REFLECTING ON VICENTE RAFAEL'S *MOTHERLESS TONGUES*: THE INCURSIONS OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF AND THE APORIA OF TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

In reflecting on Filipino historian Vicente Rafael's book, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (2016), this article examines the author's critique of Filipino nationalism and its pursuit of a national language and culture. It brings to question Rafael's characterization of nationalism as a monolingual project that rejects the foreign, arguing that such assertion not only presents a reductionist view of Filipino nationalism, but also undermines its value as form of resistance to enduring structures of linguistic and intellectual imperialism.

Keywords: Filipino nationalism; Hegemony of the English Language; Deconstruction

At the beginning of his book, Vicente Rafael explains that *Motherless Tongues*: *The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* is about the relation between language and history "seen

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from the perspective of translation practices."[2] Beneath the impersonal "narrative" of research, however, one can hear the author's intimation of a self, in revealing his personal, intellectual journey. Although hardly sustained throughout the book, Rafael offers sufficient autobiographical fragments, revealing that his incessant return to the topic and trope of translation is an attempt to satisfy something more than an intellectual curiosity. For someone who grew up speaking various languages of different hybrids and accents, and moves constantly between empire and colony, it is hardly surprising that his concern for translation, which may have begun, he claims, as a result of a happy accident, would eventually develop into "a kind of obsession."[3] Marked by the experiences and sentiments of an immigrant scholar, of one who constantly traverses Anglo-American and Filipino academia and negotiates between Western theory and Philippine realities as a way of grappling with issues that cut across the geographical divide, *Motherless Tongues* is about the vexed relationship between the languages that have nursed and nourished the author's mind and his life as an intellectual. As such, the book is not just a study on the history and politics of translation practices, but also a reflection on the task of translation seen from the perspective of, and intimately related to, the translator's life.

As part of his "imaginative recuperation,"[4] Rafael chooses to remember his beginnings as a series of accidents. Not only does he identify the accidental as the force of discovery, the wind of chance that brought many of his teachers in Area Studies to stumble upon the "unlikeliest" encounters and unforeseen situations;[5] more importantly, he declares it as what falls, what befalls us, what comes to us as the event of *the unintended*, what falls outside and beyond our control*, and of the unexpected*, insofar

[2] Vicente L. Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016), 1.

[3] Rafael, 190.

[4] Rafael, 178.

[5] Rafael, 155.

as it falls outside what is familiar, habitual or known to us. And so to have an accident, according to him, is "to come in contact with the *radically foreign*, a kind of otherness that resists assimilation."[6]

Anyone who has read *Contracting Colonialism*[7] will remember how Rafael revealed a trace of the foreign, not in the drama of unexpected encounters but in the most mundane, common places of our everyday existence, particularly in the most subtle accidents and inconspicuous mishaps of communication. In moments when mishearing or misunderstanding occurs, unintended meanings are produced. And it is through such mishaps that translation, despite it being constantly harnessed as a tool for colonial subjugation, becomes simultaneously the site of subversion, a site where the hierarchy of languages could be undermined and the authority's control and monopoly over the production of knowledge falters. But the real force of insight of this book, which in light of the author's recent work now begs to be recognized as a kind of foreshadowing, lies in showing that colonial resistance did not and need not rise from either hate for or rejection of the imperial other.

In bearing witness to the radically foreign, to the indelible otherness that resides at the heart of language, we not only acknowledge that the language we speak is far greater than we can fully comprehend or control; more importantly, we recognize that language, and the promise of otherness it brings, *is* the condition of our existence: that in our inescapable desire to understand and be understood, we are always already in translation, and to be so means to be in a constant state of othering. "Welcoming what comes,"[8] the Filipinos are and have always been a people eager to listen and learn the ways of the other. But while nationalist writers have deemed this as a kind of submissiveness to the foreign, a tragic symptom of slavish mentality that has caused them much anxiety, Rafael argues that

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[6] Rafael, 153.

[7] Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[8] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 21.

this openness has actually been the very proof of the people's resilience against an imperial power and the condition that has made possible the emergence of true sovereignty. This sovereignty, which is forged not by distinguishing itself apart and against an other but, through acts of compassion and generosity, by what constantly and joyfully grants hospitality to the foreign, is a freedom that completely escapes the logic of violence inherent in the very idea of sovereignty, latent in the power and authority that any sovereign body would necessarily grant itself. As Rafael eloquently describes, this sovereignty is "the miraculous, if evanescent, opening of an entirely new life," the traces of which "continue to arrive from the future within and beyond the nation-state."[9]

(Re-)Assessing the Dangers of Filipino Nationalism and the Threat of a Monolingual Culture

Pursuing further the implications of such thoughts, we find in *Motherless Tongues* Rafael's insightful critique of Filipino nationalist writers, whose ideas on sovereignty and language, he argues, subscribe to the same "structuring logics" of an imperial/colonial agenda. Reflecting on Renato Constantino's essay on "The Miseducation of the Filipino,"[10] he notes the Filipino historian's inability to get beyond an instrumentalist view of language. Constantino gives too much credit to the hegemony of English, which has wiped a people of their memory and their ability to speak; he is unable to take into account the unintended effects, the resilience of the native languages, the ways by which Filipinos are constantly transforming English "into a language foreign to the Americans themselves."[11] Rafael's message is clearly more hopeful; he tries to convince us that we can get beyond what he describes as the "tragic vision and unfinished history of the national."[12] But the nationalist fervour, it

[9] Rafael, 49.

