ON CATACHRESIS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY: IS THERE ANYTHING MESSIANIC ABOUT FILIPINIZATION?

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ABSTRACT

The notion of history as a text to be deconstructed has been a staple of much advancement in the treatment of the discipline as a literary work. In the Philippines however, very few historians have taken note of the fact that the writing of history is subject to its own rhetorical devices and effects of metaphor. In this paper, I advance the argument that the most pervasive methodological flaw in the nationalist construction of Philippine historiography is the persistent catachresis that traces everything to the notion of a "Filipino" people that was subjugated by the advent of Spanish colonialism. This tendency to trace all events to a unitary and originary standpoint as a basis for interpreting everything about the pre-Philippine past results to the epistemic violence of a historiography that is complicit with the Orientalism of Western Eurocentrism itself. Filipinization, taken as the discourse of emancipation anchored on the insistent realization of a Filipino nation,

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would thus precisely instantiate this problem of discursive complicity that compels us to ask: "Is there anything messianic about nationalism?"

Keywords: catachresis, deconstruction, history, Filipinization, Spanish colonialism

I Introduction

This paper has, as its object of critique, the Philippine nationalist construction of history and its attendant effects upon the current struggle for emancipation against the practice and ideology of western Eurocentric colonialism. I use the term "nationalist construction of history" as synonymous with nationalist historiography to refer to that tradition of Philippine historical writing, stretching from the late 19th century *ilustrado* thinking by Jose Rizal and his cohorts—going through the works of the nationalist historians Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino—to the present, that presupposes the standpoint of a "Filipino" nation or people who acts as the protagonist in a more or less unilinear narrative geared towards a given telos or purpose.[2] Recent scholarship has also come to understand nationalist historiography in terms of how nationalist ideas has shaped the writing of the Philippine historical narrative and influenced a consequent generation of scholars to do the same.[3]

Nationalist thinking has at least two basic principles relevant to this paper: 1) first, the positing of a "Filipino people" (the term being used here *under erasure* [~~Filipino~~])[4] because there are inhabitants or citizens in the

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[2] See for instance Apolinario Mabini, *Ang Rebolusyong Filipino* [*La Revolucion Filipina*], trans. Michael Coroza (Manila: Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2015). See also, Teodoro Agoncillo's Agoncillo, *Filipino Nationalism, 1872-1970* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1974) and *Malolos: Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2006). Constantino's text is given below.

[3] See for instance, Francisco Jayme Paolo A. Guiang, "Nationalism in History Writing: Revisiting Teodoro A. Agoncillo and the Nationalists After Him," *Pingkian: Journal for Emancipatory and Anti-imperialist Education* 6, no. 1 (2021): 32–45.

[4] Explaining Jacques Derrida's adherence to this Heideggerian gesture , G.C. Spivak

country who live in, love, and are willing to die for a country historically called *Las Islas Filipinas* or the modern Philippines; 2) and second, that nationalist thinkers, specifically modern historians and philosophers, can use the idea of a "Filipino people" existing in the present as an ideological ground for interpreting all events in the historical past as sources for discovering what it means to be authentically "Filipino" or to label a mode of thinking philosophically as distinctly "Filipino." The narrative tradition usually followed by this mode of thinking is often underlined by the drama of victimization which traces the genealogy of Spanish colonialism in terms of the subjugation of a "Filipino" people by the foreign, European other. From this perspective, it becomes possible to interpret all historical struggles against the Spanish colonial regime as emancipatory (which I provisionally define here in accordance with Ernesto Laclau's abolition of hegemonic power within the binary colonizer/colonized),[5] and thus, consider them as anti-colonial movements within a narrative of liberation that continues up into our present.

Against this thesis, I claim that the insistent interpretation of historical data in terms of the unilinear historical struggle of a "Filipino" nation or people, which I label here as *Filipinization*, suffers from a fundamental methodological problematic.[6] This problem is precisely

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explains that writing "under erasure (*sous rature*)" is a conscious attempt to bracket an assumed subject position as an indispensable starting point for a historical discourse that cannot do away with the categories employed by traditional nationalist thinking. "Introduction" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xiv. Henceforth OG. Niall Lucy explains that "[it] refers to the practice of crossing out certain words (key metaphysical concepts) that have to be used ('being', 'is', etc.), because it is not possible to think and write outside of metaphysics altogether, even though Derrida was seeking to denounce their authority and presence." Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 128.

[5] Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 1.

