

Article

The Decolonial Turn in Filipino Philosophy

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Abstract: Academic philosophy is privy to the pervasive colonial knowledge production in the academia. The colonial legacy of philosophy was highlighted by the eminent Filipina philosopher Emerita Quito in her 1983 essay “The Status of Philosophy in the Philippines.” Decolonizing philosophy in the country entails urgent reforms of a myriad of interconnected factors which include, first and foremost, the decolonization of the university, its curriculum and instruction, its pedagogical method, and most importantly, an overhaul of neoliberal-oriented-imperialist-led-neocolonial education.

This paper argues that a significant “decolonial turn” in Filipino philosophy took place via the historical turn, that is, through the writings of prominent nationalist historians such as Teodoro Agoncillo, Renato Constantino, and Reynaldo C. Ileto. Hence, this paper extracts decolonial themes found in Constantino’s major works. Recognized as one of the top ten Filipino philosophers, Constantino puts forward the position that a prerequisite to decolonization is the demythologization, i.e., a rectification of historical myths that have been presented and accepted as reality. In most of his works, Constantino used the terms “counter-consciousness” and “decolonization” interchangeably. The advantage of Constantino over other historians like Agoncillo, de la Costa and Ileto lies in Constantino’s staunch defense of nationalist aspirations and his conviction of the necessity of liberation movements which, as I presented, constitutes a major force in the process of decolonization. Lastly, it is posited that Renato Constantino’s decolonial project is evident in his philosophy of nationalism. For Constantino, a nationalist consciousness must be at the heart of decoloniality, for a true Filipino is a decolonized Filipino.

Keywords: Filipino philosophy, Renato Constantino, decolonial theory, decoloniality

Introduction

Philosophy is an accomplice to the pervasive colonial knowledge production, distribution, perpetuation, and legitimization in the academia. This paper argues that a significant “decolonial turn” in Filipino philosophy took place via the historical turn, that is, through the writings of prominent nationalist historian Renato Constantino. As a product of colonial hegemonic pedagogy, philosophy in the country not only acts as a resource for creation of truth discourses, but is also equally influenced by the socio-historical and cultural conditions from which these discourses emerge (Soldantenko, p. 139).

Mignolo and Quijano sees the link between “decolonization,” “epistemic disobedience” and “discursive delinkings from colonial thought.” Decolonization, then, is “defined and pursued in terms that center liberation of the mind over land and body” (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014 cited in Mignolo 2020). Hence, for Quijano (cited in Mignolo 2020), the entire decolonial project entails a critique of the European paradigm of rationality/modernity. Consequently, colonial subjugation reinforces and legitimizes epistemic injustices in colonized countries. Miranda Fricker (2007) defines epistemic injustice as “consisting, most fundamentally, in a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (p.1). Therefore, an antidote to epistemic injustice is liberation through epistemic reconstitution (Mignolo 2020, p. 5).

Academic philosophy came to the country through the revered walls of the University of Santo Tomas (UST). Established in 1611, less than a century after the arrival of Spanish colonizers, UST originally heralded a colonialist-oriented Thomistic-Aristotelean philosophy which, in tenor, is understandably conservative and reactionary. Dominican Thomism, as Demeterio (2005) puts it, is guilty of “wanton disregard for the urgent and concrete problems of the present” due to its obsession with speculation and highly theoretical master-narrative metaphysics (p. 9). As a corollary to Spanish colonial rule, Thomistic epistemic framework in UST came to be understood as the only legitimate and valid path toward The True, The Just, The Good, and The Beautiful. For this reason, the discipline of philosophy in the Philippines must be understood as “Western” insofar as it reflects colonial-colony power relations. The mere fact, that generally speaking, philosophy as a field or a discipline in universities remains a bastion of Eurocentrism, male and white supremacy, is a compelling reason for the necessity and urgency of the decolonial project. However, Filipino philosophers have often overlooked and neglected to examine and scrutinize how philosophy, which is the universal art of questioning reality, came to be dominated by a particular segment of Western society. Equally important is the task of immanent critique, i.e., criticizing philosophy “from inside” in order to expose and oppose existing dominant Western and Eurocentric beliefs and attitudes.

