trapping identities

filipinization and the problems of a nationalist historiography

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Abstract

The claim about Europe's and the West's spiritual indefensibility puts forth a critique of the western colonial project as informed by a subtle duplicity anchored on the employment of a techno-scientific and economic-capitalist rationality working under the illusion of a God-given *mission civilisatrice*. To combat this ideology, present postcolonial discourses, notably in Asia, tend to create a rupture within this linear view of global politics and history by employing discursive strategies of decentralization and destabilization from the perspective of an identity-politics by the marginalized colonial "other."

Within the Philippine context, I claim that this obsessive-compulsive tendency to look for collective identities as basis for anti-colonial struggle is itself contained within that inescapable cycle of colonial violence and oppression. Using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of *epistemic violence*, I argue that the insistence on the privilege of a discovered, achieved, or constructed Filipino identity by nationalist discourses, be it from the *Ilustrado* elite or the hastily generalized and abstract Filipino masses, render them susceptible to becoming subtle—though unwitting—arms of the colonial machinery itself. To insist on a certain *Filipino* identity as an ideal of *who or what a Filipino is* or *Filipino-ness* is to be implicated within discursive complicity, i.e., a process that implicates the anti-colonial struggle within the homogenizing "identity-trap" laid down by the colonial processes themselves and simulates the struggle for a Philippine nationalist liberation as a worse—because more subtle—form of colonial hegemony. I illustrate my claim by describing how historical injustice is propagated and perpetuated through the distorted interpretations of historical data by nationalist historiographies that only solidify the horrible heritage of the Philippine colonial experience.

Keywords
Gayatri Spivak, deconstruction, subaltern, nationalism, nationalist historiography

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I am much more interested in questions of space, because identity and voice are such powerful concept-metaphors, that after a while you begin to believe that you are what you are fighting for.[1]

The Western Colonial Legacy

When the Martinique poet and politician Aimé Césaire proclaimed about Europe's and the West's spiritual indefensibility,[2] he laid down the groundwork for a critical examination of the founding assumptions of western colonialism. His critique revealed the perpetuation of the western colonial project as informed by the hegemony of a techno-scientific and economic capitalist rationality which was justified, at the same time, by a God-given *mission civilisatrice*. In this critique, the insight into the subtle duplicity that characterize the essence of all colonial enterprise forces one to a confrontation with the ideologies that shaped our linear view of global politics and history. Present postcolonial discourses, notably in Asia, tend to address this colonial duplicity with the imperative to de-centralize and to de-stabilize the central structures of colonial violence and oppression. In the Philippines in particular, a considerable number of nationalist-postcolonial discourses have been put forth in the attempt to understand the enduring legacies of the colonial experience that pervaded the whole of traditional Philippine history. Coupled with the historical exposition of the workings of the colonial machinery, these nationalist discourses consciously revealed themselves as anti-colonial struggles that aim at the decolonization of the Philippines from its bondage to western, specifically, Spanish and American imperialism.

Looking at the present Philippine context, however, the struggle against colonial oppression is characterized by a crisis of referents. On the one hand, there is the dominant *ilustrado* discourse that draws its argumentative force from its privilege place within traditional Philippine historiography as leaders of the revolution and progenitors of the modern Filipino nation.[3] On the other hand, there is also the patrimonial claim by

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[1] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Bonding In Difference: Interview with Alfred Arteaga" in *The Spivak Reader*, edited by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 21.

[2] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 1.

[3] See for instance John Schumacher, *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997).

those from "below"—i.e., those classes found at the lowest level of the colonial strata—the oppressed and marginalized poor, as the true heirs of the revolution and the nation.[4] Both of these claims articulate their search for justice by utilizing their respective politics of representation and differing, often conflicting, constructions of *who or what the Filipino is*.

In this paper, I claim that this obsessive-compulsive tendency to look for collective identities as basis for anti-colonial struggle is itself a problematic recreation of the discursive ground that fundamentally repeats the inescapable cycle of colonial violence and oppression. Using the Indian philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of *epistemic violence*, I argue that the insistence on the privilege of a discovered, achieved, or constructed Filipino identity by nationalist discourses, be it from the *ilustrado* elite or the hastily generalized and abstract Filipino masses, render them susceptible to becoming subtle—though unwitting—arms of the colonial machinery itself. To insist on a certain *Filipino* identity as an ideal of *who or what a Filipino is or should be* is to be implicated within discursive complicity, i.e., a process that implicates the anti-colonial struggle within the homogenizing "identity-trap" laid down by the colonial processes themselves and simulates the struggle for a Philippine nationalist liberation as a worse—because more subtle—form of colonial hegemony. I intend to illustrate my claim by describing how historical injustice is propagated and perpetuated through the distorted interpretations of historical data by nationalist historiographies that only solidify the horrible heritage of the Philippine colonial experience.

This paper will thus proceed in four parts: first, the formal elaboration of Spivak's notion of *epistemic violence*; second, an illustration of how this framework can be utilized in understanding what is meant by "Filipino identity" as an "ideological fetish" that simulates an *identity-trap* into which all consequent anti-colonial enterprise can be commenced; third, the exposition of the dangers contained in the process of identity-construction which we call *Filipinization* and lastly, an assessment of the problems connected with the production of a Filipino nationalist historiography.

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[4] This view was radically held by some prominent nationalist historians such as Renato Constantino (see for instance his *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness: Essays on Cultural Decolonisation* (London: Merlin Press, 1978); and more forcefully by Reynaldo Ileto in his *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979).