[6] Historically, the term "*Filipinization*" refers to a policy initiated by Governor-General Francis Burton Harrison, aimed at replacing Americans with Filipinos—understood here as the colonized inhabitants of the Philippines—in civil government positions, as a preparation for autonomy and eventual self-rule. In simpler terms, it entailed the

constituted at that moment when the categories of the present are used to interpret events in the past without regard to that inescapable epistemic violence effected when a discourse is determined through the very law of exclusion that establishes identity in terms of an inside-outside distinction. This process of ascribing meaning to past events from a time "out-of-joint"[7] is what we refer to as *catachresis*,[8] or simply, the improper (or incorrect) use of a word used in the present to interpret events that have happened or to categorize things that have existed in the past. Such persistent anachronism that haunts the interpretation of the conduct of all anti-colonial discourses implies a construal of Spanish colonialism as a rapture of the unity of an idyllic, golden time that characterize pre-Philippine native civilization and society. Notice here that I have used the term "pre-Philippine" and not the anachronistic "pre-Hispanic Filipinos" because I aim to avoid performing the very contradiction implied by the use of the latter, i.e., the espousal of a notion of history and method that self-legitimizes its own ground by constructing the past from the present, the beginning from the end, in order to ensure the unity of history as a linear and teleological narrative.[9] In a sense, such a theoretical gesture

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inclusion of Filipinos into the colonial government. In this paper, however, we understand the term not merely as an administrative policy but as a framework for interpreting historical data and events from a nationalizing standpoint. *Inaugural Address and Message of Governor-General Francis Burton Harrison to the Third Philippine Legislature*, delivered October 1913 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1913), available online via HeinOnline Philippine Law Collection, https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/1186944 (accessed December 29, 2025).

[7] See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Henceforth SM.

[8] See Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 207-271; 255-7.

[9] The formulation is adapted from Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 2-3.

echoes Reynaldo Ileto's idea of a "non-linear emplotment"[10] of Philippine history—a gesture that would enable us to avoid the epistemic violence—taken here as the cognitive failure resulting from the *invention* of the colonized—consequent to the overarching attempt to produce a hegemonic body of knowledge about the conquered (colonial) "other."[11]

In what follows, then, I will negate the claim that there is anything emancipatory, or what, following Jacques Derrida, I call here as "messianic," about Filipinization. If by Filipinization is meant the reduction of all narrative struggles within Philippine historiography as anti-colonial enterprises aimed as the destruction of the more than 330 years of Spanish colonial rule, and later at the outset of the 20th century, of American imperialism, then the examination of the specific notion of *what constitutes a Filipino identity* utilized by nationalist discourses would eventually betray an agenda that is ultimately complicit with the structures of imperial ideology itself. Following the deconstructive employment of the term *messianic* as a universal structure in our experience which prevents the *same* from being self-contained in the present,[12] I illustrate my argument by demonstrating three points of analysis, namely: 1) that the nationalist construction of Philippine history

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[10] Reynaldo Ileto opens the possibility of studying Philippine history from the alternative logic of discontinuities, multiple timelines, and history from the margins that goes against the dominant traditional nationalist paradigm of doing history in the Philippines. See Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Outlines of a Nonlinear Emplotment of Philippine History," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 98–131.

[11] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313..

[12] See the use of term "messianic" given by Jacques Derrida in "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 56ff. In this work, Derrida defines the messianic as "the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without the horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration." See also John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 182.

is essentially catachrestic; 2) that nationalist discourses are trapped within discursive fetishism; 3) and lastly, by virtue of first two points given, that the conduct of nationalist discourse itself simply translates the ideology of Empire into the homo-hegemony of the modern Philippine nation. By utilizing the term, I insinuate a movement of freedom or liberation from the bondage of colonial oppression and suffering which must be distinguished from its usual connection with traditional or institutional religions (which Derrida calls as *messianisms*). In this sense, the *messianic* retains a phenomenological significance that moves human existence and history into a future justice-to-come that escapes programmability and appropriation by totalitarian powers.[13] As I will hope to show, the above signposts are successive, complementary stages within the effective mythologization and mystification of the idea of ~~Filipino~~ identity (or Filipinoness) that is ultimately revealed to be discursively complicit with the Eurocentrism of Hispano-American imperial ideology itself.

II Philippine Nationalist Historiography in Focus

In the three decades preceding the 1896 Katipunan Revolution, we can trace the emergence of this nationalist catachresis most notably in Jose Rizal's work on Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*.. Here, I am deliberately leaving out Isabelo de los Reyes work on folklore[14] inasmuch as it lacked the comprehensive generalization performed by Rizal and Pedro Paterno's ethnological treatises following the advice of the Jesuit Fr. John Schumacher who saw most of his works as fantastic.[15] While the argument may be pushed further into Padre Jose Burgos's

[13] See Derrida, SM, 28.

