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Re-thinking Filipino Philosophy with Gilles Deleuze

The question of Filipino philosophy has long been a staple of debates among Filipino students and scholars of philosophy due to its import to academic discourse as well as the weight it bears on the issue of Filipino identity. The tacit assumption is that the propounding of a distinctly Filipino worldview is necessary to identify what makes Filipino *Filipino*. This assumption however is rendered problematic by two key related issues: first, the idea that philosophy can be defined along ethnic lines; and second, the unacknowledged metaphysical or essentialist claim that underwrites Filipinos' notion of identity. What I propose to do in this paper is to examine these two issues at length guided by the following questions: 1) *What requires the re-thinking of Filipino philosophy?*; 2) *What are the concepts from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze that can aid in such re-thinking?* These questions shall be my points of departure in my attempt to critique a mode of discourse labelled as *Filipino philosophy* and to explore new possibilities for the same with the aid of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995). I believe that this discussion on Filipino philosophy through Gilles Deleuze has a significant role to play in understanding the separate yet interrelated evolution of the notions *Filipino* and *philosophy* in the midst of the global collapse of traditional political, economic and cultural borders.

Introduction

The translation of *Difference and Repetition*, the book form of Deleuze's doctoral dissertation was published in 1994, a year before he took his life. In a way, we may consider the said work as a fitting exclamation point of a life lived and dedicated to exploring and conquering new frontiers for philosophy. With *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze comes to his own after his apprenticeship with his predecessors, in particular, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson from whom he acquired theoretical education for his ontology of difference.¹ Deleuze is considered one of the most influential philosophical voices of the 20th century. His works have been intensely debated and have attracted both adherents and enemies in such diverse areas as literature, history, political theory, film, architecture, visual art, music, among others. No less than Michel Foucault saw the global resonance of Deleuze when he pronounced that: "Perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian."² Deleuze is a French philosopher who counts himself as an *untimely philosopher* after the earlier "untimely philosophers" (like the ones cited above) who, in their separate episodes and modes of theorizing, pushed for and developed a counter-establishment philosophy. Deleuze described what he was doing "as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own child, yet monstrous."³ Deleuze followed their direction and later constructed his own untimely philosophy in the form of philosophy of *difference*. The notion of *difference* is the central theme of Deleuze in his aforementioned doctoral dissertation. In the

¹Michael Hardt, *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (London: UCL Press Limited, 1993), 111-114.

²Sean Hand, quoting Michel Foucault in Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xli.

³Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 6.

said text, he problematized the current state of Western philosophy by pointing out the continual subordination of difference to identity. Difference is as old as philosophy itself but philosophers, ancient and modern alike, from Plato and Aristotle down to Leibniz and Hegel, can only think of it within the purview of concepts. This justifies Deleuze's lament that, despite what the past thinkers have achieved, they have gone only as far as suggesting *conceptual difference* but not far enough to articulate the *concept of difference*. Difference is covered over by different conceptual schemes, all intended to protect identity's preserve: *the One, analogy, God, truth, being, metaphysics, universal, cogito, monads, dialectics, Geist*, among others. These schemes are carried over and are constantly employed by philosophy through representation and mediation. In the words of Deleuze himself:

Difference is "mediated" to the extent that it is subjected to the fourfold root of identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance. On the basis of a first impression (difference is evil), it is proposed to 'save' difference by representing it, and to represent it by relating it to the requirements of the concept in general. It is therefore a question of determining a propitious moment – the Greek propitious moment – at which difference is, as it were, reconciled with the concept. Difference must leave its cave and cease to be a monster; or at least only that which escapes at the propitious moment must persist as a monster, that which constitutes only a bad encounter, a bad occasion. At this point, the expression "make the difference" changes its meaning. It now refers to a selective test which differences may be inscribed in a concept in general, and how.⁴

⁴Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 29.