[10] See Renato Constantino, "The Mis-education of the Filipino," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 1 (1970): 20-36.

[11] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 56.

[12] Rafael, 49.

seems, still remains quite strong, and at one point, one senses a tinge of frustration in Rafael's tone. He asks, "does the promise of a foreign, colonial language always invariably turn out to be a curse? Does it always lead to the self-destruction of the miseducated? Or can miseducation itself give rise to something and someone different from the suicidal colonized subject?" Further he queries, "can the desire for the master's speech, bring about not death but another form of life? And could we think of this life as one that while steeped in the history of the colonial, also escapes it?"[13]

Indeed, on the one hand, one wonders how anyone could be oblivious to the resilience of a people, and not see this as proof that life, our life, cannot easily be destroyed. And yet, on the other, I feel myself hesitating to accept this view without thinking the repercussions of what may possibly be an underestimation of the danger.

Rafael clearly recognizes a threat: he acknowledges the hegemony of American English and its monolingualism, and criticizes American foreign policy for instrumentalizing language, particularly how foreign languages are "stockpile[d] into a standing reserve,"[14] and how translation is used as a weapon serving its nationalist and imperial agenda. However, consistent with his arguments, Rafael shows how such efforts are doomed to fail, how "American monolingualism is never quite free from the polylingualism of its non-Anglophone citizenry,"[15] and how even in the context of war, the work of translation itself, can never be fully secured to serve intended goals. But in light of Rafael's critique of Filipino nationalism, one cannot help but take his analysis of American monolingualism as a grave warning, showing how America's vision of a national language, its imposition of a hierarchy of languages and its history of purifying English, all have an uncanny resemblance to the call of Filipino nationalists for a vernacular-based national language.

It is therefore not surprising that Rafael would defend Taglish against nationalist writers (Constantino, as well as Agoncillo) who saw it as

[13] Ibid.

[14] Rafael, 123.

[15] Rafael, 113.

a corruption, a bastard language[16] unfit for the task of national unification. Exploring the potentials of Taglish as an urban creole and lingua franca, he tries to undermine a supposed hierarchy of languages. But this is not merely an attempt to grant equality among languages, and recognize in each one a singular potential for communication. Rafael wants to alert us to a greater danger: as he demonstrates quite convincingly in his book, *The Promise of the Foreign*,[17] nationalism, in its desire for a national culture and language, betrays an imperialist tendency insofar as it tries to either exclude or contain and manage the other. Tracing back to the experiences of the early nationalists, the tragedy of misrecognition and failure of their attempts at assimilation, and the frustration that led to a rejection of the foreign, Rafael shows how Filipino nationalism was born out of anger and revenge.

The arguments Rafael presents are compelling. One wonders, however, if this narrative leaves out the possibility of other origins, of other ways of conceiving the nation and the desire for a national culture and language. Must the "unfinished history of the national" always be seen as a struggle fuelled by revenge and marked by a rejection of the foreign? And if some nationalist writers have indeed exaggerated the disastrous repercussions of a slavish mentality, would acknowledging the resilience of a people truly neutralize the enduring dangers posed by an imperial power?

While Rafael suggests an enfeebling of American English, and how its hegemony as a global lingua franca is constantly undermined by "the mutation of regional dialects and creole speech,"[18] it is curious how it has nonetheless become an overwhelming force in knowledge production today. Despite the utopic vision rallying the use of English

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[16] For his discussion on Teodoro Agoncillo's criticism of Taglish as a 'bastard language," see Vicente L.Rafael, "Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca" *Public Culture* 1995 8(1): 101-126.

[17] Vicente L. Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*: *Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[18] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 113.

towards democratizing the channels of communication and accessibility to resources, it is, ironically, also posing challenges that could easily lead to the exclusion and marginalization of non-English scholarship.