Decolonizing philosophy in the country entails urgent reforms of a myriad of interconnected factors that include, first and foremost, a decolonization of the university (Bhambra, et.al. 2018; Pete 2018; Batz 2019). This should be followed by curriculum and instruction revision (De Lorme 2018, Lockley 2018), the application of creative and transformative pedagogical methods (Pirbhai-Illich, et.al., 2017; Jabbar 2017; Sachs, Barbara Clark, et.al 2017; Dennis 2018), and most importantly, an overhaul of neoliberal-oriented-imperialist-led-neocolonial education. The decolonization of philosophy should likewise include the critical role of the faculty and the student body in decolonial praxis and social transformation (Sefa Dei and Lordan 2016; Imoka 2016). William Jamal Richardson (2018) explicitly warned us that it is impossible to decolonize university knowledge systems apart from the material conditions where colonial knowledge originated. For Richardson, epistemic critique can only be possible once we “address forms of physical and economic colonial violence” (p. 231). Real decolonization can only take place once decolonial scholars and marginalized communities link arms to oppose epistemic injustice *and* “intervene politically in the physical spaces where these debates take place” (p. 232).

The first task in achieving this goal is to acknowledge “multiplicity of centers” and move away from Eurocentric/Western philosophic hegemony. In the words of Carol Azumah Dennis (2018), “to center otherness is to accept that no single voice speaks for us all” (p. 197). A truly decolonized Filipino philosophy is one whose philosophical landscape is centered on multiplicity that accepts disharmony of voices, “where the risk of disintegration is preferable to selective listening” (p. 197). Freeing subjugated indigenous knowledge and belief systems is a crucial step toward achieving this goal (Doxtater 2004, Ndlovu 2014, Gaudry (Métis) and Danielle E. Lorenz. 2019). However, since the crisis in philosophy lies deep in an uneven power relationship within the academe, the solution must go beyond multiplicity, inclusion, or in simply diversifying the field. In most cases, these liberal interventions only yield superficial results that eventually lead to an “eternal return of crisis... that make little or no difference” (Torres, p. 65). What is needed is what Renato Constantino calls a revival of the Filipino peoples’ revolutionary aspiration and their tradition of struggle against colonial oppression. This means a total dismantling of imperialist and neo-colonial systems of domination.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the reader to the general themes and issues surrounding decoloniality in relation to Filipino philosophy. The second part elucidates the various philosophical “turns” that took place in philosophical circles. Third, it explicates the genesis of decolonial turn through the seminal works of Quito and Mercado. The last part is a crystallization of Renato Constantino’s own breed of nationalist decolonial project, highlighting the link between “counter-consciousness” and decolonial praxis.

Philosophical Twists and Turns

Western philosophy has undergone various shifts in terms of focus and emphasis. Skripnik (2023) identified at least four “philosophical turns” in contemporary philosophy: analytical, linguistic, pragmatic, and ontological turns.

The linguistic turn took place with Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921. The logical positivists in the 1920s and early 1930s advanced this philosophical movement by rejecting everything related to metaphysics. Richard Rorty’s book *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (1992) provides an anthology on how linguistic philosophers view philosophy and philosophical method over the last three to five decades.

Similarly, one can also speak of the “cultural turn” in philosophy. Fredric Jameson’s book *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1990* (1998) is a compilation of Jameson’s ideas on postmodernism as it emerged from the cultural practices of late capitalist society. It provides a thorough exposition and critique of the theoretical basis of the cultural, socioeconomic, and geopolitical dimensions of the postmodern.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Continental philosophy began to engage in a “theological turn,” a philosophical movement where philosophers began to shift their emphasis on the theological agenda. Prominent philosophers who took the theological turn include Jean-Luc Marion, Giorgio Agamben, John Caputo, Gianni Vattimo and others. For example, Alain Badiou’s bold and provocative work, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (2003), extracts the emancipatory political praxis in the life of St. Paul. Badiou argues that the Pauline figure is a revolutionary leader who was able to weave truth and subjectivity together. In *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (2010), Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank reiterates the revolutionary possibility of the Pauline figure which, according to them, can rupture “the predetermined coordinates of the world” and offer “an entirely new kind of political subject altogether” (p. 2). The edited volume by John D. Caputo and Linda Martin Alcoff, *St. Paul Among the Philosophers* (2009), provides an excellent philosophical retrieval of the Pauline project which views the image of Paul as centrally important for contemporary political life.