[14] Isabelo de los Reyes, *El-Folklore Filipino,* trans. Maria Elinora P. Imson & Salud Dizon (Quezon Ciy: University of the Philippines Press, 1994).

[15] John Schumacher, *The Making of the Nation: Essays on Nineteenth Century Filipino Nationalism* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991), 106. Pedro Paterno's works include the following: *La antigua civilización tagalog* (Madrid: Hernández, 1887); *El Cristianismo en la antigua civilización tagalog* (Madrid: Imprenta Moderna, 1892); *La familia tagálog en la historia universal* (Madrid: Cuesta, 1892); *Los Itas* (Madrid: Cuesta, 1890) and *El Barangay* (Madrid: Cuesta, 1892).

Manifiesto as a sort of proto-nationalist prelude to *ilustrado* political ideology[16] and even up to the late 19th century accounts about Luis Rodriguez Varela[17] who self-baptized himself as "El Conde Filipino" (according to Nick Joaquin's celebrated *A Question of Heroes*),[18] it was only Rizal who strategically nationalized the past within an explicit program of support for the ideological ground of the *ilustrado* Propaganda Movement. Drawing upon the racial science prevalent during his time, Rizal consciously imagined an idyllic past where "the ancient Filipinos" [*los antiguos Filipinos*] possess a culture that is, if not comparable, higher than those of the Europeans. Rizal saw reason in de Morga's work to posit the idea of an "ancient civilization"[19] that has been lost with the advent of the Spanish colonizers. The Spanish imposition of colonial culture, especially through Catholicism, is portrayed as having shattered a precolonial "golden age," leading Filipinos to abandon their indigenous traditions, languages, arts, laws, and modes of thought in favor of unfamiliar doctrines and imposed moral standards detached from their historical and environmental conditions.[20] This cultural erosion is attributed primarily to the religious friars—excluding the Jesuits—whose

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[16] See John Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement 1880-1895* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002).

[17] Ruth de Llobet, "Luis Rodriguez Varela: Literatura Panfletaria Criollista en los Albores del Liberalismo en Filipinas, 1790-1824" in *Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana* Año XLIV, no. 88 (2018): 131-153.

[18] See Nick Joaquin, *A Question of Heroes* (Quezon City: Anvil, 2004).

[19] See Jose Rizal, "A Reply to Don Isabelo de los Reyes" in *La Solidaridad,* Year II, No. 42 [October 31, 1890], 505-507; 507. In his short monograph, Cesar Adib Majul speaks of "ancient nationality" instead of the word "civilization" in his discussion of Rizal's work on Morga (see Cesar Adib Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation* [Diliman, Q.C.: Department of Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 1959], 11).

[20] See José Rizal, *Events in the Philippine Islands by Dr. Antonio de Morga* (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2011), 40ff. See also Jose Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence" in LS 1:377-379; 377 (September 30, 1889). The concluding part is located in LS 2:31-39 (February 1, 1890).

denigration of native peoples is said to have reduced a once proud and intellectually capable population to humiliation, dependency, servility, and passive submission to foreign authority.[21]

The invocation of an "ancient nationality" preceding Spanish colonization which installs the nation within a pristine, precolonial temporality, disavowing the constitutive disruptions and violences introduced by colonial subjugation was only the second step in the espousal of a generalized *ilustrado* conception of Filipinoness. For Rizal, Filipinoness is displaced from a Catholic genealogical framework and reconstituted through an appeal to a precolonial space-time of common belonging, one posited as entirely exterior to Spanish hegemony. Working upon the elitism of his fellow *ilustrados* who conceived of Filipino identity in terms of: 1) geographic affinity—the Filipino is someone born in *Filipinas*; 2) ability to speak Spanish; 3) possession of Spanish education and culture; 4) loyalty to Spain and to the Catholic faith; and 5) dutiful performance of civic and religious responsibilities in order to merit the label Spaniard or Spanish citizen too, Rizal's articulated a secular Filipinoness—freed from the authority of religious tutelage—constituted a further refinement of the reformist logic underpinning his political project.. Here, Rizal's intent was clear: it was necessary to know "the past in order . . . to judge better the present . . ."[22] But this recourse to the past is anchored upon the anachronism that interpreted everything in terms of the categories of the present. In this precise historical context, Rizal's nativism (or *perennialism*) implied the fantastic assumption of the notion of a "Filipino people" taken as an authentic ethnic identity into which one can reduce the search for an "unsullied indigenous cultural tradition."[23] This nativist purism however, would not be left uncriticized

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[21] Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," 377.