With the neoliberal reforms applied to higher education, some scholars are observing the effects of a growing, "collective obsession" with research assessments and Impact Factor.[19] In her essay, Evelyn Mae Tecson-Mendoza explains, for example, how the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has sought to increase the number of internationally-accepted Philippine journals by imposing a system of accreditation and monetary incentives. And yet, despite its efforts, only 4% of the total number of existing journals, as of 2014, has qualified for the Thomas Reuters or Scopus master lists and citation databases, and fewer still registered with an actual Impact Factor value.[20] But while the author laments the poor ranking or even the exclusion from citation databases of some of the oldest and historically significant journals in the country, she concludes that the best response to such pitiable situation is simply to intensify the financial support from the government and concerned sectors that would enable more journals to attain international standards.[21]

One finds a more critical stance in Ulysses Paulino de Albuquerque's analysis of scientific publications in Brazil. He argues that while Impact Factor is a measure not so much of quality as the visibility and citation frequency of a scientific work, many researchers and institutions are indiscriminately equating the two. As a result, articles published in high impact journals are perceived to be "superior to those published in low impact journals," which subsequently have become a determining factor in evaluating the quality of both scientists and graduate courses.[22] The problem, he argues, is that citation rates, despite their pretence of

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[19] Ulysses Paulino de Albuquerque, "Letter: The Tyranny of the Impact Factor: Why do we still want to be subjugated?" *Rodriguesia* 61, no. 3 (2010): 353.

[20] Evelyn Mae Tecson-Mendoza, "Scientific and Academic Journals in the Philippines: Status and Challenges." *Science Editing* 2, no. 2 (2015): 74

[21] Tecson-Mendoza, "Academic Journals in the Philippines," 77-78.

[22] de Albuquerque, "The Tyranny of the Impact Factor," 354.

objectivity, are influenced by other factors and biases, making them not quite the reliable measure of the quality of an academic work.

One of the major factors at play in the visibility of a scientific work is language. Not only have studies shown that English native speakers are cited more than scholars from non-English speaking nations, thus putting the latter at a disadvantage;[23] French-speaking Quebecoise academic Francine Descarries also asserts, in her analysis of feminist studies, that the use of English as the lingua franca of academic scholarship has particularly given English-speaking scholars control over "the form and content of articles deemed acceptable for publication" in highly ranked, indexed journals.[24]

Exploring the rationale and the repercussions of such influence, Descarries reveals that the assumption underlying this "blind adherence" to the English language is that all languages are "equivalent and interchangeable." Consequently, this belief has led to a tendency to downplay contextual and semantic differences, as well as the singularity of each language as a mode of expression. Giving little regard for untranslatability, Descarries argues how the dependence on English as the academic lingua franca has not only led to a "lack of familiarity with and sparse use of feminist writings in French"[25] but has also spawned misconceptions and "a truncated vision" of feminist perspectives developed from non-English-speaking countries. And because non-English feminist literature is "hardly read, barely cited, and poorly indexed,"[26] many scholars tend to invest less in such field and instead are inclined to adopt dominant, theoretical models that circulate within and through high ranking journals, in the hope that they may gain visibility for themselves. In fact, with the "transnationalization of knowledge,"

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[23] de Albuquerque, "The Tyranny of the Impact Factor," 356.

[24] Francine Descarries, "Language is Not Neutral: The Construction of Knowledge in the Social Sciences and Humanities" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 3 (2014): 565.

[25] Descarries, "Language is Not Neutral," 566.

[26] Descarries, "Language is Not Neutral," 567.

the saying 'publish or perish" has come to mean, more accurately, the necessity to publish *in English* in order to keep one's academic career afloat.[27] Thus, for Descarries, what is clearly

> at stake in the issue of language… is the power to appropriate or to conceal, enabling the center to reinforce its privileged position and hegemony. For instance, while the use of a single language significantly diminishes the palette of concepts and experiences circulating at the international level, it is also true that the theoretical contributions and strategies developed, reappropriated, or revamped by the center are more likely to be judged important than those emerging sources defined as specific and therefore secondary.[28]

While there are attempts to resist the predominance of English in knowledge production by asserting and acknowledging the multilingualism that scholars practice in conducting research and communicating with local, regional, and international collaborators,[29] the prevalent belief among scholars is that this "lack of bibliodiversity" has led to the silencing of scholars from the Global South.[30]

Indeed, given the great advantage of publications in English over works written in other languages, and the way the production of knowledge is shaped and controlled accordingly, one wonders how far, if at all, can a global lingua franca deliver the promise of otherness.

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[27] Descarries, "Language is Not Neutral," 564.

[28] Descarries, "Language is Not Neutral," 568.

[29] Mary Jane Curry and Theresa Lillis, "Multilingualism in Academic Writing for Publication: Putting English in its Place," in *Language Teaching: Surveys and Studies*, 57, no. 1 (2022): 91.

[30] Ronald Snijder and Danny Kingsley, "Research Assessment Systems and the Effects of Publication Language: Manifestations in the Directory of Open Access Books" in *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 27, no.1 (2024): 284. See also Ana Cristina Suzina, "English as *lingua franca.* Or the Sterlisation of Scientific Work," in *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no.1 (2021): 171-179.

While the polylingualism of non-English speakers could *ideally* lead to mutations that undermine the English language's privileged position, with neoliberalism's "audit" culture, what seems to be more and more established is the hegemony of a monolingualism and its creation of a new hierarchy in academia.