The Philippine philosophical landscape has likewise experienced philosophical turns. For example, one can uncover a cultural-linguistic turn in the earliest works of Leonardo Mercado. In *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (1993), Mercado was convinced that his “pioneering work” will lead to a clear understanding of the Filipino mind by analyzing Philippine languages and behavior (p. 8). Employing what he calls a “metalinguistic analysis,” Mercado analyzed three major Philippine languages, Cebuano/Visayan, Tagalog, and Ilocano, which proceed from an inference from phonology, from semantics, and from

structure (p. 9). In *Filipino Thought* (2000), Mercado aligns Filipino philosophy with ethnophilosophy, or more specifically philosophical anthropology. In *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy* (2009), Mercado reiterates and continues the philosophical themes expounded in *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* by positing that philosophy is inseparable from culture and religion. In *Reflections on the Status of Filipino Philosophy* (2016), Mercado was convinced that a “people’s philosophy” must make explicit their worldviews, their ethics and values, as well as their philosophy as reflected in their language/s (p. 24). For her part, Espina (2006) made the assertion that philosophy of culture is, ultimately, philosophy of man, insofar as it tackles concepts such as “nature,” “agency,” “autonomy,” and “freedom” (p. 7).

Other eminent Filipino philosophers who were engaged in the “linguistic turn” include Florentino T. Timbreza, who popularized the intellectualization of the Filipino language, and the Jesuit philosopher Roque J. Feriols, who was credited as the first philosophy professor to teach philosophy in Filipino. As a staunch advocate for the Filipinization of philosophy, Feriols was convinced that language can “awaken other people into living” (p. 339).

Consequently, it was Florentino Hornedo who popularized the “cultural turn” in Filipino philosophy. More recently, the Redemptorist missionary, anthropologist, theologian, and social activist Karl Gaspar made a significant contribution to the decolonial-cultural turn through his in-depth study and analysis of Indigenous (more specifically the *Lumads* of Mindanao) worldviews and belief systems (Gaspar 2005; 2010; 2017; 2021; 2022). His award-winning book *Handumanan (Remembrance): Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring* (2021) is a decolonial reading of Philippine history from the lens of *Lumad/indigenous* philosophy. His most recent work *Diwang Balaan/Banal: A Decolonial Discourse on Pinoy Spirituality* (2022) includes a chapter on Mindanawon/indigenous philosophy.

The very limited and scarce literature on decoloniality in the country can be attributed to the seeming late arrival of decoloniality in the field of philosophy. This article is a modest contribution to this apparent research gap.

Decolonization and Filipino Philosophy

In 1983, the renowned Filipina philosopher and one of the pillars of Filipino philosophy, Emerita S. Quito, wrote an important essay which initiated the first step in decolonizing Filipino philosophy. The first paragraph in the *Introduction to The State of Philosophy in the Philippines* (TSPP) tells us how coloniality of power permeated the

cognitive faculties of Filipinos. This dismal colonial pervasiveness is evident in three key areas: the academia, politics, and religion:

Owing to four centuries of Spanish domination (1521-1898), the Philippines has been greatly influenced by Spanish customs and values, but most especially, by the Catholic faith which the Spaniards brought to the country. So strong has been the influence of this Catholic faith that its impact continues to be felt in other domains such as philosophy and politics. A philosophy espoused by saints is considered sacrosanct; a political party that advocates measures contrary to Catholic principles does not prosper. The hold of the Catholic faith on the minds of the Filipino people has been so tenacious that most people no longer draw a line between religion and faith on the one hand, and philosophy and reason, on the other. As a result, the most prominent philosophical trend among the majority of professors until the 1960s had been Catholic philosophy, or to be more specific, the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas (p. 9).

Here, Quito shows us the pervasive colonial legacy of philosophy in the country. In an attempt to decolonize philosophy, Quito rejected the traditional dichotomy between indigenous/folk philosophy and academic philosophy. Instead, she restored the status of indigenous/folk philosophy by putting it at par with academic philosophy. Reacting against the Western/Greek “classical” definition of philosophy, Quito affirms the pluriversity of knowledge in the Philippine context. As Quito puts it, philosophy *ought* to be the collective mind of a people interacting within its own universe. Acknowledging indigenous wisdom and practices as valid paths toward philosophizing, Quito states that philosophy should include the attitude of a people toward life and a Supreme Being. And if philosophy is the love of wisdom, then Filipino philosophy ought to be a people’s concerted effort to acquire wisdom in order to live well (p. 10). Quito, then, sees the urgency to decolonize philosophy by decentering Eurocentric philosophical outlook in order for the popular, the grassroots, and the folk spirit to emerge.