Deleuze credits three important names who, according to him, paved the way for the conceptual disentanglement of difference, namely Scotus, Spinoza and Nietzsche.⁵ Deleuze hails Duns Scotus for single-handedly pricking the bubble of identity with his singular ontological proposition regarding the univocity of Being. Because being is univocal, Scotus made it easier for us to see how being itself includes individuating differences. Spinoza seconded what Scotus did with his identification of univocal being with the unique, universal and infinite substance—*Deus sive Natura*. With Spinoza, being ceased to be neutral and becomes expressive instead, that is, expressive of difference. Nietzsche will carry it further by reversing the relation of being and becoming, thus introducing the possibility of the eternal return and from it, the concept of difference.

Difference stands opposed to the tradition of *identity* (the hegemony of the “I” of the West) which has become Western civilization’s enduring fixation. Western philosophy itself has become a site of legitimation and preservation of Western identity which reached the Philippines through the Pacific expansion of European modernity. Noted Deleuzean scholars, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri credited Rene Descartes for having fathered the construction of European modernity on the foundation of what they call as the transcendental.⁶ In the unfolding of European history, the theological transcendental of Descartes was succeeded by the political transcendental of Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau and much later, by the transcendental of capital endorsed by Adam Smith and decried by Karl Marx. As noted by Hardt and Negri:

There is at the base of modern theory of sovereignty, however, a further very important

⁵Ibid., 39-42.

⁶Michael Hardt Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 80.

element—a content that fills and sustains the form of sovereign authority. This content is represented by capitalist development and the affirmation of the market as the foundation of the values of social reproduction. Without this content, which is always implicit, always working inside the transcendental apparatus, the form of sovereignty would not have been able to survive in modernity and European modernity would not have been able to achieve a hegemonic position on a world scale. As Arif Dirlik has noted, Eurocentrism distinguished itself from other ethnocentrisms (such as Sinocentrism) and rose to global prominence principally because it was supported by the powers of the capital.⁷

Thomas Hobbes once described the State as *Leviathan* to illustrate the magnitude of its power. The sovereignty of the State, established with the fiat of a social contract, is Hobbes' proposed corrective to the state of nature which constantly threatens society with instability and fragmentation. John Locke subsequently, with his improvisation of this Hobbesian social contract theory, would posit a theory of State whose principal purpose is the protection of the private property of its citizens. In both thinkers, the State appears as the center of gravity of political and economic power. In the Deleuzean scheme however, we find an overturning of this traditional notion of the State. It is not as if the State is disempowered; the State retains the same power with the same intensity and yet its sovereignty is already demystified by being located within the ambit of a higher power called capitalism. For Deleuze, the State is simply an effect of capitalism which itself is a product of a series of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as well as decoding and overcoding of various political and economic systems. The State appears in this flux where elements constantly meet and depart from each other within the capitalist field of immanence.

⁷Ibid., 85-86.

Capitalism generates the State as an element of anti-production. Deleuze underscores the power of capitalism by telling us that even in its being an anti-force, a re-territorializing entity like the State owes its possibility to capitalism. In a way, capitalism is overcoded by the State by virtue of capitalism's own overcoding of the State. As explained by Deleuze:

The State, its police, and its army form a gigantic enterprise of antiproduction, but at the heart of production itself, and conditioning this production. Here we discover a new determination of the properly capitalist field of immanence: not only the interplay of the relations and differential coefficients of decoded flows, not only the nature of the limits that capitalism reproduces on an ever wider scale as interior limits, but the presence of antiproduction within production itself. The apparatus of antiproduction is no longer a transcendent instance that opposes production, limits it, or checks it; on the contrary, it insinuates itself everywhere in the productive machine and becomes firmly wedded to it in order to regulate its productivity and realize surplus value which explains, for example, the difference between the despotic bureaucracy and the capitalist bureaucracy.⁸

It is this transcendental of capital that will engender later on what Deleuze would describe as "control society."⁹ Through control society, capitalist Western culture is able to diffuse itself and homogenize everything that crosses its path. The cultural and political history of the Philippines, both past and recent, is replete with events

⁸Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 235.