Incursions and Entanglements of Autobiographical Selves

One of the works that have clearly inspired Rafael's reflections is Jacques Derrida's own autobiographical account. In his book, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*,[31] the philosopher grapples with a particular form of colonial violence, that is, the bestowal of language as one's colonial legacy, which in Derrida's case, was the imposition of French while growing up in colonial Algeria. In her analysis of this text, Rey Chow reminds us that Derrida's intention was to present not merely an autobiography, but "a demonstration of deconstruction in the act."[32] And this is why in undermining the violence inherent in a colonial language, and its imposition of a hierarchy among languages, Derrida refuses to return or lay claim to an originary language, which for him would only reproduce the same imperialist aggression. Instead, by questioning the unreflected assumptions underlying the idea of legacy—in this case, as something owned by the colonial master, bestowed to the colonized other—Derrida undermines the violence that comes with the claim of possession by emphasizing what Chow describes as "a lack of proprietary identity or oneness with the language."[33] To say I only have one language, that is, as the absolute habitat in which I dwell, and to say that it is not mine, is to open language to the possibility of play, to a myriad of unintended meanings and effects.

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[31] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Standford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[32] Rey Chow, "Reading Derrida on Being Monolingual." *New Literary History* 39, no. 2 (2008): 218.

[33] Chow, "Reading Derrida," 217.

Chow points out, however, that despite his critique of phonocentrism, of a linguistic purity intolerant of inappropriate accents, Derrida betrays his own anguish over the impurity of his own "French Algerian" accent. While he admits not being proud of it, he says quite candidly that "an accent—any French accent, but above all a strong southern accent—seems incompatible (…) with the intellectual dignity of public speech,"[34] and for this reason, he "would very much prefer, that no publication permit my 'French Algerian' to appear."[35] It appears, as Chow keenly observes, that Derrida himself believes "that he can pass as *authentic* as long as his speech is seen and not heard."[36] As Derrida writes,

> despite everything I sometimes appear to profess, I concede that I have contracted a shameful but intractable intolerance: at least in French, insofar as the language is concerned, I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French.[37]

While drawing attention to Derrida's critical self-awareness as exemplified in his confession, Chow also criticizes the philosopher for his unreflective and reductive views. By stating that culture is "originarily colonial," Chow argues that Derrida summarily condemns all cultures to an "oppressive sameness," especially when their institutions impose a certain politics of language.[38] Because of this negative and pessimistic perception of egalitarianism, we are forced to seek out a form of utopianism in a multiplicity which, on the one hand, "always already and ontologically resides within language," but on the other, what continues to arrive from the future. While Derrida's ideas are crucial in conceiving otherness as an event, and therefore what constantly escapes the finality of assimilation, reducing all culture to a colonial logic dismisses or undermines any present

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[34] Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 46.

[35] Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 45-46.

[36] Chow, "Reading Derrida," 219. My emphasis.

[37] Derrida, *Monolingualism*, 46.

[38] Chow, "Reading Derrida," 226.

form of resistance to cultural domination or linguistic hierarchies. Thus, as Chow correctly points out,

> [Derrida's] argument is not exactly helpful regarding the ongoing inequities among languages as they are lived in different parts of the world because of the histories of colonialism. These are the inequities caused, for instance, by the dominance of English and French in formerly colonized lands, where such dominance continues to this day to exercise functions of mental subordination, social stratification, and cultural stigmatization.[39]

While Chow makes a compelling argument, it is important to remember, however, that the goal of Derrida's deconstruction was to dismantle metaphysical constructs and assumptions. Its aim was not so much to seek an alternative to monolingualism (i.e., multilingualism) as to destabilize the latter from within, and shake the foundations, so to speak, of the house in which the master dwells. In this case, deconstruction reveals how monolingualism's founding premise of proprietary identity is not as essential and inescapable as it appears but is completely unstable and arbitrary.

Nevertheless, in pointing out Derrida's anguish over the impurity of his French accent, Chow shows how the master's language is deeply entrenched in the mind of the colonized subject, making the individual's life itself part of the space where deconstruction must be performed. But while Chow treats Derrida's autobiography as a stage where the postcolonial dilemma is both enacted and deconstructed, Jane Hiddleston offers a more critical appraisal of the genre, revealing its vitality to the subversive ethos of deconstruction itself. For Hiddleston, the "fleeting incursions from a (fragmented) subjected '*je*'"[40] "contaminate" or "parasit[e] traditional philosophical discourse" with thoughts and affects

[39] Chow, "Reading Derrida," 227.

