamics of the online environment:

Click bait posts like this makes my heart jump with laughter. Come on, you are selling your opinions as hard facts when you haven’t even experienced the whole country. And if you pay peanuts by the way you get well– disappointment. And who the hell goes to a convenience store expecting gourmet quality food? I travel too but the last thing i will ever do is to insult a country’s culture just because it doesn’t fit my personal criteria. (Lauren, 2014, para. 117)

It is much easier to type, especially given a blanket of anonymity, than to be verbally aggressive in face-to-face situations. Some Filipino commenters type in capital letters, the equivalent of “verbal yelling” or “screaming”, to

express their discontent. Computer-mediated communication provides a forum for usually passive individuals to express their more dominant side.

Proposition 11 (members of collectivist cultures tend to use more obliging conflict styles than members of individualistic cultures) and proposition 12 (members of collectivist cultures tend to use more compromising to integrating conflict styles than members of individualistic cultures) (Ting-Toomey, 2005) do hold true for some of the commenters. Of the 247 comments, 19 used obliging conflict styles, 37 employed a compromising tone, while 25 used an integrating strategy to communicate differences. Abe (2014) says:

I appreciate your opinion and I'm very sorry that the food from the places you visited didn't satisfy your appetite. Honestly, most of our food (specifically those being sold in the streets) is not served to please foreigners. They are meant to satisfy our locals with limited budget as well as please those who are daring and adventurous enough to eat our sweet, strong, fishy but yummy dishes. And to generalize filipino [sic] cuisine as unappetizing as well as to invite others to subscribe to your opinion is but unfair and by far an insult to the intelligence of those who are interested to taste our local dishes. (para. 60)

Marla (2014) posts:

It is sad though that you weren't able to experience the best food we have and The Filipinos that are commenting badly are just full of pride. we're [sic] not the best basketball and we don't have the greatest government. in [sic] a way your blog just hit us where we actually found pride in our country—our food. I totally understand where you're coming from. There [sic] will always be those people who just didn't like it. period. but [sic] i didn't also like your title. It [sic] misleads other travelers who would want to get a taste of our food and culture. you're [sic] basically robbing us of tourists instead of letting them find out for themselves. (para. 17)

Both Marla and Abe acknowledged Walewinder's frustration with Filipino food. Abe admitted that Filipino street food is not tourist-friendly (in terms of quality); Marla understood where Walewinder was coming from and even revealed that Filipinos take pride in their food. But both

commenters shared the sentiment that for someone outside of the culture, a member of the outgroup, to generalize after spending a short time immersed in local culture was unfair. Most of the comments from Filipinos echoed this notion, some even offered tips and invitations to their homes should Walewinder wish to taste authentic Filipino dishes.

Filipino blog commenters treaded carefully, responding to the criticism in a more congenial manner, and withholding rash judgment. Ting-Toomey's concept of mindfulness comes to mind, as a skill required in intercultural facework competence that may manage conflict more effectively (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Walewinder replied to some of the comments on her blog post, particularly to comments that validated her opinion of Filipino food or when factual corrections (regarding her nationality) had to be made. The kind of facework strategy she employed was one of a verbal, explicit style influenced by an individualistic culture. Her country, Poland, is an individualistic society, which means there is a high preference for a loosely knit social framework where individuals are expected to take care of themselves. Individualists also use low-context direct styles of communication, evident in one of her replies to a comment:

I'm not surprised that most of Filipinos are getting emotional when reading the title of the post. It's a bit extreme, but that's the way I felt when experiencing the food in the Philippines. We did not have any Filipinos friends who would take us home and treat us with the food their moms would cook for us. We didn't visit any Filipinos houses and as the post says, it's all about the street food we tried. We ate the way locals eat. And that's the truth....Sorry if you felt insulted by the post, but as I said countless times, this is my personal experience with dining out like a local in the Philippines and the food I was served made me sick and unhappy. (Agness, 2014, para. 33)

In some of Walewinder's comments, she recounted how she enjoyed the scenery, the beaches, and the local people, but she emphasized that she was not satisfied with the food served. She also underscored her individual, subjective, and truthful opinion of the food, one she merely wanted to share with fellow travellers. She had not accounted for Filipinos' sensitivity to criticism of fellow Filipinos and Filipino cultural products.