⁹Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 175.

that will testify to this. The Filipino that we know now is a product of a long and violent process of deterritorialization carried out by the agents and institutions of Western hegemony - a deterritorialization that persists even today. This explains, read from Deleuzian hermeneutics, why the question of ethnicity in philosophy and the question of a distinct identity are themselves manifestations of the hegemony and the control of the West. In his philosophy of difference, what Deleuze suggests is the location of an otherwise unheralded centers of counter forces (described by Deleuze as *molecular*, *minor* or *micro* elements) to facilitate the outbreak of becoming, that is, *difference* in sustained proliferation. The challenge is for Filipino philosophy to re-think itself, or in Deleuzian language, to think *difference* within itself. In other words, the task for Filipino philosophy is to digress from the discourse of ethnicity and identity and to step into the sphere of difference by tapping into the irruptions of the possible in both the minor or the micro, including and most importantly, the traditionally perceived as non-philosophical and non-Filipino. The re-thinking of Filipino philosophy should help unleash new possibilities both for Filipino as it becomes philosophical and philosophy as it becomes Filipino. Only then can the Filipinos' utterance become philosophical and philosophy become a territory where the Filipino can articulate his becoming different.

Filipino, Philosophy and Identity

If Filipino philosophy means articulation of native thought, doubtless we say that Filipino philosophy has existed long ago. What renders this proposition arguable however is the problem inherent with the notion of the *native* itself. At the turn of the 19th century, as the world was undergoing massive geopolitical shift and the Philippines was embroiled in its own struggle for sovereignty, a Filipino intellectual attempted to provide his counter definition of the term *native*. The said

intellectual was Dr. Jose Rizal. To accomplish his project of recuperating the meaning of *native*, Rizal turned to Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*. De Morga was a Spanish lawyer and was the lieutenant governor in the Philippines from 1595-1603. Rizal was drawn to him who he acknowledged as the authority who "governed the destinies of the Philippines in the beginning of her new era and witnessed the last moments of our ancient nationality."¹⁰ Rizal decided to make a corrective annotation of de Morga's work because he wanted to revive his fellow Filipinos' "consciousness of the past, already effaced from [their] memory."¹¹ The past Rizal was alluding to was the Philippines' colonial prehistory which he reconstructed from de Morga's reportage. In Rizal's fictive and romantic history, the Philippines had an authentic Malayan and Asian ancestry, an established culture and a pre-colonial nationality. All these however floundered with the coming of European modernity.¹² Rizal's de Morga annotation was described by the Philippine culture scholar Resil Mojares as a "nationalist counternarrative."¹³ As he explained:

Rizal's decision to annotate Morga was not merely dictated by expedience but the discursive formation in which the nationalists operated. They had to speak to, through, and against the European texts that had—by now they represented the past, present, and future of the country—produced a Philippines that the Filipino nationalists now desired to fashion as their own.¹⁴

¹⁰Jose Rizal, *Events In The Philippine Islands*, (Manila: National Historical Commission, 2011), xlvii.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²Resil B. Mojares, *Waiting For Maria Makiling: Essays In Philippine Cultural History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002), 61-62

¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

While Rizal's work was read more as a fictive rather than a historical narrative even during his time,¹⁵ it did however succeed in convincing his contemporaries as well as the latter readers of Philippine history that such pristine, native Filipino culture was once existent. Rizal's legacy of nationalism proved to be dominantly influential among scholars across generations and research disciplines. With the resurgence of nationalism prior to and during the heyday of the so-called Marcos years, philosophy too would graft itself onto the language of the nationalist discourse. It is within this context that one may construe the works of the exponents of Filipino philosophy like Emerita Quito, Claro Ceniza, Leonardo Mercado and Florentino Timbreza. Theirs were an attempt to render Filipino philosophy an articulation critical of the philosophy we imbibed from the West and at the same time evocative of Filipinos' own native self. As noted by Mercado in his apology:

All movements are based on a philosophy which bullets cannot destroy. In the growing clamor for Filipino self-identity is implied the need for clarifying what Filipino thought is. Colonial powers have ruled the Filipinos for the past centuries and in doing so imposed their own ideologies on the people. Intellectual colonialism is like a process of conditioning; it induces a person to forget his own culture and eventually makes him ape a superior model. (. . .) In short, the Filipino needs a philosophy to explain and support his identity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 57

¹⁶ Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City, Philippines: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), 7.