Spivak on Epistemic Violence

In her landmark essay that radicalized the questioning of the famous *Subaltern Studies* group, Spivak asks "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this piece, she explored both the possibility and impossibility of the marginalized colonial other's self-representation within the enduring legacy of western colonialism. Taking her cue from Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze—two activist philosophers of history—the western intellectual project of understanding the "Other" as the object of its knowledge is an attempt to overhaul the established narratives of history in order to retrieve those subjugated or "naïve" knowledges (or *episteme*) that did not meet "the required level of cognition or scientificity."[5] The liberalist agenda behind this gesture is to emancipate a space within which the marginalized colonial subject, or the "subaltern" as Spivak (following Antonio Gramsci)[6] terms it, can articulate their own "class interests."[7] This is where and when the subaltern, i.e., the "oppressed subjects [can] speak, act and know *for themselves*."[8]

But this persistent desire to let the other speak must be met with skepticism. The West,[9] as the self-legitimating producer of knowledge about the East, has always

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[5] Michel Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon), 82. The quotation is taken from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313; 281; also in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Cahoone (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 319-341. According to Foucault, subjugated knowledges refer to: (1) "historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations . . . but . . . critique was able to reveal their existence by using, obviously enough, the tools of scholarship;" and (2) "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity." (Michel Foucault, "Lecture on 7 January 1976," in *"Society Must be Defended:" Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana [New York: Picador, 1997], 8).

[6] See Antonio Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," in *Selections from Political Writing: 1921-1926*, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: International Publishers, 1978).

[7] In this context, the idea of "class interests" must be understood within the context of the worker's struggle against bourgeois capitalism. Within a social class, "interest" is not something instinctive or natural; identified with economic agency, it is rather artificial and impersonal (see Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 276).

[8] Ibid.

[9] The idea of the "West" in Subaltern Studies is identified with "Europe." Gyan Prakash explains that the West "refers to an imaginary though powerful entity created by a historical

understood the colonized subject[10] as its specific "Other," i.e., the "Other as the Self's shadow."[11] For Spivak, the palimpsestic narrative of western imperialism necessarily captures within its own episteme *any* form of knowledge that is presented to be its "Other." This means that any cultural or intellectual production by the West with regard to its object—i.e., the colonial subaltern—must necessarily be incriminated within the ideological hegemony of colonialism. The retrieval of subjugated or naïve forms of knowledge is itself part of that colonial machinery that gobbles everything up within itself making these discourses complicit with the privileging of the historical narrative of West as the "best version of history" and consequently, as the "normative one."[12] This search for naïve knowledges and the pure, original subject of colonial subaltern agency, constitutes a "nostalgia for lost origins"[13] that clandestinely restores the "subjective essentialism"[14] of a "utopian politics"[15] ultimately utilized—unwittingly—for the consolidation and justification of the western colonial enterprise. This way, the constitution of the colonial subject becomes the defining moment of the assimilation of the Other within European ethnocentrism.[16] Within this Eurocentrism, the production of knowledge or *episteme* about its Other can only be complicit with the hegemonic structures of the West as the Subject of desire, power and knowledge. Here, it is imperative to treat with caution the task of the *absent* western (first-world) intellectual "who lets the oppressed speak for themselves."[17] The erasure and the assimilation of the colonial Other as a mere moment of the West, whether in *jouissance*, *eros*, or in the search for justice,[18] within the "narratives of

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process that authorized it as the home of Reason, Progress, and Modernity" ("Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 [December 1994], 1475-1490; 1485).

[10] I understand the term "colonized (or colonial) subject" here as opposed to the abstract and idealized subject of the consciousness underlying class struggles. See Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 239. Taken from Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 70-1.

[11] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 280.

[12] Ibid., 281.

[13] Ibid., 291.

[14] Ibid., 279.

[15] Ibid., 276.

[16] See ibid., 293-4.

[17] Ibid., 292.

[18] The idea that the Other is subsumed by the Self in knowledge, in the discourse provided by the West as sovereign subject and power, may trace its roots in the ethical discourse given in Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 143ff. The problematization of western episteme as violent commenced, inarguably, in the Levinasian project. This line of influence is

codification" sanctioned by the law and by the academic production of knowledge legitimated by authoritative scholars[19] results to that irreducible "cognitive failure"[20] that instantiates the problem of why the subaltern *cannot speak*. To deny this cognitive failure and to insist on the privilege of the West's historical discourse as the normative one is to be precisely captured within the vicious cycle of epistemic violence.

Succinctly, then, epistemic violence is the Janus-faced violence that necessarily results from the West's production of knowledge about the colonial subject—subaltern. It is, on one hand, the result of an ideological production that creates a *false*—because cognitively deficient—class representation of the subaltern's desire and interests.[21] The

important to underline since it enables us to understand better the concept of epistemic violence. Spivak undoubtedly follows Derrida and his deconstruction on this account and it is no secret how deconstruction has always been concerned about the "other" in the Levinasian sense. See for instance Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and the Other" in *Dialogue with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 118.

[19] See Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 281-2.

[20] "Cognitive failure" results from the inability of the established normative historical discourses to arrive at a specific political class-consciousness of those who are considered marginalized, insurgent, peasant, nationalist, etc. due to these discourses being captured within elite historiography (see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *The Spivak Reader*, 203-236; 199-200; also in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988]). In simpler words, cognitive failure is the failure of the western emancipatory discourses to articulate a consciousness which really speaks the point of view of the subaltern, or alternatively, to let them be heard in their own language within which they should be heard.