Quito identified at least three schools of philosophical thought in the country which are predominantly Western. First is the Thomistic-Aristotelian school which emanated from the Dominican-owned University of Santo Tomas. According to Quito, this school of thought considers Catholic ideas of the Medieval Period as gospel truths. The second is the Logico-analytic school exemplified by the University of the Philippines which strictly adheres to the Anglo-American school of formal logicians. The third school, which “resists labeling” according to Quito frames philosophy in a new light and welcomes new philosophies with open-mindedness and benevolence. Although all three were very much influenced by Western philosophical tradition, the third philosophical school achieved a

certain degree of social relevance when it began to descend from its ivory tower and started to dialogue with contemporary socio-political problems. (pp. 38-9)

In Chapter 2 of *TSPP*, Quito tackles the “Filipino Indigenous Philosophy in Asian context,” a very important topic aligned with the decolonial project. Following the linguistic turn initiated by Mercado, Quito highlights important Filipino values such as “*Bahala na*” attitude (to leave everything to God, Divine Providence, an element of resignation), “*Gulong ng Palad*” (wheel of fortune/life which for Quito constitutes an optimistic outlook), “*pakikisama*” (smooth interpersonal relationship, to live well with others), “*bayanihan*” (a collective effort to help those in need), and “*utang na loob*” (internal debt or sacred obligation). For Quito, these Filipino attitudes and values “constitute the hidden springs of the Filipino Mind” (p. 12). Here, Quito already proposes the delinking of popular/grassroots philosophy from academic/European/Western framework—philosophy as “the corpus of adages and wise sayings which are manifest on the popular grassroots level” (p. 12).

Prior to the publication of *TSPP*, decolonial and anti-colonial themes can be deduced from the works of other prominent Filipino philosophers. For example, in 1972, Leonardo Mercado gave a lecture to the students of Ateneo de Manila entitled “*Tuta sa Isip*” where he exposed and opposed the intellectually subservient and/or colonial mindedness of Filipinos (Mercado 2005, p. 18). Hence, in order to clarify what Filipino thought is, Mercado (1974, 1976) sees the need of establishing a Filipino self-identity. Reacting to centuries of colonial rule, Mercado explains that:

Intellectual colonialism is like a process of conditioning; it induces a person to forget his own culture... But one man’s medicine can be another’s poison. What works for the West can hurt the Filipino (p. 7).

Mercado concludes by suggesting that what the Filipino needs is “a philosophy to explain and support his identity” (p. 7).

Moreover, Demeterio’s comparative analysis on the “twelve discourses of Filipino philosophy” (2014, pp. 191-218) reveals yet the colonial nature of Filipino philosophy. Sadly, these discourses are still dominated by Western/Eurocentric philosophical outlook: first, Filipino philosophy as the oral exposition of Scholasticism and Thomism; second, Filipino philosophy as the exposition of foreign systems; third, Filipino philosophy as application of Anglo-Saxon logical analysis; fourth, Filipino philosophy as the application of Continental-European phenomenology and hermeneutics; fifth, Filipino philosophy as an appropriation of foreign theories; sixth, Filipino philosophy as revisionist writing (i.e., revisionism of foreign philosophies); and seventh, Filipino philosophy as an academic and critical analysis,

an appropriation of the Enlightenment and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist political and social theory.

Of the twelve “discourses,” five are aligned with the decolonial option: first, Filipino philosophy as the interpretation of the presuppositions and implication of Filipino worldview; second, Filipino philosophy as research on Filipino ethics and values; third, Filipino philosophy as appropriation of folk spirit; fourth, Filipino philosophy as the study of Filipino philosophical luminaries; and fifth, Filipino philosophy in the Filipino language.

Decolonizing philosophy goes beyond the mere dislodging of the centrality of Eurocentric philosophy. It requires the transformation of what philosophy is from the very start: a “meta-philosophical re-drawing of its own being.” Since dominant groups have always been incapable of opening spaces and listening to minoritized groups, it is the task of philosophy to insist on privileging these marginalized and excluded epistemological and hermeneutical experiences and understanding (Díaz and Mendieta 2012, p. 3).

Renato Constantino and the Decolonial Project

This essay is an exploration on the decolonial themes found in the major works of philosophical luminary Renato Constantino. Following Demeterio (2014), the researcher believes that until now, discourses of famous Filipino luminaries are insufficiently explored (p. 215). As such, this essay is necessary for the propagation and popularization of a decolonized Filipino philosophy.