[40] Jane Hiddleston, "Derrida, Autobiography and Postcoloniality." *French Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2005): 293.

that inflect its neutral tone, as well as put to question "the certainty of its universal ambitions."[41] But more importantly, she argues that the intervention of the first person, hesitant and uncertain of itself, is meant to disturb the generalizations of postcolonial theory: that as soon as Derrida establishes the general applicability of linguistic alterity, he immediately shows his intractable anxiety towards his imperfect French. Furthermore, his constant emphasis on his experience as an Algerian Jew calls for a recognition of the singularity of any postcolonial experience, which "involves a confrontation with the specific, with the search for a sense of place, together with the drive to question the specific's confines."[42] For Hiddleston, this is what critics such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak fail to address in their analysis of (neo)colonial discourse and nationalism, in adhering to deconstruction more as a model than the act of performing the struggle between theory and the singularities it excludes. Acutely aware of the dangers of his own philosophy of deconstruction falling into the trap of conceptual generalization and becoming a "mainstream gesture," Derrida interjects a fractured autobiographical subject into the text in order to constantly refigure "the resistance of the singular as a stain on the universal that has no position of its own."[43]

In contrast to Derrida, who agonizes the contradictions between his own philosophical ideas and the affects of an unwieldy self, Rafael's autobiographical account is extremely hopeful. In his narrative, the incursion of the self is, without fail, a testimony to the inevitable triumph against monolingualism. Here, he refers to the gradual enfeebling of the hegemony of American English, "punctured and punctuated" by the vernaculars that comprise his linguistic legacy.[44]

Yet, despite his optimism, Rafael recognizes the problematic position of "English-literate Filipinos" and discusses their complicity in perpetuating the violence of the English language. However, at this

[41] Hiddleston, "Autobiography and Postcoloniality," 295.

[42] Hiddleston, "Autobiography and Postcoloniality," 294.

[43] Hiddleston, "Autobiography and Postcoloniality," 296.

[44] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 5.

point, one notices a radical shift: instead of exploring the complicity of his own linguistic legacy and the anguish of a singular "I," he invokes the collective guilt of a "we" of English-literate authors. Reflecting not on his own practice but on the work and autobiographical account of a fellow Filipino historian, Reynaldo Ileto, he highlights a "curious contradiction" – that while Ileto's seminal work, *Pasyon and Revolution*, uses the English language to bring to light the specificity of the Filipino vernacular, how it exceeds all attempts of English at approximations and remains stubbornly untranslatable, it also reinforces the social hierarchy, where "we" English-literate authors and readers posit "our" power "to represent and intervene into the lives of those other Filipinos inhabiting largely vernacular worlds."[45]

Here, Rafael clearly confesses to the violence of the English language and how it is used by Filipino scholars to subalternize the voices of the people who dwell in the vernacular. These "discrepant effects," he concludes, are "inherent in translation." While this may be true, Rafael seemed unable or unwilling to acknowledge that the Filipino scholars he labelled as "nationalists" may have sought a different path altogether. Rather than resigning themselves to complicity in the epistemic violence of the English language, they found their work, beyond the task of translation, in building a community of scholars committed to producing knowledge grounded in its own epistemic traditions.

A Different Coda

I would like to return to Chow's essay, where she reminds us that the second part of Derrida's book title refers to "the prosthesis of origin." She interprets this as the philosopher's invitation to deconstruct "(the very positing of) this 'originarily colonial' condition, this condition of coloniality taken for the origin of all culture."[46] It is indeed quite telling that the idea of origin for Derrida is not meant to be taken as *the* original, or the authentic, but a prosthetic add-on, which necessarily means that it is

[45] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 176.

[46] Chow, "Reading Derrida," 227.

an artificial construction. And if so, would it then be possible to conceive of a construction of an origin, and a culture, that is not necessarily colonial?

I would like to take up this challenge of thinking a different way about culture, to reflect once again about the call for a national language, and hopefully show a different "prosthesis," so to speak; that such call need not be perceived as colonial or imperial by nature, nor necessarily constructed in a way that dominates or excludes the other.

Coming from the discipline of Philosophy, I was mainly inspired by the writings not of Constantino or Agoncillo but of the Filipino Jesuit philosopher, Roque Ferriols. In the 1970s, he pioneered the teaching of philosophy in Filipino in the Ateneo de Manila University—a radical departure from the legacy of Jesuit education, which had promoted English as the primary language of instruction. His commitment to explore and develop the Filipino language as a medium for philosophical inquiry positioned him as a significant figure in the broader Filipinization movement of the time—a nationwide cultural, intellectual, and political effort that sought to assert Filipino identity and agency against colonial influence.

In the Ateneo, the Filipinization movement is often attributed to a student manifesto published in the university newspaper, *The Guidon*. Released on November 27, 1968, the manifesto, which invoked a line in the school hymn, was written by five Ateneans[47] as a complaint against the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus, and the Ateneo as the bastion of Jesuit education, for indoctrinating its students into a Western orientation which they deemed responsible for perpetuating and exacerbating socio-economic injustices. Among their demands was the replacement of American Jesuits with Filipino counterparts in administrative positions and in the teaching of certain courses. Some professors were skeptical of such demands, viewing them as having racist overtones. Ferriols, however, was among those sympathetic to the

[47] Jose Luis Alcuaz et al., "Down from the Hill," *The Guidon*, November 27, 1968, p.3. The authors of the manifesto were Jose Luis Alcuaz, Gerardo Esguerra, Emmanuel Lacaba, Alfredo Salanga, and Leonardo Montemayor.