The ultimate epistemic consequence of this position is the impossibility of the subaltern's being able to speak (and thus of being heard) either because she is inescapably caught within the language of the foreign colonizer (West) which prevents her from articulating her desires from an "imagined" originary subaltern standpoint; or because she is trapped using her own native, subaltern language which the colonizer cannot understand. Here, the dangerous role of translation as the medium of colonial transaction reveals itself in the slippages, and therefore lapses, of power and violence that resonate within the fissures of Spanish colonial rule. While the exercise of colonial power and domination was principally accomplished through translation of the native cultural life-world into the language of the Spanish colonizers, the same process of translation outlined the effective limits of colonial power. As Vicente Rafael seems to suggest, the limits of translation itself ironically create the spaces for resistance and transgression against Spanish colonial rule (see his *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* [Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988]).

[21] The employment of the category "false" must not be understood in opposition to what is historically "true" but to that carefully constructed episteme that creates the illusion of

privileging of a particular conception of *who or what the subaltern Other is* necessarily opens up the space for the establishment of a dominant position by those privileged enough to gain access to such carefully-constructed episteme. Once this knowledge has been secured and entrenched through the privileged class (elite bourgeoisie/enlightened nationalist), it becomes the center from which the production of other forms of knowledge (proletariat/subaltern) must be referred. Any form of knowledge not anchored on the structural priority of the colonial narrative must, perforce, be relegated to a secondary and derived status. As a necessary result, they become socially excluded from those considered privileged possessors of knowledge. These social exclusions constitute precisely the epistemic violence resulting from Western ideological production.

On the other side, the more debilitating effect of the West's discursive hegemony is the "silent programming function"[22] it exercises over the recipients of colonial discourse and the direct objects of the imperial narrative. By necessity, the West's structural imposition of a privileged subaltern identity imposes a subtle normativity which inscribes the colonial subject within the palimpsestic scheme of exploitation already mapped out by the restrictions of a consciousness operating in terms of an inside/outside distinction.[23] Within this process of subaltern knowledge-identity production, it becomes possible for the colonial subject to conflate its own desires and interests with the abstract class interests of the subaltern identity patterned after the West's ostensibly anti-colonial discourse. This conflation results to an abstraction that *idealizes* the marginalized colonial subject into the West's construction of what subaltern identity is. This identification of the colonial subject with the idealized subject of anti-colonial struggle is a re-inscription that violently transforms the colonial subject into a solidified, homogenous, subaltern identity that can be mechanically subjected to economic and socio-political manipulation by the subject-less processes of history. When the project of colonial emancipation takes this knowledge-identity production as the indispensable starting point for the anti-colonial struggle, its falls prey to its own self-illusion of salvation from the evils of western colonialism. Strangely, what we see in the western intellectual's emancipatory project of letting the subaltern speak is a valorization of an idealized class subject wherein the

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sacrosanct origins when in fact, genealogically, there is none. The radicality of a deconstructive critique in its genealogical force here shows that the search for origins, in this case for an originary (subaltern) consciousness, yields an origin that is not really originary, but one that has always already been founded on the "arms" of the colonial powers. In other words, the search for an origin reveals that there is, ultimately, no origin except that origin that has already been controlled and dissimulated by power and tradition (See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977], 140-164).

[22] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 282.

[23] See ibid., 282-3.

diverse colonial populations—regardless of differences in race, economics, gender, etc.—can be homogenized into the hegemony of a content-less class identity. This conceptual homogenization into a "subaltern identity" is an ideologization[24] that constitutes the inclusionary instance of the epistemic violence consequent to theoretical production.

Trapped Identities

The politics of social exclusion/inclusion occasioned by the West's production of subaltern identity illustrates the epistemic violence that is necessarily connected with the production of knowledge-as-ideology. When the abstract class identity is taken as a unitary and absolute subject capable of representing concrete desires and interests,[25] such identity is "ideologized" by being elevated into an independent object-of-thought that has acquired its own intrinsic value. This ideologized identity, however, is essentially devoid of any material content or history. In order to acquire content and to realize its intrinsic value as the radial fulcrum from which all anti-colonial struggles must be commenced, this ideologization must become a space where the conduct of social and political relations are mediated and transformed into material instantiations of an otherwise empty subaltern identity. Within the context of the socio-political struggle of the nation-state, such ideologization is able to unify desire and its object within the empty, abstracted subject—subaltern identity while, at the same time, alienating the concrete subject from desire. When desire is separated from its concrete subject, or conversely, the subject lacks or is without desire, there is the danger of power slipping in order to shape desire and its

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[24] We understand "ideologization" within the context of the masking or mystifying process that establishes a particular idea as the "truth" which a specific class must believe in order to construct a "naturalized" identity. The naturalization of what is artificial in terms of class consciousness has always been a subject of intense debates between Marxist theoreticians (see ibid., 276).

[25] Here, it is important to note the distinction between two senses of the word "representation." Following Marx, Spivak notes that there is a difference between "representation as "speaking for," as in politics, [*vertreten*] and "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy" [*darstellen*] (ibid., 275). A problem occurs when these two senses are conflated together leading to the baleful situation where we think that the oppressed subjects can already "speak, act and know *for* themselves" (ibid., 276) when, in *praxis*, political *vertreten* concerns itself (only) with the economic interests of its own [bourgeois] class and fails to authentically "re-present" [*darstellen*], or embody, the concrete material (economic) interests of the oppressed. This complicity between *Vertreten* and *Darstellen* is what Marxists must precisely expose (see ibid., 277).

effects.[26] Away from the powers of the sovereign subject, ideologization results to a mystification that subtly masks the violent effects of a *subjectless*—yet totalizing—power and *captivates* the colonial subjects into the emancipatory potential promised by a subaltern identity. When this identification with subaltern identity becomes constituted as a product of the colonial subject's deeply constituted desires, ideologization transforms itself into *fetishization*.[27] This way, subaltern identity reveals itself as a *fetishized identity*[28] whose mystical power resides in the promise of salvation[29] it offers from the horrible violence of the colonial experience.