This paper argues that a significant “decolonial turn” in Filipino philosophy happened via the historical turn, that is, through the writings of prominent nationalist historians such as Teodoro Agoncillo, Renato Constantino, and Reynaldo C. Ileto. Rolando Gripaldo, in *The Making of a Filipino Philosopher* (2007, 2008), considers these prominent Filipino historians as philosophers. He traced the origin and development of Filipino philosophy from the strong influence of Enlightenment thinkers to contemporary Filipino nationalists and political theorists.

Using the “traditional approach” to Filipino philosophy, Gripaldo categorized three groups of Filipino philosophers. The first group were the Enlightenment thinkers who were the *ilustrados*, the Filipino elite during the Spanish colonial period, who were either trained and educated in European universities or exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment. Among them are Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Andres Bonifacio, and Emilio Jacinto. The second group were the American and Japanese colonial interludes, which include political figures such as Manuel L. Quezon and Jose P. Laurel. The third group, which Gripaldo calls the postcolonial thinkers, include Teodoro Agoncillo, Claro M. Recto, Jose Ma. Sison, Lorenzo

Tañada, and Renato Constantino. These Filipino postcolonial thinkers were “left-leaning nationalists who wanted the Filipinos to cut their umbilical cord from their colonial past” (2007, p. 15). The status of Constantino as an established scholar, historian, and nationalist was emphasized in numerous research. For example, Liwanag and Demeterio (2021) included Renato Constantino in their list of “Ten Most Important Filipino Philosophers.” Moreover, Gripaldo (2009) wrote an extensive analysis on Constantino’s “philosophy of nationalism.”

History and philosophy are allied disciplines. Raymun J. Festin (2021) ascertained the link between philosophy and history: “the study and nature of history as a branch of knowledge is a philosophical undertaking” (p. 1). This is because the study of history “provides us with valuable insights into algorithms of human essence and the fascinating world of Nature” by furnishing us with “that light of understanding about who we are as human beings and the nature of reality itself” (p. 2). Decoloniality via nationalist historiography was explicitly stressed by Teodoro Agoncillo:

Our history under Spain and, for that matter, under the United States, must be rewritten to give way to a new interpretation... It must be inclusive to encompass within its fold the active role played by the Filipinos in carving out their destiny. It must be exclusive in the sense that matters not pertinent to the development of our policy [sic] should be ruthlessly deleted to make the role of the Filipinos positive” (cited in Domingo 2021, p. 6).

Agoncillo wrote *History of the Filipino People* so that the student will learn to “think of himself as a free Filipino, not as a colonial” (cited in Domingo p. 6). The Jesuit historian Fr. Horacio de la Costa thinks that Filipino identity can only be understood in the light of coloniality: “we cannot even begin to understand the Philippines as a nation unless we first understand it as a colony” (cited in Domingo p. 6). Moreover, de la Costa believes that the task of the Filipino historian is to make history “Filipinocentric,” i.e., to reinterpret it from the point of view of Filipinos rather than the colonizers.

This paper will rely heavily on the decolonial themes found in Constantino’s works *The Miseducation of the Filipino* (1982), *Identity and Consciousness: The Filipino Experience* (1974), *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness* (1978), and *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (1989). In most of these works, Constantino used the terms “counter-consciousness” and “decolonization” interchangeably. The advantage of Constantino over other historians like Agoncillo, de la Costa, and Ileta lies in Constantino’s staunch defense of nationalist aspirations and liberation movements which, for me, constituted a major force in the process of decolonization. For Constantino, a nationalist consciousness must be at the heart of decoloniality.

For Constantino, historians from developing countries have the duty to “eliminate the distortions imposed by colonial scholarship” (Constantino 1980, p. 233). Constantino sees the urgency of thwarting the influence of colonial scholarship and to “rectify the myths that have been presented and accepted as reality.” The urgent task therefore is to “demythologize Philippine history” (Constantino 1978, p. 262). Colonized peoples can only be liberated from their alienated past if progressive historians (re)write history not only from the point of view of the Filipino people, but also from the Filipino masses. Rewriting history means restoring the memory of struggle against colonial oppression long buried by massive instruments of imperialist conditioning (1980, p. 233). In other words, the epistemic injustice perpetuated by our colonial masters was the outright and deliberate distortion, suppression, and falsification of historical events. This, in turn, reinforced the colonial consciousness which “has made it pathetically easy for colonizers to make the colonized believe that policies in pursuit of their own selfish designs were really for the good of the dominated people” (p. 234). The task of the historian is “to trace the roots of the physical and intellectual bondage of the Filipinos” (Constantino 1970, p. 97). One crucial step in dismantling colonial scholarship is to put forward the nationalist agenda. A nationalist ideology is an indispensable prerequisite to free their minds and act in their best interests:

A people in search of identity, in pursuit of coherent national ends and in the process of de-colonization, should be extremely careful in their re-examination and analysis of historical events... An incorrect appraisal of past event... not only adds to confusions that already impede our vision, but may also aggravate certain weaknesses of attitude that even now hamper the national spirit... Therefore, if we are serious in our attempts at de-colonization, we must unchain not only our culture and our economic and political life, but also our history (1970, p. 92).

Sadly, according to Constantino (1974), Filipino nationality is just a matter of identity and not of “consciousness of common aspirations” (p. 1). Hence, Constantino sees a gap between Filipino identity and consciousness. Decoloniality must start with counter-consciousness, i.e., consciousness of our identity and of our interests. To be a good nationalist, one must share in the goals of other peoples for a better life” (1970, p. 63). To some extent, decolonization must start with intellectualization, meaning, thinking “for and in behalf of the forces of change” (p. 148). By forces of change, Constantino has in mind two important social agents: public intellectuals and social activists. The validity of the nationalist thesis greatly depends on the structural socio-political-economic changes that will take place. Nationalism is not just a rejection of the status quo. At times, it entails a destruction of the present rotten socio-political-economic order. It must offer a constructive program, an infinitely better alternative to what is (p. 164). Herein lies the role of activists, revolutionaries, and national liberation movements. Therefore, for Constantino, there is a

dialectical relationship between epistemic critique and social critique, between intellectualization and revolutionary decolonization.

However, decolonization for Constantino does not mean a total and outright dismissal of colonial ideas. For example, he noted how the *principalias* and *ilustrados*, driven by European liberal philosophy of the 19th century, “learned to use the tools of colonial education in the articulation of thought and the formulation of demands” (1974, p. 28). Liberal ideas from European universities “provided educational opportunities which activated a new and higher level of counter-consciousness.” Following the reformist and assimilationist line, these educated elites called for better treatment and accommodation within the colonial system “to enhance their economic interests and secure their social and cultural aspirations” (p. 25). However, the elite-led and self-serving anti-colonial ideas of the *ilustrados* were inadequate and even failed to cultivate a counter-consciousness. What is needed is a leader that would resuscitate the revolutionary aspirations of the Filipino people. The revival of the revolutionary aspiration and their tradition of struggle is a necessary prerequisite to, one and for all, “destroy the framework of colonialism” (p. 15). Constantino explains the connecting thread between the Filipino people’s history of struggle and the emergence of national counter-consciousness:

The history of the Filipino people and hence the growth of their consciousness and the attainment of national awareness is primarily the history of their struggle against colonial oppression... They exhibit their own dialectical development beginning from a low level in the earliest risings and reaching a climax in the Philippine revolution of 1896 (1974, p. 12).

It was the decisive rejection of reformism in favor of the revolution waged by Andres Bonifacio and the *Katipunan* that was able to synthesize the desires of the people into fighting for the abolition of the throngs of colonialism. From the ruins of reformism emerged a more “politicized action of the people” (p. 29), which led to the development of a new and higher revolutionary consciousness, an awareness of the need to dismantle Spanish rule and to wage a revolutionary struggle on a national scale.

The collective and heightened desire for liberation from colonial subjugation eventually led to the defeat of Spanish colonial grip in the country. However, the revolutionary consciousness eventually eroded due to three interlaying circumstances: first, the abrupt interruption of the newly found freedom by US aggression; second, the legal structures imposed by US imperialism which helped cement its aggression, like the Sedition Law of 1901; and, third, the weapon of public education, or more accurately, miseducation (p. 35). The Americans set in motion the process of gradually negating the revolutionary consciousness of the Filipino people.