students' cause. In an interview published in *The Guidon*, he explained that "one who was born in a foreign land and grew up among foreigners cannot be sensitive to the nuances of our present cultural crisis."[48] This, he makes clear, is "not a stigma on the foreigner," but a fact about language: that there is a difference in perception and understanding determined by the language with which one is born, and that such difference is revealed clearly in the way that "some insights . . . are expressible only in a certain language."[49]

As a young priest voicing his views, Ferriols incurred the ire of a few American Jesuits who accused him of instigating the Filipinization movement. In a later interview, however, Ferriols denied this accusation, explaining that the students themselves had already seen the need for change and did not need to be provoked. But he also pointed out that he was grossly misunderstood at that time, and that some of the views he expressed during the 1968 Guidon interview were omitted from the publication. He argued that his desire for Filipinization did not begin with the student manifesto, and that his attempts to filipinize was never a political statement against the Americans, but rather an attempt to revitalize culture.

> I was not fighting the Americans. I encouraged [students] to be Filipino. And if you are to be Filipino, there are American ways to which you cannot agree. Not because you don't want the American, but because you want the Filipino.[50]

Unfortunately, the wave of nationalist resentment muffled Ferriols's position, creating an image that the Filipinization movement was a homogenous bloc. With the recent publication of his autobiography,

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[48] Ramon V. Puno and Vicente A. Cabanero, "A Call for Cultural Realism," *The Guidon*, December 11, 1968, 3.

[49] Ramon V. Puno, "How 'Down from the Hill' Launched a Fruitful Dialogue on Filipinization," *The Guidon*, December 11, 1968, 3.

[50] Roque J. Ferriols, S.J., personal interview, 2009.

however, one finds anew an interruption in the narrative of Filipino nationalism: that Ferriols's pioneering efforts in the Filipinization movement in the Ateneo in the 1970s were born not out of resentment but a profound gratitude towards his American teachers: among others, Fr. Joseph Kerr, who taught him to love Greek,[51] which later enabled him to translate the fragments of Ancient Greek philosophers into Filipino, and Fr. Joseph Mulry, who helped him realize the power of his own thinking.[52]

For someone whose mother tongue was Ilocano, and who suffered the mockery of his North Sampalokese accent by young Tagalese "enforcing elitist norms,"[53] it is curious why Ferriols chose to philosophize in Filipino. In his memoirs, Ferriols adamantly denied that he was helping make Tagalog the national language. Nevertheless, despite his claim that "Pilipino" was not his favourite, he asserted that it was a good language, which he not only strongly advocated as the medium of intellectualization and instruction in the university, but also as the language in which all Filipinos could meet (*wikang pagsasalubungan*). But more than a space of encounter, Ferriols believed that the Filipino language is also a richness of thought that needs to be rediscovered, utilized, explored, and developed. In his memoirs, he explains:

> When I try to philosophy in Pilipino, it is with intent to live and to help awaken other people into living. . . . He who has touched the heart of a language, even if only for a split second, knows that it is an irreducible way of being alive. Each language has unrepeatable potentials for seeing and feeling, its very own genius, its own nuance.[54]

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[51] Roque J. Ferriols, S.J., *Sulyap sa Aking Pinanggalingan*, ed. Leovina Ma. Garcia (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2016), 94.

[52] Ferriols, *Sulyap*, 61.

[53] Roque J. Ferriols, S.J., "A Memoir of Six Years," *Philippine Studies* 22, 3rd/4th Quarters (1974), 344.

[54] Ferriols, "Memoir of Six Years," 340.

In some ways, however, Ferriols was like Agoncillo; he was quite intolerant of Taglish, or Enggalog, and regarded them as barbarities. He says, "in these aforementioned barbarities, one who knows Tagalog and English becomes too lazy to speak either well. He collapses into using whatever English or Tagalog word comes fastest to mouth."[55] And so, indeed, in Philosophy, in academia, we have learned to dislike Taglish, and without pause have learned to discard it as a corruption of language. We regard it not only as ugly but a monstrosity, evoking the grotesque twistedness of the tongue (*baluktot na dila*). And it is here that I heed Rafael in all the strangeness of his message—he is in a way the foreign who speaks differently than us, who makes the appeal on behalf of these bastard languages, so that we may reconsider their worth, that even the impatience of slang, the quickness of its jump from one word to another, which Ferriols refused to recognize as valuable in itself, can also be seen as "an enactment of expressive possibilities."[56]

Nevertheless, one also cannot deny the value that Ferriols was trying to impart. He was not simply advocating a more frequent use of Filipino; he wanted to explore its potentials for a philosophical language, one that would require a certain slowness of thought and careful attention.