Such fetishized identity implies that the western conception of subalternity is always already involved within the economy of religious motives whose mystical force endows itself with a quasi-numinous[30] character that subtly attracts and compels the marginalized colonial subjects into the fetishism of idea-worship. Once the desires and interests of the marginalized are given the illusion of representation through the subaltern class, the fetishized identity acquires that "religious" character necessary to solidify it into a divinely-ordained, native or naturalized essence, i.e., as an object or commodity to be

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[26] See Spivak's invocation of Deleuze's revision of the psychoanalytic notion of desire: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is lacking in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject except by repression" (in ibid., 273). The passage is from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 26.

[27] Jacques Derrida intimates fetishization as 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: The State of the Debt*, *the Work of Mourning*, *and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 147-155.

[28] Our argument is hinged on Karl Marx's idea that fetishism "attaches itself to the products of labor. . . ." (Karl Marx, *Capital* [London, Penguin Classics, 1990], 165). Evidently, in this case though, the product is not physical but intellectual.

[29] The supposed connection between religious consciousness and oppression has, inarguably, Karl Marx's imprint to it. In this decidedly Marxist situation, one related point to help us understand the concept is through Jean Baudrillard's elucidation of the illusory salvific function of the "fetish" in relation to the general structure of alienation that we find in the modern-day "world of signs." See his *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 8.

[30] This approximation of quasi-numinous character employs Rudolf Otto's description of the Numinous as the religious object, the *mysterium tremendum* that attracts us to itself but repels us at the same time. See Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, revised edition, trans. John Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 12-41.

worshipped. Such "theologizing fetishization"[31] creates an *identity-trap* within which the marginalized colonial subject becomes captured by the hegemony of dogmatically historicized class conceptions. Once desires, interests, and struggles are concentrated within the solidified notion of (a subaltern) class, these same desires and interests become effectively *alienated* from concrete human subjects. The epistemic violence of sweeping the marginalized colonial population into a fetishized subaltern identity ultimately leads to their alienation[32] from the *possibility* of articulating their authentic material desires and interests. Entrenched in the hallucinatory effects of the promise of colonial emancipation, the marginalized colonial subject's persistence on its continued subalternity is to insist on its continued inscription within the hegemony of ideological fetishization. Simply put, when the colonial subject insists on the valorization of a subaltern class-consciousness, it constitutes an unwitting acquiescence to the epistemic violence produced by neo-colonial discourse. Nowhere is this complicity more subtly elucidated than in the acceptance by authoritative scholars of the western intellectual project of "letting the subaltern speak" and its complete triumph in the codification of the colonial subject by turning it into an object of academic study within the inescapable Orientalism[33] of those established institutes of "Asian" or "Philippine Studies." By a sleight of word, such transformation effects the destruction of the "vanquished culture" by turning "it into an object of academic study, with its own university chair."[34]

Thus far, we see that the emancipatory project by the marginalized colonial subject through the production of class identity is radically compromised from its inception. Through epistemic violence, we are able to see how the production of knowledge about the West's colonial Other, whether on the part of the western intellectual or that of the colonial subject *trapped* as the subaltern, inevitably remains within the hegemonic structures of western colonial discourse. By instituting a center from which a subaltern consciousness *can speak*, the production of knowledge becomes

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[31] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 42.

[32] See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language House, 1951), 51.

[33] It is evident here how Orientalism in the sense of that "high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism" is itself an instance of that epistemic violence that results from the complicit authority of those cultural workers—"poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators"—who decide what is authentically "Orient" from what is "Occidental" (see Edward Said, *Orientalism* [New York: Random House, 1979], 2-3). Said's third definition squares perfectly as an exact example of epistemic violence: "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (ibid., 3).

[34] We take the form of this argument from Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71.

complicit or contaminated, as it were, by the same exclusionary and inclusionary violence that characterize the dominant colonial discourse. Within the historical and social text, this becomes an attempt to substitute one set of signifiers in place of another—a manifest *translation* of the violence necessarily connected with the possession of knowledge-identity from one text/context to another.

Filipinization

Situating our study thus, we can aver that the historical production of a Filipino identity is, by necessity, a positivistic project—it is a search for a firm, essential ground upon which all disclosures must be based.[35] The emergence of a Filipino identity, which I arbitrarily term as *filipinization*, is a process of transforming the recipients of Spanish imperialism and colonialism[36] into a homogenous class concept based on a certain ideal of *Filipino-ness* or *who or what a Filipino is or should be*. Such homogenizing process constitutes a sweeping generalization of all inhabitants of the Philippine Islands into an abstracted, fetishized essence based only on one common material condition, i.e., geographic location. On the level of theoretical production, however, such homogenization reveals to us the primacy of a political signification that has nothing to do with concrete conditions of human existence. The concept of Filipino identity, as guiding principle for filipinization, is fundamentally operative as a political signifier that is able to cut through ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences only by privileging a carefully conceived ideal that should serve to underlie its anti-colonial struggle against western (Spanish) colonialism. Such valorization of the Filipino as a "class concept" prior and fundamental for any project of social and political liberation presents itself, however, as an example of a western intellectual production complicit with the colonial society's ideological hegemony. Such complicity happens when the social struggles undertaken as political responses to colonial oppression form themselves out of—and pass through—an economy of liberal interests and the influence of religious motives. When these socio-

[35] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 212.