[22] Rizal, "To the Filipinos" in *Events*, xlvii.

[23] Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, "Introduction" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 14. For the meaning of "perennialism," see Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 12.

by two of his most respected contemporaries: the Ilocano Isabelo de los Reyes, and Rizal's Austrian best friend, Ferdinand Blumentritt. The former, author of *El Folklore Filipino,* castigated Rizal's inability to be an impartial historian who must be wary of essentializing the past in the name of a "Filipino people" while Ferdinand Blumentritt, on the other hand, strongly warned Rizal about the problem committed by most modern historians who interpret "the occurrences of centuries past in accordance with the concepts that correspond to contemporary ideas."[24]

Given Rizal's inceptual thinking about the pristine origins of a pre-Hispanic "Filipino" people, it would thus be possible to identify the distinct sentiment of nostalgia echoed by the nationalist interpretation of history. This thinking, which was followed by a whole generation of nationalist thinkers, can be illustrated by the eminent historian Renato Constantino's prescription some eighty years after Rizal's annotations:

> A correct understanding of our present ills and a good guide for our future can only be secured if, as a historically conscious people, we actively make our own history and also remake what has been passed on to us as a history. Only then can we trace the roots of present ills and properly appraise the acts of individuals who took part in our history. We should learn from history and from these lessons chart our own course of action. . . [25]

In this initial conflation of Rizal's thesis with that of Constantino, the structure of catachresis signifies the espousal of the idea of a unilinear history that is driven by a mechanism that inevitably moves towards the emancipation of the colonized from suffering and oppression. Rizal suggests that only by recovering their "true" native identity beyond the accretions of colonialism, they might return to the imagined splendor of an ancient Filipino civilization—one projected to serve as the normative

[24] Ferdinand Blumentritt, "Prologue," in *Events in the Philippine Islands*, xlix-lxiv; liv.

[25] Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness*, 4th Printing (Manila: Renato Constantino, 1970), 96.

ground for a future nation emancipated from colonial rule. How is this possible?

III The Fetishism of Discourse

The obvious primacy accorded to the value of the nation by nationalist discourse demands that the project of colonial emancipation utilize a carefully defined notion of Filipino identity as its indispensable starting point. In this regard, Rizal accordingly prescribed a protentional set of ideal characteristics into which specific colonial subjects can identify themselves as Spanish citizens too while offering, at the same time, the possibility of its racial ground in the concept of an ancient indigenous civilization. Such discursive maneuver results to the constitution of an idealized class subject capable of homogenizing the diverse subjects of colonial rule into the representative notion of a ~~Filipino~~ people—regardless of differences in social, economic, political, and even racial exigencies of the various historical actors within Spanish colonial *Filipinas.* This "ideologized" notion of a ~~Filipino~~ people, however, is essentially devoid of any material content or history—it is an "empty signifier"[26] capable of being manipulated in accordance with the powers that dictate the force of discourse and signification.[27] And in order for this essence to acquire content and to realize its intrinsic value as the radical starting fulcrum for all anti-colonial struggles, this ideal and empty fantasy must become a space where the conduct of social and political transactions are mediated and transformed into effective instruments for emancipation. In Rizal's *Annotations* on de Morga, we see this material negotiation in the fantasizing of a non-existent ~~Filipino~~ ancient civilization that has become the *only* effective ground for the mystification and eventual

[26] The original context of my understanding of the term is from Roland Barthes' discourse on the empty signifier in his *Mythologies* where the ideological closure of the sign reveals the hollowing out or the depoliticization of the term's historical meaning. We construe "empty" here as "plasticity" or "malleability." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 111ff.

27 See Laclau, *Emancipations,* 15.

fetishism of nationalist discourse. In the name of a people-to-come, this non-existence of an ancient ~~Filipino~~ people and civilization has to become the indispensable starting point for any promise of colonial emancipation. Thus individuated and elevated into an independent idea, the notion of ~~Filipino~~ identity acquires a life of its own[28]—one which like the idea of a religious God is capable of exerting control over human lives—indeed, as a fetish.[29] Strangely then, this fantasy of the nationalist fetish is what would ground the emancipatory perspective of a ~~Filipino~~ nation whose realization would be the precise promise of the messianic and the embodiment of the concrete desires and interests of the colonized.