Another nationalist writer whose ideas, I believe, have easily been dismissed or reduced as a form of cultural imperialism, is U.P. historian and founder of *Pantayong Pananaw*, Zeus Salazar. Although they never had the chance to meet, Salazar was someone who deeply respected Ferriols, often mentioning him in his class, and urging his students to read his books. As one of the leading proponents in the indigenization movement in Philippine studies and Social Sciences in the 1960s, Salazar was, like Ferriols, a strong advocate for the intellectualization and use of the national language in universities. And like Ferriols, developing the Filipino language meant not merely its increased use as the medium of expression and reflection, but drawing from it an alternative to "foreign" modes of analysis, what Ramon Guillermo describes as "a genuinely

[55] Ferriols, "Memoir of Six Years," 341.

[56] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 67.

Filipino perspective on Philippine phenomena."[57]

To do so, Salazar developed an historiography that encouraged Filipino scholars to produce historical knowledge in their own terms, exploring topics that were not necessarily aligned to prevailing trends in Western scholarship but what contextually relevant and meaningful to Philippine society. He called this the *Pantayo* ("from-us-for us") perspective, where knowledge would be produced by Filipinos for Filipinos, and where the use of the vernaculars was crucial in making that knowledge legible to all. Thus, Salazar explicitly described *pantayong pananaw* as a "closed-circuit" discourse where "those who are communicating to each other are only Filipinos. It means the foreigner or non-Filipinos are not included."[58]

From this description, it would be easy to reduce Salazar's notion of *pantayo* to a perspective that rejects the foreign, especially when he contrasts it with what he calls the *pangkami* perspective ("from us-to-you"). Despite its nationalist intentions, this perspective produces narratives *for* the foreign. By taking up a defensive position, Salazar argues that the Filipino scholar remains trapped in the colonial encounter, producing knowledge primarily in response to the expectations and derogations of an imperial other. It was precisely from this colonial bind that Salazar hoped to liberate the Filipino scholar.

One can easily see how a careless and reductionist reading of Salazar's intentions and works could lead to labelling him as the kind of nationalist that Rafael critiques. Even his idea of recovering the Filipino language (*pagbawi sa wika*), through the rehabilitation and rediscovery of its wisdom and communicative function, could be misconstrued as an instrumentalist view of language. Because of this, Salazar has been criticized for being ethnocentric and an exclusivist. But as proto-pantayo

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[57] Ramon Guillermo, *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009), 468.

[58] Zeus Salazar, "Ang Pantayong Pananaw Bilang Diskursong Pangkabihasnan," in *Pantayong Pananaw: Ugat at Kabuluhan,* ed. Atoy Navarro et al. (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 2000), 82. My translation.

historian Reynaldo Ileto argues, "the philosophy behind [Salazar's] pantayong pananaw needs to be threshed out more. It could be more subtle ... than you portray it…. To reduce it to a form of crude nationalism gets us back to a dead end sort of discussion."[59]

As a polyglot who has written in French, German, Filipino, and Indonesian, Salazar is definitely a scholar who celebrates multilingualism, opening us to realities beyond and other than the Anglo-American world. And one sees this in his efforts at translation, particularly his translation of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, which, due to what he deemed as the failure of the Leftist movement to contextualize Marxism, has consequently remained a "foreign ideology." By revealing elements of the Marxist tradition that cannot simply be translated to the Filipino experience—i.e., its untranslatability, Salazar shows the specificity of Marx's experience and its limits vis-à-vis the Filipino context: that Marx's description of the proletariat—which lacks a historical countenance and therefore merely seen as the exploited in relation to the expansion of the Bourgeoisie and a mere cog in the historical dialectic—does not and cannot make sense of Bonifacio, the Katipunan movement, along with the likes of Balagtas and Hermano Pule, and the messianic movements in Banahaw and other parts of the Philippines.

This is not the place to get into the long-drawn debate between Salazar and *Pantayong Pananaw* scholars and their critics. My concern at this point is only to argue that Salazar's translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, though it may in the end dispute the idea of class struggle as the main problem in our society and therefore deny the possibility of an easy, if not complete, translatability of Marx's philosophy to the Philippine context, cannot simply be reduced to a rejection of the foreign.

In his book, *Of Hospitality*, Derrida introduces the foreign as the arrival not merely of a (mute) presence, but of one who *speaks* in a different language or accent, expressing in her own idiom, bearing ideas that are strange to us, which are even sometimes parricidal, in putting forward the unbearable, "fearful question" that disturbs the authority of the master

[59] Reynaldo Ileto, quoted in Guillermo, *Pook at Paninindigan*, 2.

of the house. More importantly, Derrida discusses the (im)possibility of granting asylum or hospitality as an aporia of an antinomy: on the one hand, "*the* law of absolute, unconditional, hyperbolical hospitality," that says yes "*to who or what turns up,* before any determination, before any participation, before any *identification*," and thus transgressing all laws; and on the other, the laws that grant hospitality as a conditioned and conditional right and duty, and safeguard the sovereignty of the host without which the act of welcoming could not be possible. But it is only in the collision of these two laws that hospitality, as the unconditional act of welcoming what comes, is not merely "abstract, utopian, illusory," but truly "effective, concrete, determined."[60] While laws may deny, violate, or pervert hospitality itself by say, for example, forcing the foreigner to seek asylum or tolerance in the language imposed on him by the host, the nation, or the State, or demanding obligations and liability by reeling in a foreigner into a contract of nationality or citizenship, or even refusing the right to hospitality or asylum to those that have been labelled as a parasite, illegitimate, and clandestine—these laws make hospitality possible. Not only are they attempts at enacting the law of unconditional hospitality, but also, in their present state of corruption and perversion, create the condition and urgency to challenge and transgress their limits.