[36] We provisionally understand imperialism in this context as "the globalization of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or no-capitalist forms of social organization" (Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), "Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, [New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993], 2). Colonialism, on the other hand, may be understood here as "the conquest and direct control of other people's land" (ibid.). Imperialism represents a more comprehensive phenomenon that integrates capitalist hegemony with territorial expansion and ideological production (see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch [Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997], 21-2).

political struggles crystallize through concrete political actions, they become assumed into the economy of violence necessarily present at the institution of any socio-political authority. In this vein, the tendency to look for that "native" and "essential Filipino identity" that has to be uncovered behind the massive distortions of colonial history constitutes a "nostalgia for lost origins"[37] that eventually proves disastrous for any anti-colonial enterprise. When this sentimental search becomes an obsessive-compulsive condition for all emancipatory agenda within western colonial discourse, they ultimately fall into that practical violence implicit within any "essentialist, utopian politics."[38]

Nationalist Discourses in Burgos and Rizal

In order to illustrate the epistemic violence latent within the discourse of filipinization, I will offer an interlaced reading of two texts: the *Manifiesto* by the nationalist secular priest, Fr. Jose Burgos and Jose Rizal's Annotations to Dr. Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*.[39]

1) Padre José Burgos' *Manifiesto*

Burgos's nationalist discourse was primarily underlined by the desire of the native secular clergy (to which he belongs) to attain equal status with the peninsular clergy, both secular and religious, for purposes of ecclesiastical administration. As it is concerned with the political and economic administration of the Philippine parishes against the colonial bureaucracy of the religious friars, it was essentially devoid of the nationalist, whether assimilatory or separatist, agenda contained in the writings of the *ilustrados* such as Marcelo H. del Pilar and Jose Rizal and the Tagalog revolutionaries like Andres Bonifacio, Emilio Jacinto and Apolinario Mabini. What is insightful in the text of Padre Burgos however, is the conception of *what a Filipino is* provided therein and the nationalist interpretation he gives to history. In his *Manifiesto*, Burgos conceives of the "Filipino" as a distinct social class into which the native secular priests can be included insofar as they share the following qualifications: 1) deep loyalty to the Spanish Nation and to the Catholic Church, 2) excellent learning due to the Spanish system of education,[40] 3) ability to speak

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[37] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 287.

[38] Ibid., 276.

[39] José Rizal, *Events in the Philippine Islands by Dr. Antonio de Morga* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 2011). Originally published as *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas por el Doctor Antonio de Morga* (Parîs: Garnier, 1890).

[40] One of the purposes of the Manifiesto was to exalt the quality of the native secular clergy in terms of their high intelligence, zeal, integrity and many other virtues necessary for the execution of their Church duties (see for instance José Apolonio Burgos, "To the Nation,"

well the Spanish language,[41] and ultimately, 4) in their being "Spaniards by conviction and by sentiments."[42] In terms of racial stock however, such specific definition of *what a Filipino is* hardly constitutes a simple, homogenous class. Already set apart from its original creole-referent, the term "Filipino" in Burgos's discourse has effectively included within its class not only the creoles, or those Spaniards born in the Philippines, but also both Spanish and Chinese mestizos, and the upper-class indios that constitute the principalia. There is then a specific political agenda behind such identity-appropriation: it was meant to extend the parochial rights enjoyed by the religious friars and the peninsular clergy to be enjoyed also by the native clergy [*clerigos naturales*] of which Burgos himself was a leading representative. Within this gesture, we can glimpse the emergence of the economic[43] as the sub-text that reveals the fundamental motivation for Burgos proto-

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trans. by John Schumacher in *Philippine Studies* 54, no. 2 [2006]: 168-209; 187. This article was a translation of the original 1864 document that appeared in *La America*, VIII, 17 (12 Sept. 1864):11-3. Fr. Schumacher has previously published the 1888 version of this article under the title "Manifesto which the Loyal Filipinos address to the Noble Spanish Nation in Defense of their Honor and Loyalty gravely wounded by the Newspaper *La Verdad* of Madrid" in his *Father José Burgos: A Documentary History* [Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1999], 56-105).

The native clergy's capacity for learning in turn was supplemented by the effort of the Spanish colonial government to educate the local population. This implies, at the least, that the education of the natives should not be attributed to the religious orders as the friars would claim it. No instance in the document, however, was given to justify the extent to which the Spanish government had carried out the task of education (see ibid., 193, 195).

[41] The ability to speak the Castilian language was one defining feature of the educated class. Education during the Spanish colonial period was largely carried out in Castilian Spanish, which technically served as the *lingua franca* of the Spanish colonial Philippines, and only those who can speak the language can really be called educated. The native clergy, especially those mentioned for their excellence in virtue and knowledge in the document, has shown exceptional ability to learn (and thus speak Castilian) and for this reason can only rightly claim the status of being a Filipino.

For an extended discussion of the issue of the Spanish language in colonial Philippines see Albina Peczon Fernandez, "The Politics of Language and the Language of Politics: A Preliminary Study of the Spanish Language in Colonial Philippines," in *Imperios y Naciones en el Pacifico* Volume II, eds. Ma. Dolores Elizalde et al. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2001), 219-234.

[42] Burgos, "To the Nation," 197.

[43] Burgos was straight and clear about the main issue under consideration which was about the division of parishes and the unfair allocation of those rich parishes to the regular clergy that have previously been under the secular native clergy (see "Letter of Secular Clergy to Regent of Spain," in *Father José Burgos: A Documentary History*, 215-237). The issues of

nationalist agenda.[44] Since Padre Burgos and the other Filipinos (referring to secular priests) are loyal subjects of Spain and thus "Spanish too," they must also partake in the economic privileges accompanying the possession of such socio-political identity.