Here, it is clearly manifest that the construction of the idea of "Filipino identity" (or Filipinoness) as a nationalist fetish is precisely occasioned by Rizal's mythologization and mystification of the past—a process that renders his political discourse vulnerable to the influence of liberal economic interests and religious motives. The attempt to recover an authentic "native" and "essential" Filipino identity behind the distortions of colonial history constitutes a form of nostalgia which can become ironically intertwined with the structural violence inherent in the establishment of any socio-political authority. Once such sentimental quest becomes an obsessive element of emancipatory projects against Western colonial discourse, it becomes inevitably subsumed within the theoretical and practical violence embedded in any future-oriented political fantasy.

IV Discursive Complicity

In this vein, the most glaring contradiction that we can see in Rizal's anachronistic interpretation of history is its inescapable repetition of the same colonial epistemic violence against which the *ilustrado*s have

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[28] See Karl Marx, *Capital* (London, Penguin Classics, 1990), 165.

[29] For Jacques Derrida, fetishization is the last step in the five-fold process of "metaphysicalization, abstraction, idealization, ideologization and fetishization." Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons" in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 245. The more sustained discussion of ideology and fetishism by Derrida is contained in *Specters of Marx,* 147-155.

always set their nationalist agenda or simply, what we may call as their *discursive complicity.* By this, I explicitly define the problem of a discourse (following Michel Foucault)[30] that presents itself as emancipatory; yet, by virtue of being implicated within the homogenizing "identity-trap" laid down by the Spanish colonial stratification, it masks the violent assumption of power conspicuously desired by *ilustrado* nationalist ideology. Within the intellectual project of Rizal and his *ilustrado* circle, the construction of the Filipino as a "class concept" premised on an essential, native authenticity functions as a Western epistemic production that remains complicit with the economic priorities of the colonial bourgeois elite, thereby reproducing their grip on social, economic, and political power. This complicity arises when social struggles against colonial oppression are articulated through political forms already structured by liberal interests and religious imperatives. Once these struggles congeal into concrete political action, they are subsumed into the very economy of violence through which socio-political authority is instituted, normalized, and sustained.

Here what appears as epistemic authority is sustained through epistemic violence: the privileged class, whether bourgeois elite or enlightened nationalist, installs its episteme as the center, thereby relegating other knowledges (colonized, subaltern, and/or proletarian) to a derivative position. Any attempt to overcome this epistemic violence by the very resources contained within the same colonial episteme must necessarily be *contaminated*, as it were, by the very violence that the subaltern itself wishes to eradicate. What occurs in this theoretical operation is a "discursive displacement"—from the privileged colonial ideology into emancipatory subaltern-nationalist discourse—that surreptitiously *translates* the violence necessarily connected with the possession of knowledge-identity from one (con)text to another. This discursive displacement is what opens up the problematic of Filipinization

[30] "Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 49.

into *textuality* so as to become an object of interpretation that can illustrate the ironic transformations [or passages] of theoretical violence within the conduct of Philippine nationalist discourses. We can now dissect this as follows:

1) **Hispanophilia.** First, Jose Rizal and his fellow *ilustrado*s have always seen themselves heirs to the nationalist thinking of Padre Jose Burgos, although one that has already been stripped of its Catholic institutional loyalty.[31] This implies that their nationalist discourse were conditioned by the same limits that haunted Burgos: they were not intent at separation from the Empire but merely for reforms within the Spanish legal context. While it is true that the *ilustrado*s objected to the violence of Spanish colonial rule and desired better legal reforms within it, they were still trapped within the boundaries of imperial epistemology. For them, freedom meant better reforms for living under the same system of imperial hegemony (domination with consent)[32] and not complete separation from Spanish political control. In this sense, discursive complicity required nationalist discourse to acknowledge the validity of Empire while negotiating a better position within the imperial scheme of things.

Because it was impossible for the *ilustrado*s to step out of the discursive field available to them, they needed to use the very same categories of language that they need to subvert if meaningful political change can be possible. Due this, Rizal and his fellow *ilustrado*s needed to

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[31] See José Rizal, *El Filibusterismo* (Ghent: F. Meyer–Van Loo Press, 1891), dedication. Also José Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," in *Political and Historical Writings*, vol. 7 of *The Rizal Translation Series*, trans. Encarnación Alzona (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1976), 7–9. The Jesuit John Schumacher was also clear on Burgos' influence on Rizal. John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness*, rev. ed. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 12–15, 45–47.