In Salazar's translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, one finds this aporia of hospitality at play. On the one hand, he grants hospitality to Marx's ideas by translating it into Filipino, and through annotations, allows their foreignness to speak from the specificity of their time and place. On the other, as Portia Reyes and Ramon Guillermo explain, Salazar's insistence on the foreignness, and therefore, the untranslatability of terms such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is not merely a claim that these are "unique products of the singular development of 'European culture/civilization,"[61] lacking referents in the Philippine context. It is, they

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[60] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. By Rachel Bowlby (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 79.

[61] Portia Reyes and Ramon Guillermo, "Paraphrasing Europe: Translation in Contemporary Filipino Historiography, *Kritika Kultura* 13 (2009), 85.

argue, "an 'anti-translational' practice in the midst of translation itself," the translator's "refusal to be integrated into the history of *another*."[62]

In *Pook at Paninindigan*, Guillermo criticizes Salazar for stubbornly rejecting Marxism. Not only does Salazar denounce it as what remains a foreign ideology with no connection to Philippine reality; he relegates it as part of the *pangkami* perspective, arguing how it uses the class struggle discourse to "enlist" the Filipinos to the anti-colonial or anti-imperialist struggle, which for him is nothing but a subscription to a "history that takes the West as the center."[63] For Guillermo, Salazar's refusal is a denial of the existence and importance of economic and political issues, resulting from a myopic and exaggerated emphasis on the cultural divide, on the problem of an intellectual elite that has lost its connection to its own language and culture, and thus, whose return to the *ethnos* becomes crucial to a resolution.[64]

If Salazar refuses to grant unconditional hospitality to Marx's ideas, it is not simply to reject the foreign. Through translation, Salazar not only gives way to the arrival of the foreign, but allows the latter to speak, in recognizing a language that is different from ours, an idiom that is audible within its particular *ethnos*. At the same time, however, our reception of the foreign cannot take place in a vacuum; it must constantly reckon with memories and the imminent threat of colonialism, i.e., of the foreign as "a hostile subject," where the host had become, and runs the risk of becoming once again, its hostage. Salazar is particularly mindful of this "hostage situation," of a kind of "dependency theory," where the intellectual, caught in the act of "xerox-ing" and copying, becomes a mere peddler of the history and ideas of the West.[65] But precisely in coming to grips with the danger, one can clearly see that Salazar's refusal is a

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[62] Portia and Guillermo, "Paraphrasing Europe," 88.

[63] Guillermo, *Pook at Paninindigan,* 55.

[64] Guillermo, *Pook at Paninindigan*, 44.

[65] Zeus A. Salazar, "Pangkalahatang Tala ng Tagapagsalin," in *Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. Manifesto ng Partido Komunista,* trans by Zeus Salazar (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 2000), 153. See also Salazar, "Pangkalahatang Tala," 165.

rejection not of the foreign itself but of a particular way of appropriating the latter. For Salazar, translation is a way to "make something one's own" (*pag-aangkin*), a process which "begins from one's inner self, as a necessity of the inner self."

> This means [that] Marxism can be a part of the culture of [our] people, or the national culture, and not the other way around. The reason is that Marxism, like any other system of thought, ideology, philosophy or religion, is just one among many ideas, thinking, systems, etc. that emerged (and will continue to emerge) in the history of Humanity which could be of interest and therefore what could be appropriated and used by the Filipino people in their collective capacity to make decisions.[66]

Again, the danger is to reduce the act of *pag-aangkin* (appropriation) to a kind of Hegelian dialectics, of a sovereign self that uses translation as an instrument to appropriate the other. But considering the lengthy annotations where the translator painstakingly makes audible the voice of the other, it seems more reasonable to think that Salazar's aim is to allow the foreign to take part in the construction of our *ethnos*. Thus, in rejecting the current appropriation of Marxism, Salazar sets the work of translation into motion, as an uncompleted task in the unfinished history of creating the nation.

From a more nuanced reading of the works of Roque Ferriols and Zeus Salazar, we find a different cultural prosthesis – one that is not necessarily borne out of anger or resentment towards the foreign, nor from a compulsion to reject other cultures. Instead, by confronting the realities of colonial legacy and the continuing dominance of English in knowledge production, these scholars have sought a revival and development of the Filipino language as a medium for thought and dialogue. Moving away from a reactive form of nationalism, the reconstruction of a cultural

[66] Salazar, "Pangkalahatang Tala," 158.

identity is aimed at establishing a community of thinkers and learners who speak to each other on their own terms.

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