In effect, the consolidation of various social, cultural, political, economic, linguistic and geographic factors in the concept of a generalized "Filipino class" lead to its creation as a social and political status. Those social groups, like the Moros and other mountain tribes like the Tinguians, Kalinga, Zambals, etc., which do not possess the required criteria must, then, eventually be excluded from the Filipino class. In this vein, the homogenizing politics of social inclusion must, perforce, also be a language of exclusion. And this process of inclusion/exclusion squares exactly as an illustration of that epistemic violence that results from ideological production and the fetishizing trap that it creates. Since the struggles of Padre Burgos and his fellow secular priests are now identified with a definite social class against a common friar enemy, it now becomes impossible to separate their imagined collective identity from what they are fighting for.[45] Here, what we see in Padre Burgos's filipinization project is a *naturalizing* process that solidifies the relation between collective desire and its object (i.e., freedom from marginalization) apart from individual agents as concrete subjects of oppression. When the struggle for emancipation from concrete oppression becomes nationalized, the singular, unique, and irreducible character of concrete material suffering becomes lost in the abstract fetishism of discourse. Within filipinization, this happens when the privileged possession (or inclusion) of a Filipino identity becomes the only acceptable starting point for any anti-colonial struggle. When such Filipino identity becomes the absolute ideal which must guide the project of colonial emancipation, this results to the idea-worship of Filipino identity as a kind of fetish.[46]

The idea-worship of Filipino as a fetishized identity is what constitutes the identity-trap in which Filipino nationalist discourses inevitably find themselves. Driven by the desire

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compensation about parishes that are given from the secular clergy to the regulars was a clear indication of how the economic aspect of the colonial Catholic Church proved to be the central factor in creating the divisions within the Catholic clergy and hierarchy themselves.

[44] If one will peruse the many letters of Padre Burgos (see for instance, "Letters of Father Burgos to the Madrid Newspaper, *La Discusión*, Against the Regular Clergy," in *Father José Burgos: A Documentary History*, 131-144), one will surely arrive at the conclusion that he never had dreams of revolution against Spain nor any of those anachronistic interpretations that nationalist historians gave to his works. Burgos had always been consistent in his profession of loyalty to Spain that even up to the point of death, in text, he can only proclaim innocence and despairingly sigh over the injustice done to him.

[45] For a theoretical elucidation of this point see Spivak, "Bonding in Difference," 1.

[46] A similar argument which clarifies the role of the fetish in the conduct of revolutionary struggles can be found in James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

for justice against concrete colonial oppression, these nationalist discourses have a special predilection for cultivating Filipino identity as the necessary and inescapable ground for any anti-colonial enterprise. Any emancipatory project that does not take the nationalist baggage must ultimately be relegated into a secondary, if not entirely irrelevant, status. As a fetish, the Filipino identity, whether construed as a native, authentic essence to be retrieved from the past or a set of ideals to be achieved in the future, reveals itself as a magnetic-mythical force that draws all concrete struggles unto itself as their ideal/ideologized culmination. As such, it is capable of empowering the concrete native recipients of colonial hegemony with a psycho-mythical force directed towards the eradication of the sources of colonial oppression. In these struggles, the subject's identification with her cause or the nationalist ideal which she is fighting for takes the form of a complete intoxication with the fetishized identity which demands nothing less than the complete sacrifice of the individual's life in revolutionary death. Such ideological obfuscations are undeniably seen in those "blood nationalisms of the native soil [that] not only sow hatred, not only commit crimes, [but also] have no future. . . ."[47] It is no wonder, then, how supposedly cultural nationalisms,[48] such as filipinization, eventually end up becoming worse translations of the violence they are supposed to eradicate. In the filipinization context, in fact, nowhere is this thirst for blood, sacrifice and death more exemplified than in the last lines of the Philippine national anthem (*Lupang Hinirang*): "*ang mamatay ng dahil sayo* [to die because of you]."[49]

2) José Rizal's *Annotations* of Morga's *Sucesos*

If the proto-nationalism of Padre Burgos was the historical starting point for the subsequent conduct of Filipino *ilustrado* nationalism, as Fr. John Schumacher, the most eminent social historian today, has claimed,[50] it is interesting to see how this Filipino identity as a fetishized essence has been valorized in the nativist discourse propagated as

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[47] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 169.

[48] Cultural nationalism refers to the kind of nationalism based on the putative criteria of "common heritage and language, a distinct area of settlement, religion, customs and history, and does not need to be mediated by a national state or other political form" (Peter Alter, *Nationalism*, trans. Stuart Mckinnon-Evans [London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1989], 18). Political nationalisms, by contrast, are those mediated through the state or those in which the state plays an essential part.

[49] For an insightful elaboration of the centrality of death within the technics of Filipino nationalism, see chapter seven 'Freedom = Death" and the Afterword "Ghostly Voices" of Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2006), 159-190.

[50] See Schumacher, "Historical Introduction" in *Father José Burgos: A Documentary History*, 1. Also, Schumacher, "The Burgos Manifiesto," footnote no. 44, 196-7.

starting point for José Rizal's nationalism.[51] At this juncture, while I provisionally leave unquestioned the generalized opinion that his *Noli Me Tangere* was to be considered as a "charter on nationalism,"[52] I will only be focusing on his *Annotations* on de Morga's *Sucesos* for the reason that Rizal considered it as his main scholarly work on Philippine historiography[53] as opposed to the fictive character of his *Noli* and *El Filibusterismo*.[54]

Accordingly, Rizal's discursive starting point was the hypothesis that the Filipinos (loosely understood here as an imagined collective opposed to what is Spanish)[55] originally possess an "ancient civilization" prior to the advent of the Spanish colonizers within a pristine past free from the destructive effects of colonial power. This primordialist-nativist[56] stance which insists on "the necessity of making known the past in order . . . to

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[51] See Jose Rizal, *Epistolario Rizalino* Vol. 2 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1930-8,) 166. Rizal opines that without the influence of the "Event of 1872" when Padre Burgos was hanged, there would have been no Propaganda Movement and he would have been a Jesuit.