[32] See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12–13, where hegemony is theorized as the exercise of leadership and domination secured through consent rather than force alone.

secure their ideological ground in the language of Eurocentric superiority in order to convince the Spanish imperial authorities about the rightness and righteousness of their cause. The Philippine National Artist and scholar Resil Mojares illustrates this fact in the way Rizal utilized the racial science of his time to argue for the excellence of a "Filipino" ethnic identity[33] (or "ancient nationality" as the scholar Adib Cesar Majul would anachronistically call it)[34] which can be the scientific basis for acknowledging equality with the Spaniard and hence, for the plausibility of granting colonial reforms. In Mojares' opinion, Rizal's immersion into the world of German Anthropology gave him the necessary theoretical tools to create a solid ground for their *ilustrado* nationalist thinking of assimilationist- reformist discourse. This was clear in Rizal's own terms: "The Filipinos have never asked for independence, and still less separation from Spain." On the contrary, "What they ask is that they be treated as Spaniards, that they be granted the rights of Spanish citizens."[35]

In this context, assimilation meant that the *Islas Filipinas* be recognized as a province and more a mere colony of Spain. The status of Filipinos becoming Spanish citizens would thus result to the granting of all the other reforms: from legal and political equality (representation in the Cortes, equality before the law, institutional reforms)[36] to freedom of the press, speech and association,[37] to educational reforms (access to

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[33] See Resil B. Mojares, "Jose Rizal in the World of German Anthropology," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 41, nos. 3–4 (September/December 2013): 163–94.

[34] In his short monograph, Cesar Adib Majul speaks of "ancient nationality" instead of the word "civilization" in his discussion of Rizal's work on Morga. See Cesar Adib Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation* Diliman, Q.C.: Department of Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 1959, 10-12.

[35] José Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," in *Political and Historical Writings*, trans. Encarnación Alzona (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1972), 11.

[36] John N. Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement, 1880–1895* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997), 112–118.

[37] See for instance Marcelo H. del Pilar, "Friar Alarmists and Philippine Masonry" in *La Solidaridad [The Solidarity]*, Vol. 1, trans. Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon and Luís Maneru (Pasig City: Fundación Santiago, 1996), 569-573; 569 (December 15, 1893).

education for all subjects, teaching of Spanish, promotion of science, history and the humanities) and eventual cultural equality. For Mojares, Rizal was initially convinced that this emerging science (anthropology) was the key for the scientific rejection and rebuttal of Spanish ideas about racial hierarchy. To emphasize the obvious, Rizal vehemently criticizes the colonial view that Filipinos are inferior and blames the colonial regime for the lack of development of the colonial subjects and not on any inherently deficient native potential. Accordingly, he argued that intelligence and civilization are shaped by historical and environmental factors rather than any racial qualities.[38] Yet, in using the same categories, Rizal was bound to share in the contradictions of European racial theory. As Mojares insightfully observes, there "are slippages and contradictions (. . .) in Rizal's discourse on race."[39] This was clear in how Rizal, for instance, uplifts "the intellectual levels of the majority of the *Tagals* (Tagalogs)" in comparison with the advanced civilizations of France and Germany. While Rizal rejected the deterministic, biological determinations of "race" in favor of a shift to the "category of "strata" ("social classes," "lines of stratification"),"[40] he inadvertently assented "to the distinctions of precedence in the language of the more or less advanced and civilized."[41] This inability to "escape the language and prejudices of his time" constitutes the inescapable re-inscription of epistemic violence within their nationalist anti-colonial rhetoric. Here, it is clear that while Rizal consciously desired to serve Spanish imperial interests, his alignment with the very European racial classification he sought to critique reveals a crucial irony in their fight for *ilustrado* reforms: they were not intent at the emancipation of the whole social field from colonization but only for

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This was the newspaper that the *ilustrados* published under the leadership of Marcelo H. del Pilar that began in 1889 in Barcelona. It later moved to Madrid and had its last publication in 1895. This work would henceforth be cited as LS.

[38] Mojares, "Jose Rizal in the World of German Anthropology," 177.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 178.

the specific, elite segment of it.[42] Indeed, the whole arsenal of Filipino *ilustrado* nationalism would highlight this discursive complicity in the way Rizal and his cohorts articulated their notions of "Filipino identity" and the nation.

2) **Filipino Identity.** For the *ilustrado*s, the articulation of "Filipino identity" as a Spanish citizen represented the apex of their assimilationist=reformist thinking. This equation however, represented a Hispanic or Eurocentric ideal, a sort of homogenizing identity-trap, unto which the colonized must conform they are to gain legal and political equality within the Spanish imperial scheme. Evidently, this reveals a puzzling contradiction in Rizal's nationalist discourse: while he was pushing for universal equality, their stringent criteria of who can be made "Filipinos" and be part of the modern Philippine nation created an inside-outside structure that effectively discriminated those who can be included into the nation and those who cannot.