## Face Content Domains

Face negotiation theory posits that individuals have different face “needs” or “wants”. Some negotiate because they need to assert their independence and protect their privacy; some negotiate because they need others to respect their sense of dignity and honor; others simply want to be acknowledged as a likeable person. In any conflict, it is important to know what individuals hold in high regard; ultimately the more one holds a content domain in high esteem, the more one needs validation in that domain. Hofstede’s value dimensions may influence the face content domains of particular cultures: individualists value autonomy face, while collectivists value inclusion face (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Competence was an important face-content domain found in 79 comments. Both Filipinos and non-Filipinos expressed their expertise in navigating different cuisines. The Filipinos were especially vocal about the skills and knowledge about food they possess, recommending dishes to try and places to visit. Walewinder’s competence as a traveller was questioned; Filipinos asked why she neither researched the places that she would be visiting nor hire a guide to bring her to the best places to experience local culture.

Reliability, exhibited in 58 comments, was also a concern for both Filipinos and non-Filipinos. For Filipinos, it was important to gain non-Filipinos’ and Walewinder’s trust, so a number of commenters offered to show Walewinder the best places to consume Filipino street food to expunge Walewinder’s negative experiences.

Filipinos wanted to be recognized as friendly and sociable (53 comments used the face-content domain of inclusion). Alex (2014) said:

If you received strong criticisms here, it’s because it’s a cultural thing. In general, Filipinos are non-confrontational and indirect-speaking of negative criticisms (similar to the Japanese and formal British). Most are not used to otherwise. We are also very proud of our heritage and are naturally very hospitable. When a foreign visitor reacts strongly negative, Filipinos may UNCONSCIOUSLY take it as us not having been hospitable enough (introverted response), an attack against our heritage (extroverted offense), or both. But that’s just to explain where the emotions may come from. I understand the honesty and frustration you had over your experience. A lot of travelling locals get that too. (para. 12)

Though many comments by Filipinos generally found fault with

Walewinder's blog post, most of them ended by inviting Walewinder to their own homes. One commenter said that her maternal grandmother was a great cook, and that Walewinder should email her when the traveler returns to the Philippines. Another shared links to highly recommended and budget-friendly places to eat in and out of Manila. Still another was interested in arranging a special food tour for Walewinder so she could experience the best food the Philippines could offer. There was no lack of accommodation on the part of Filipinos, further demonstrating their need for inclusion.

Some of the comments on the blog post also supported Filipinos' need for others to admire the Philippines' reputation as a beautiful archipelago of islands, each with its own culinary specialties. Reacting to Walewinder's comment that "Apples were tiny, oranges and nectarines were extremely sour and pineapples were soaked in some kind of liquid that smelled bad" (para. 19), one Filipino declared that the Philippines is one of the exporters of the finest pineapples in the world, and that their bananas and mangoes are sold worldwide. Other commenters described the specialties of each region, like the *adobo* from Pampanga, *longganisa* from Lucban, and the *lechon* from Cebu. Filipinos were proud of their local specialties, and were not shy to recommend provincial delicacies. To highlight this need for validation, some commenters referred to the pleasant experiences of famous and highly regarded culinary connoisseurs Anthony Bourdain and Andrew Zimmern, who both travelled to the Philippines and talked about their gastronomic adventures.

## Conclusion

Although Filipinos are reputedly warm, friendly, and hospitable, push their buttons and expect a collective reaction, maybe even a request for an apology from the appropriate embassy. Hot-button issues included: jokes about Philippine medical education on a popular television sitcom; branding the Philippines as a nation of servants; and the racist slurs that likened Filipinos to a biscuit. Only the latest in a long list was a Polish blogger's claim that she would rather go hungry than eat Filipino food again. In this day and age of connectedness and convergence, cultural sensitivity goes a long way lest a misunderstanding turns into conflict.

Face negotiation theory is useful in understanding intercultural communication conflict situations. In certain situations, one's face is at risk in conflict. Culture may have a lot to do with how one deals with conflict. What comes naturally in Filipino culture may not be the most effective communication style for other cultures. The individualism-collectivism orientation can also explain the priorities of Filipinos, as well as their source

of pride. Face negotiation theory is far from perfect, as Ting-Toomey (2005, p. 89) admits “more research is needed to determine the importance of affective and situational aspects of face concerns and conflict styles across ethnic groups and across a diverse range of cultures.” Face negotiation theory and other related theories about impression management in an intercultural setting are reminders that communication and culture are intricately linked; it is with mindful listening and true dialogue that one must traverse the web of cultures.

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## Note

- 1 The post, initially titled “I Would Rather Go Hungry Than Eat Filipino Food Again!”, was changed after the barrage of irate comments it garnered.

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