In the words of Constantino: “Through the alchemy of miseducation, the Americans were transformed from conquerors to solicitous friends and history was distorted to favor US imperialism (p. 41). Education became miseducation because it “de-Filipinized the youth”, taught them to regard American culture as superior to any other, and viewed American society as the model par excellence for Philippine society. Education was designed as an instrument to conform to the American viewpoint and interests (p. 39). Westernization/Americanization, or more specifically “Defilipinization,” made the Filipino “estranged from his society, isolated from his fellowmen and alienated from himself” (p. 31). Three educational policies significantly advanced the process of Americanizing the Filipino consciousness: first, the institution of a nationwide public school system; second, the use of English as a medium of instruction; and third, the distortion of the history of the early American occupation in conjunction with the glorification of the American way of life, its heroes, and institutions (p. 38). Once again, the newly emergent Filipino was transformed into colonial Filipino—Americanized through colonial miseducation.

Colonial consciousness impaired our perception and distorted our reality. What is thus needed is a counter-consciousness, a decolonial reinterpretation of social reality. It is for this reason that for Constantino, a true Filipino must be a decolonized Filipino.

Liberation Movements, Partisan Scholarship, Activists, and Decolonial Praxis

Constantino repeatedly emphasized that history should be written “on the basis of the struggles of the Filipino people” (1978, p. 267). Partisan scholarship means utilizing decolonized knowledge as a weapon against imperialism and neocolonialism. The partisan scholar believes that his work is valuable in providing the correct framework for the people’s struggle for national and social liberation (1980, p. 236). For this reason, the partisan scholar’s task is to ignite the revolutionary consciousness of the masses with the objective of defeating the onslaught of imperialism.

Historically, several factors led to a heightening of the militant consciousness of the people: first, trade unionism among peasants and the rural and industrial workers in the 1930s to 1950s; second, higher ideological levels of worker-peasant alliance and student activism in the 60s and 70s; and third, the re-establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the founding of the New People’s Army (NPA), an offshoot of the ever sharpening sociopolitical and economic contradictions of the period. All these subjective and objective factors contributed to the resurgence of militant/revolutionary counter-consciousness which was regarded as a continuation of the “unfinished revolution” of Bonifacio and the Katipunan. Hence, the evolution and development of the Filipino people’s militant counter-consciousness is a product of quantitative and qualitative advancement of revolutionary theory and praxis; a learning experience that includes failure and defeat as

well as advancement and victory, from the earliest resistance to Spanish rule to the 1898 Revolution and down to the present resistance against US imperialism:

These struggles were the schools of the masses; their quantitative change: the birth of a nation. From blind responses to foreign oppression, mass actions against the Spaniards and later the Americans underwent various transformations until they finally became a conscious struggle for national liberation. Each struggle developed in the participants a deeper and more intense comprehension of the nature of their society and of the changing forms of their struggle (1980, p. 238).

A militant consciousness adheres to the principle that political freedom is meaningless unless it is buttressed by economic freedom, for the basis of true political democracy is economic democracy (Constantino 1970, p, 14). Hence, a requisite for decolonization is the “politicization of the people.” This entails a heightened “consciousness of their right to a better life, an awareness of their power to achieve such a goal by united action” (p. 28). Without politicization, there could be no decolonization. This counter-consciousness, as Constantino calls it, necessitates a “realization of self-imprisonment, and consequently a desire to escape” (1978, p. 278). Counter-consciousness is the antidote to the thoughts and ideas that impede the proper development of society. From a decolonial perspective, these are systems of thought that guide the process of change.

For this purpose, public intellectuals must become partisan. To become an intellectual partisan means to take side with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized sectors knowing that “official history is written by the ruling class in its own image” (1978, p. 266). Partisan scholarship recognizes that “the battle against colonialism and imperialism is being waged not only in the political and economic fields but in the field of consciousness as well” (p. 266). Intellectuals play an important role in the politicization and intellectualization of the Filipino people’s national consciousness. As an organic intellectual, he/she is well-acquainted and has a clear grasp of the concrete conditions of the masses. Hence, his/her liberation “is part of the people’s struggle for freedom. He cannot be truly free and creative if the people are not free and creative. National culture is a manifestation of the nationalist struggle and is at the same time a condition for the struggle itself” (1970, p. 46). Education, mass decolonization, and mass mobilization should be framed from the perspective of sustaining and completing the “unfinished revolution” of Bonifacio and the Katipunan.