On the one hand, it is obvious that only those *who are and can be hispanized* among the colonized subjects can be made *Spanish citizens too*. This privileged class, as we have seen above, consists only of those creoles, native elites (*principalia*) and mestizos who have access to Spanish education, language and culture by virtue of their economic affluence and social influence. Evidently, this very restrictive characteristic can only include a very small portion of the colonized subjects. On the other hand, however, such restriction, discriminates against the majority of the colony's inhabitants and leads to the effective exclusion of most ethno-linguistic groups within the Philippine colony such as the Chinese, Muslims, Aetas and other mountain tribes (*los tribus montañesas*) like Tinguians, Kalinga, Apayao, etc. from becoming "Filipinos."

This coherent contradiction within ilustrado nationalism is one we can appreciate deeper now by reflecting on the consequences of Rizal's incursion into modern racial science. Recalling his work on De Morga,

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[42] See Vicente Rafael, "Introduction: Revolutionary Contradictions" in Milagros C. Guerrero, *Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society, 1898–1902* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1998), 1-19.

the attempt to establish a secure ontology for Filipino identity through the myth of a "pure indio" was a catachresis designed to define, and thus limit, Filipinoness into a very specific segment of the colonized, viz, the creoles, mestizos and the native elite. However, this can be arbitrarily extended to those which the ilustrados themselves can deem worthy of being included in their imagined nation. Thus, while he initially limited Filipinoness to the economically affluent creoles, mestizos, and the native principalia, he eventually expanded this process to include also the lowland Catholicized natives (e.g., Bikolanos, Tagalogs, Kapampangans, Bisaya, etc.) as being filipinizable. The basis for this inclusion lies in the ability of these "internal others" to achieve educational progress even though they have "limited intelligence (*intelligencia limitada*)" or "low capacity (*poco* capacidad)." Clearly, this implies Rizal's indirect acknowledgment the intellectual inferiority of the *indio* and the savage mountain tribes in relation to the European and other white races. For the scholar Ramon Guillermo, this was a striking and manifest contradiction with his initial view of racial equality.[43] This, in turn, clarifies why Rizal remained obstinate about the exclusion from Filipinoness of the Chinese, Muslims and the other savage tribes who "constitute only a small number of souls" and thus, not worthy of "the extension of the liberties of constitutional life."[44] Clearly: where Rizal wanted to be most emancipatory is where he was also most exclusionary: a duplicity in his anti-colonial rhetoric that finds it most clear expression in the *ilustrado* conception of the modern Philippine nation.

3) **Nation.** The coherent contradiction of *ilustrado* nationalist discourse whereby the incorporeal transformation of the colonial subject into a Spanish citizen was accomplished also extends to their conception of the modern Philippine nation. Consistent with their Eurocentric Hispanophilia and exclusivist application of Filipinoness, the *ilustrados*

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[43] See Ramon Guillermo, "The Problem of *Indio* Inferiority in Science: Rizal's Two Views," *Philippine Studies* 59, no. 4 (December 2011): 471-494, 483.

[44] Rizal, *Cartas Entre Rizal y el Professor Fernando Blumentritt*, xvii, cited in Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Tracing Origins," 622.

viewed the nation as a product of modernity. They also saw it as an essential moral project[45] where the realization of freedom in thought and speech, as marks of an educated and cultured citizenry,[46] was to be the solution to the problems of colonial violence, suffering, and oppression. For the *ilustrados*, the modern nation is an achievement that can combat the evils and ignorance brought about by Spanish monachism (or rule of the friars).[47]

However, this concept of the nation was not equivalent to the desire for an independent political state. For Rizal and the *ilustrados*, the modern Philippine nation was not meant as a separate entity independent from Spanish imperial power but rather, merely as a small nation (*Filipinas* as *patria chica*) contained within a bigger one (Spain as *madre patria*) By their fervent Hispanophilia, the initial *ilustrado* vision for a modern *Filipinas* was to assimilate her as a province of Spain;[48] an agenda which, if realized, would make Spanish law reign supreme over the Philippines and the consequent legal equality among its inhabitants would allow them to pursue the national goals of self-determination and progress. This assimilationist thinking is what ultimately clarifies the *ilustrado*

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[45] See Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of the Nation*, 16.

[46] The founders, under the leadership of Marcelo H. del Pilar, declared *La Solidaridad's* guiding principles thus: "Our program aside from being harmless is very simple; to fight all reaction, hinder all steps backward, to applaud and to accept all liberal ideas, and to defend progress; in brief to be a propagandist above all of ideals of democracy so that these might reign over all nations here and beyond the seas" ("Our Aims" in LS 1:3 [February 15, 1889]).