[52] See the examination of this nationalist thesis in Benedict Anderson, *Why Counting Counts: A Study of Forms of Consciousness in* Noli Me Tangere *and* El Filibusterismo (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press), where he claims that a "fully political *nacionalismo* is still absent" in the *Noli* (37). For his part, Florentino Hornedo claims that the *Noli's* thesis "is weak for lack of clearer articulation of ideology." See his "Notes on the Filipino Novel in Spanish," in *Ideas and Ideals: Essays in Filipino Cognitive History* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 2001), 118.

[53] In a polemic against Isabelo de los Reyes on the subject of Philippine historiography, Rizal considers his work on Morga as an objective, scholarly work free as much as possible from bias (see José Rizal, "A Reply to Don Isabelo de los Reyes," in *La Solidaridad*, Year II, No. 42 [October 31, 1890], 505-507). La Solidaridad will henceforth be cited as LS.

[54] See Horacio de la Costa's judgment in his book review of Cesar Adib Majul's *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines, 1957) about the historical truth on the relations between the religious friars and the "inarticulate mass" of people that Majul contrasts with the "*ilustrados*" (the educated ones that did not necessarily identify themselves as "Filipinos"). (Horacio de la Costa, "The Philippine Revolution: The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution," *Philippine Studies* 6, no. 4 [1958]: 466-470; 469.)

[55] Rizal had different and conflicting descriptions of what the Filipino is. His standard description however of *who or what the Filipino is* was given as a hodgepodge: ". . . of Spanish descent, Chinese mestizos, and Malayans; [but] we call ourselves solely Filipinos" (Jóse Rizal, "" to Ferdinand Blumentritt" dated Berlin 13 April 1887 in *Epistolario Rizalino* 5 [Manila: 1938], 110-13; 111; also in *The Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence* [Manila: Jóse Rizal National Centennial Commission, 1961], 72).

[56] Nativism refers to "the belief in an authentic ethnic identity . . . or the desire to return, after the catastrophe of colonialism, to an unsullied indigenous cultural tradition. . . ."

judge better the present,"[57] however, runs counter to Padre Burgos' construction of the Filipino in terms of a negotiated pro-Hispanic and Catholic class identity. Whereas Burgos' intent was to call for parochial and ecclesiastical equalities reflected within the colonial socio-political context, Rizal dreams of an improbable originary space that is totally outside the sphere of Spanish hegemony. We can peek into this idea by taking a few lines from his famous essay, "The Philippines a Century Hence" where Rizal writes:

> A new era thus began for the Filipinos. They gradually lost their old traditions and memories, they forgot their writings, their songs, their poetry, their laws in order to learn rote by other doctrines, which they did not understand, other standards of morality, other tastes, different from those inspired by their race by their climate and by their own way of thinking. Then they were humbled, degraded before their own eyes, ashamed of what had been distinctively their own, in order to admire, to extol whatever was foreign and incomprehensible; their spirit was disheartened and they acquiesced.[58]

For Rizal, the decision to separate *what is Filipino* from *what it is not* was grounded on an imagined idyllic past that returns to a dream of purity uncontaminated by the dirt and dangers of Spanish colonization. Such naïve, nativist stance however was an invention that readily offers itself as an easy target to philosophical and historical criticism. What is elevated in Rizal's reading of Morga's text is a linear view of history anachronistically seen using the historical categories of his time. This charge of anachronism, seen astutely by two of his respected contemporaries, viz., the Ilocano historian Isabelo de los Reyes and the Austrian scientist-ethnologist Ferdinand Blumentritt, did not sit well with Rizal's sensitivities. For de los Reyes, Rizal's understanding of history is blinded by "a laudable patriotism" that made him ascribe a nationalist interpretation of historical data as a primordial source from which the true character of a native Filipino identity or culture can be glimpsed. This hindered Rizal from being a historian that "should be scrupulously impartial."[59] For his part, Ferdinand Blumentritt cautions Rizal against the

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(Williams and Chrisman, "Introduction," 14). "Perennialism" is another term for this nativism (see Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* [New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 12).

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

[58] 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).

[59] Rizal himself provides the source of Isabelo's criticism in the latter's *Historia de Ilocos* (History of the Ilocos, 104). See Rizal, "A Reply to Don Isabelo de los Reyes," 505. It is also in this same reply where Rizal also criticizes de los Reyes by claiming that the latter was trying to "Ilocanize the Philippines" (ibid.).

anachronism that most modern historians commit when they "censure the occurrences of centuries past in accordance with the concepts that correspond to contemporary ideas."[60]

From his *Annotations*, we realize that Rizal understands history to be an inevitable process resulting from the divinely ordained mechanisms of history. For him, the coming of the Spaniards was merely a moment, fortunate or unfortunate, within a singular and purposive process that should culminate in the establishment of the Filipino nation. If the Filipinos can only to go back to their true and native identity that has been destroyed and buried behind the colonial heritage, it is possible again to achieve that glorious heritage of an ancient Filipino civilization. To this end, Rizal's purpose in doing the work on Morga was clear: he was intent at discovering that native identity apart from the Spanish religion and domination.[61] A certain ambivalence, however, characterizes Rizal's attitude towards Spanish colonization. On one hand, he sees the undeniable evils brought to the *Islas* by the holy Catholic civilization in the deaths of "many captives and soldiers . . . in the expeditions, depopulated islands, inhabitants sold as slaves by the Spaniards themselves, the death of industry, demoralization of the inhabitants, etc., etc."[62] Yet, on the other, Rizal cannot but resort to Spanish influence in asserting a certain superiority over those who did not receive Spanish education (non-Christianized and Hispanized indios) and equality with those nationalities who shared the enlightenment provided by European modernity. In fact, latent behind all Rizal's complains against the evils of Spanish colonialism was his desire for the Filipinos to be accorded "a right to the name of Spaniard"[63] which he deems as the logical and just reward for the sacrifice of blood and life that the inhabitants of the *Islas Filipinas* have given to the glory of Mother Spain.