Neo-colonialism has unleashed the historical forces that gave rise to national liberation movements that will eventually destroy the old and build the new. As Constantino explains, “this is the age of the small nation; this is the epoch of national liberation

movements, of the anti-colonial revolts of peoples who can no longer stand the imposition of colonialism” (p. 60). In the opening sentence of *Veneration Without Understanding*, Constantino highlights the importance of the national revolution:

In the histories of many nations, the national revolution represents a peak of achievement to which the minds of men return time and again in reverence and for a renewal of faith in freedom. For the national revolution is invariably the one period in a nation’s history when the people were most united, most involved, and most decisively active in the fight for freedom (Constantino 1972, p. 1).

Decoloniality, or “counter-consciousness” as Constantino calls it, should not be divorced from the material conditions of society. In other words, the decolonial project must “emanate from the present consciousness” and a “response to local conditions and local needs” (1978, p. 278). For this reason, counter-consciousness must be anchored on a philosophy of liberation. By philosophy of liberation, Constantino means an ideological or theoretical lens “by which men and events are judged on the basis of whether or not they advance the cause of freedom for oppressed peoples.” A philosophy of liberation is the partisan scholar’s intellectual weapon in upholding the “the truth of people’s struggle against the ‘truth’ of imperial control” (Constantino 1980, p. 235). This is where the role of the intelligentsia comes in. But can we rely on the intelligentsia to lead in the process of decolonization?

It must be pointed out that, for Constantino, the intelligentsia is not coterminous with the elite. The democratization of education supposedly provided equal opportunities and access to free education. From this perspective, Constantino came to the realization that “the wise are not necessarily rich and the rich of today need not even be wise” (1970, p. 122). Moreover, because of the colonial orientation of education in pursuit of economic gain, the majority of the educated serve the interests of the local elite or their foreign cohorts. However, Constantino is quick to point out that from the ranks of the intelligentsia also emanate “some of the theoreticians of the nationalist movement. These intellectuals have consciously turned their backs on the material rewards offered by the elite and foreign business to cast their lot with the people” (1970, p. 122).

The intelligentsia/public intellectual is the partisan scholar whose intellectual capacity is sharpened by his experiences with the conditions, realities, and struggles of the poor. As “custodians of a future counter-consciousness,” public intellectuals/activists view society from a dialectical perspective. They see society “as a united and interrelated whole... a definite point of view, and a definite commitment to basic change. Propelled by the power of their great intellect, unhampered by personal motivations and ambitions, such men have already freed themselves to some extent from intellectual captivity... At the same time their

relative freedom unleashes a creativity capable of evolving new forms of social action and projecting new types of social structures” (p. 1974, p. 149). For this reason, the public intellectual is also an activist, who is an ardent advocate and active participant in the national liberation movement. He/she is able to bridge theory and praxis in the service of national liberation. He is a true Filipino who is consciously striving for decolonization and genuine freedom, democracy, and independence.

Conclusion

The quest for a meaningful, authentic, and truly relevant decolonized Filipino philosophy, started by Dr. Emerita Quito four decades ago, continues to this very day. More than ever, we need philosophical discourses that are firmly grounded on social reality and the day-to-day experience of the people; a Filipino philosophy that truly responds to the challenges and issues of society. A decolonized Filipino philosophy must satisfy our longing for a philosophical discourse that could effectively bridge the gap between “the theoretical” and “the practical”; “the academic” and “the grassroots.”

Framed from a decolonial lens, Renato Constantino’s philosophy of nationalism is a weapon, a tool, and a potent force against neocolonial subjugation toward the attainment of national and social liberation. His decolonial theory is anchored from the wider context of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, thus making it a true Filipino philosophy whose message and vision resonates to the longing of the masses to be emancipated from neocolonial subjugation.

Renato Constantino’s philosophy of nationalism, first and foremost, addresses the question, *why* is there a need to decolonize philosophy? For Constantino, a decolonized philosophy has threefold functions. First, it is an antidote to the epistemic injustice done to us colonized people; it is a counternarrative to the Eurocentric hegemony of one-world ontology. Second, it serves as a philosophical paradigm to strengthen our appreciation of indigenous wisdom. Decoloniality paves the way for a pluriverse of knowledge and belief systems, and reconfigures our historical narrative toward a recognition of our ancestors. And lastly, as Constantino shows us, a decolonized philosophy is praxis-oriented; one that emanates from the ranks of the oppressed and marginalized sectors of society. A decolonial counter-consciousness should propel the Filipino people to rewrite their history from their point of view, i.e., the masses—the real agents and makers of history.

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