[47] Included in the definition of the friars are "[t]he Augustinians, the Recollects, the Dominicans, the Franciscans and the Capuchins." See Marcelo del Pilar, "Edifying Colloquies," quoted in Epifanio de los Santos, *Marcelo H. del Pilar, Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto* (Quezon City: Philippine Historical Association, 1957), 50. The Jesuits are not included among those targeted for friar immorality.

[48] At first, the *ilustrado*s in *La Solidaridad* were not explicitly advocating the assimilation of the Philippines into the Mother Country. However, they view such assimilation as the eventual result of their struggle for full representation in the Cortes. It is only after assimilation into Spain and their recognition as Spanish citizens that full equality before the law and opportunities will be made accessible to the Filipinos.

strategy of thinking Filipino identity as *Spanish citizens too*. By thinking and presenting themselves as Spanish too, the Filipino *ilustrados* were offering themselves as worthy of the legal, social, economic and political benefits since they perform the same duties and responsibilities due to all Spanish citizens.

Notably, in *La Solidaridad,* this assimilationist thinking was exemplified in their efforts to restore Philippine representation within the Spanish *Cortes*. For the *ilustrado*s, political representation was a strategic maneuver that would allow them to ensure Philippine national interest provided that it does not contradict the Spanish designs for empire. For this reason, their propaganda was designed to advance "representation" as not only natural and just but most importantly, advantageous for Spain herself. Once representation in the *Cortes* can be justifiably restored and *Filipinas* is assimilated as a province of Spain, the Filipinos would have been recognized as full Spanish citizens, which would then pave the way for the realization of much needed social and economic reforms within the Philippine colony. This passage from identity-construction to representation- recognition -assimilation-to reformation is essentially complete without recourse to a politically independent Philippine nation-state. In this way, the justification for the modern Philippine nation as heir to the Spanish Empire becomes clear: it is only *ilustrado* nationalist discourse that can safeguard the ideological shortcut for the continuity of Spanish colonial hegemony.

V Conclusion: Deconstructing History

Given the above insights into the constructive role of *ilustrado* nationalism vis-a-vis the ideological origins of the modern Philippine nation, what then, can we conclude, about the messianic or salvific character of Filipinization, taken here as the persistent desire to *filipinize* or to interpret everything in the past as part of the unilinear history of a Filipino people? "Is there anything messianic about Filipinization?" In asking this, our attempted deconstruction of history allows us to question nationalism's narrative of emancipation as conducted by Jose Rizal and

his fellow *ilustrados* and achieve a critical distance from the pretensions of nationalist desire whose promise of emancipation is overshadowed by its myth. Thus, we highlight several insights into subtle contradictions of Filipino nationalist thinking itself.

First, Filipinization is an identity discourse oriented towards a very specific political aim: i.e., to secure legal equality with the Spanish *peninsulares* in the eyes of Spanish law. And since this identity was only initially applicable to a select class, it was therefore clear from the outset that they had a very parochial view of emancipation such that it excludes those who cannot achieve its lofty ideals of Hispanicity and Catholicity. Second, consequent to their very parochial view of "Filipino" identity, the *ilustrados* viewed *Las Islas Filipinas* as their exclusive patrimony. This implies that the nation was not meant to be shared by all the inhabitants of a geographic *Filipinas* while its attendant attribute of sovereignty was designed to benefit only those who belong to the nation. And third, by sharing in the powers of the colonial masters, it must be stressed that the *ilustrados* were not working for independence. *Ilustrado* nationalism was not intent at achieving emancipation from the Spanish colonizers but, on the contrary, were primarily intent at preserving the colonial structures of oppression and domination. On this account, Filipinization, taken as the differential construction of Filipino identity, would precisely accomplish that discursive complicity which renders it as the precise translation of Spanish colonialism into the homo-hegemony of Filipino nationalism.

Given the above contradictions, we can say that the nation as an emancipatory principle failed to live up to its promise as a principle for radical change. Instead, it has become an instrument by which the elite and the *ilustrado* class were able to hold their control over the economic and political life of the nation. By a sweeping generalization, the nationalist thinking that we trace from Padre Burgos to Rizal and the *ilustrados* and subsequently taken by revolutionary ideology was what precisely accomplished the drama by which Spanish colonialism and its oppressive structures were historically repeated. Milagros Guerrero's incisive advice was brilliantly prophetic in its anachronism: "The drama of the past must

not be played out in the future. But what if the narrative with the same features, no seemingly according to a master plot, continues into the present? And why so?"[49]

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49 Guerrero, "Introduction," *Luzon at War,* xii.

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