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While laudable in their efforts and for what in fact they have achieved, it is difficult to see how Filipino philosophy as conceived by the above-mentioned thinkers could really become counter-hegemonic given its entanglement with the problematic of identity which as pointed out above was something Rizal posited and propagated but left unchallenged by later generations of scholars of Philippine culture. Rizal thought of identity in metaphysical, essentialist terms. Identity to him was something pre-given and something which can be lost and regained through a narrative return. The campaign for Filipino philosophy is deemed as an extension of such project. Having said that, notwithstanding, I do not think that our local thinkers could be faulted for their short sight. The problem, after all, was not their handiwork but was merely handed down by a tradition of nationalist narrative steeped in fictive history and romanticism. Rizal himself, for all his genius, could not have subjected his own writing to self-critique aware as he was that what he was doing was not a philosophical piece but a piece of propaganda against the misrepresentation of the Philippines by Spanish chroniclers like de Morga. He could not have been aware that identity and alterity are products of hegemony of European modernity. In the words of Hardt and Negri:

Colonialism and racial subordination function as a temporary solution to the crisis of European modernity, not only in economic and political terms, but also in terms of identity and culture. Colonialism constructs figures of alterity and manages their flows in what unfolds as a complex dialectical structure. The negative construction of non-European others is finally what founds and sustains European identity itself.¹⁷

¹⁷Hardt, *Empire*, 124.

This is a classic case of eternal return where one sees the predominance of reactive forces over the active forces and the perpetuation of the hegemony of the Same. The more Filipino philosophy persists in its recovery of a lost identity, the deeper it gets stuck in such quandary. In order to find its voice, Filipino philosophy must strive to assert its will to power. This happens when the negation brought about by the initial triumph of the reactive forces is itself negated (the negation of the negation) and the reactive forces themselves are dissipated in the process Nietzsche called "active destruction"¹⁸ – the event when negation is transmuted to affirmation. It is through this that eternal return can lead to the becoming of the active forces which Nietzsche and Deleuze described as the "eternal joy of becoming."¹⁹ As a first step towards this goal, Filipino philosophy, instead of harping on a lost paradise, should instead harness its own intensity towards the critique, not retrieval, of identity. This is the same strategy Deleuze himself learned from David Hume. Philosophy for both Hume and Deleuze does not begin from any notion of identity since identity is yet to be constituted. Here lies the radicalism of the empiricism of Hume. It is an empiricism that speaks of a world that is constantly slipping away from the grasp of the subject who pretends to know itself as well as the given reality.²⁰ Hume's empiricism overturns this belief cognizant of the fact that the given is in constant flux; the given is a mere succession of events, of a movement that never follows a single trajectory. The best that the subject can do is to believe and to invent, that is, to engage the unknown. The singular feat of Hume according to Deleuze is precisely in spelling out this problem: the problem of the subject

¹⁸Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 70.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 86-87.

constituting itself in the given when the given itself is not given to subject. It is in this sense that Hume becomes one of the primary sources of Deleuzian philosophy of difference. In this position, Hume himself is turning the triumvirate of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle upside down and is likewise radicalizing everything the likes of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Marx have to say after him. In Hume, Deleuze finds an exclamation point for his philosophy of difference and Filipino philosophy itself can find in it a veritable starting point. Filipino philosophy can turn to but cannot afford to dwell on history if it wishes to affirm itself. The challenge is to find an expression of newness, an exploration of becoming. In the words of Deleuze: "History today still designates only the set of conditions, however recent they may be, from which one turns away in order to become, that is to say, to create something new."²¹

Conclusion

Rizal originally thought of Filipino identity as a molar reality, as something that defined who we were and whose reclamation is indispensable in establishing a national community. Succeeding scholars pursued the same line of inspiration and as shown in the paper, early exponents of Filipino philosophy infused their works with the same mindset. It was a philosophy anchored on nationalism which itself is fed by a memory of an identity, whole and intact, before it was deterritorialized by our European colonizers. As I argued in the paper, there is a need to re-visit Filipino philosophy since the very foundation from which it seeks legitimation is itself under question. Identity, says Deleuze, is the very reason for the floundering of Western culture, the same damaged culture that we inherited from Europe with its alleged discovery

²¹Gilles Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 96.

of the Philippines. To be truly liberating, philosophy, Filipino or otherwise, must extricate itself from the domain of the Same, that is, from the realm of identity. The real matter for philosophy, in fact, the only matter, is the creation of concepts and according to Deleuze, concepts are created not by the sustaining what is but by provoking what can become. This is how Filipino philosophy can evoke difference.

Filipino scholars of philosophy can no longer hope to reclaim what has long been deterritorialized. This is not to say that native speculation has reached a dead end. The value of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference as an alternative language for Filipino philosophy lies precisely in its ability to indicate new directions and to inaugurate virgin passageways that can help Filipino speculation to be more than just a regional philosophy but a genuine field of immanence where both Filipino and philosophy can become. To help us accomplish this goal, we are here proposing some Deleuzian concepts and how they may be applied in our pursuit of pushing the boundaries of Filipino philosophy ever wider.

First, identity is a molecular, not a molar, reality. Following Hume's insight, Deleuze tells us that subjectivity is not something pregiven; it is in constant flux, an assemblage that is constantly constituted. From this perspective, we can read Rizal's much mourned lost Filipino "identity" as a mere moment in a long episode of identity creation which continues even today. The Filipino is not a figure that once was and would have been forever until deterritorialized. The Filipino is a bundle of tales, a fusion of forces. There is no reason to exorcise ourselves of our colonial past in the hope of finding a nationality that is pure and untouched for the Filipino is a field of constant deterritorializing and reterritorializing influences. To think that we can be Filipinos free from any colonial intervention is to betray the very history of the word "Filipino". A Filipino speculation on philosophy can qualify as philosophy according to its capacity to create concepts that

can elevate our understanding not just of our ethnicity but more so, of the possibilities of our relational nature as human subjects. This notion acquires particular urgency especially in this age of massive Filipino diaspora and the postmodern blurring of traditional geographical and cultural boundaries.

Second, Filipino philosophy should direct itself to becoming a minority. In the past, our local thinkers considered it Filipino to reject the influence of Western philosophical systems or to use the vernacular in our philosophical discourse. Deleuze would hesitate to call this mode of philosophizing *different* because, as it is, it remains stuck in the negative. Difference, as Deleuze would have it, is not celebration of negation but a festive announcement of affirmation. Filipino philosophy as a minority philosophy must not step back from a majority language or from a majority system of thought. What it should do instead is insert itself within them and from inside, discover new ways of saying, new modes of thinking well beyond or even against the majority's very own. Filipino philosophy can do this not only within philosophy itself but within other disciplines the way Deleuze interpreted the novels of Kafka, the paintings of Francis Bacon or the French cinema.

Rizal's hope was an experience of genuine becoming for every Filipino. An alternative Filipino philosophy using Deleuze is a corrective to the belief that such hope is lost and such hope is past. We are a people composed of singularities who continue to create and recreate ourselves from various social, cultural and historical intensities. As a philosophy of difference, Filipino philosophy is a narrative of our constant becoming. The principal task of Filipino philosophy is to resist not only the tendency to define itself according to the framework of ethnicity; it should in fact defy the very tendency towards definition. The task of philosophy, if we follow Deleuze, is to push the boundaries ever wider, to create spaces that will make the creation of new concepts

possible. To use ethnicity to designate how we think and what we are thinking as Filipinos is to denigrate both philosophy and the Filipino by reducing them into metaphysical categories. It does not mean of course that the question as to what makes Filipino *Filipino* should be set aside. On the contrary, the only way to give justice to this problem is to keep it open. Filipino philosophy, to become philosophical, must restrain itself from making conceptual prescriptions on questions that border on either philosophy or Filipino. Philosophy and Filipino – they are both singularities; they exceed identity. They can only become. Read through Deleuze, *Filipino philosophy* means philosophy becoming Filipino and Filipino becoming philosophy. What needs articulation is not identity but the creative process of engagement with a variety of forces which affect the singularities they both continuously become.

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