The Problems of a Nationalist Historiography

In this vein, we see the double bind within which Rizal's nationalist discourse is inescapably implicated. While it must glorify the existence of a glorious heritage upon which a Filipino identity can be securely established, it must also come to terms with the concrete social, economic and political exigencies inscribed within such mythologization and mystification of the past. Rizal himself was conscious of the dangers connected with his own nationalist interpretation of history. He was aware of the fact that his filipinization of history opens itself up to a worse re-inscription of the structures of social, economic and political oppression and a further solidification of the colonizer's hold on power.

[60] Ferdinand Blumentritt, "Prologue," in *Events in the Philippine Islands*, xlix-lxiv; liv.
[61] Rizal, *Events*, 42. See note 36.
[62] Ibid., 134. Note 121.
[63] Ibid., 342. Note 260.

Instead of achieving genuine liberation for the poor masses, it handily opens itself to the opposite. Rizal further writes:

> The people, accustomed to bondage, would not defend them against the invader nor would they fight for the people; it was just a change of masters. The nobles accustomed to tyrannize by force, had to accept foreign tyranny when they found it to be stronger than theirs, and not finding either love or lofty sentiments among the enslaved masses, found themselves without arms and without strength. Between a people with a tyrannical aristocracy and another with an unbridled democracy the people are balanced equally. Both easily fall under the rule of the first foreign invader, the first for weakness and the second for anarchy. Many of the colonies that are repressed due to the systematic brutalization of the inhabitants by one social class, caste, or race that surrounds itself with tinsel and which in order to maintain itself has to defend absurdities with a false principle to be logical, end up without doubt like tyrannized peoples, like Persia, India, etc., succumbing before the first foreigner.[64]

What this passage reveals is the unfortunate irony underlying the structural violence and injustice within pre-Hispanic and therefore pre-Filipino historical societies. If de Morga's historical account is to be believed and Rizal's assent to them is to be accepted, the originary violence that lies at the heart of the colonial enterprise is not an evil coming from the stranger or the foreign. Rather, it is the fact that the coming of the foreign or the stranger was the violence of an evil that merely supervenes on an already existing evil—that of the evil of servitude and injustice practiced within pre-Hispanic Tagalog and other Philippine societies.[65] Behind the idyllic past imagined by Rizal was the reality of injustice and oppression of which the Spanish colonial experience was merely a deferred form. More originary was the structural injustice and oppression within Tagalog (and by implication, other ethnic groups) societies which Rizal's nationalist historiography has intentionally (or unwittingly) camouflaged (or *masked* according to Foucault). By this anachronistic oversight or scholarly dishonesty or incompetence, Rizal's nationalist historiography has *technically* ignored or removed the differences and diversity of

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[64] Ibid., 281. Note 118.

[65] This seems to be the central thesis of Vicente Rafael's radical and momentous book, *The Promise of the Foreign*. Contrary to the promise of salvation, justice, and Filipino nationhood with the coming of the foreign, i.e., "the harnessing of Castilian into a lingua franca" (xviii), as the *ilustrado* nationalists would insinuate, the foreign merely announces the coming of a supervening order, one which did not really alter the structures of oppression and injustice but rather entrenched it more deeply by imbuing it with an over-arching Christian religious character (see "Preface" and "Introduction" of Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign*, xv-xviii; 1-16).

cultures, tradition, languages and even geographies that are supposed to be articulated by those presumed to be marginalized regional ethnic societies in favor of an "essentialist, utopian politics" whose interests are separate from those lying at the underside of the colonial status quo. In so doing, the homogenization effected by the Christian character of Spanish colonialism interestingly paved the way for the imaginable hegemony of a nation that has to be constructed within the very heart of the Spanish empire.[66] When history is written from the vantage point of a totalizing Philippine nation-state, whether imagined, actual, or projective, there runs the danger of clouding the violence created by the hegemony of the homogenization of collective desire. A nationalist historiography can never articulate the concerns of the concrete poor, marginalized, and suffering subject of pre-Hispanic, or colonial, or post-colonial oppression. Instead, it can develop and be effective *only* as a homogenizing form that erases the concrete specificities of the divergent experiences of social and historical oppression. The diverse reality of the different regional ethno-linguistic societies, and the sub-classes within them, together with their attendant interests, struggles, conflicts, and aspirations resist incorporation into the dynamics of a totalizing modern nation-state defined by self-acclaimed *ilustrado* propagandists.

Now, to see these historical traces as inclusive parts of a linear, over-arching teleological history in the name of the Filipino (taken *under erasure*, "~~Filipino~~"),[67]

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[66] In Renato Constantino's words: "The *ilustrados* believed that Hispanization was the basis of being Filipino" (Constantino, "The Filipino Elite" in *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness*, 121). Benedict Anderson's insightfully modern description of the nation as an "imagined community" also reveals the fact that it is borne out of the technology of print capitalism and the spread of the vernacular as a mode of addressing the Colonizing Other, which, in the case of middle to late 19th century Philippines was Castillian Spanish (see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* [Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 2003], 5-7).

[67] The practice of writing "under erasure [*sous rature*]" (e.g., "~~Filipino~~") reveals that this study works within the tension created between the insecurity of a constructed "~~we~~" as starting point of discourse and the impossibility of doing away with the concepts that we have inherited from traditional history. Speaking from the vantage point of the "present," this study makes a conscious attempt to put "~~we~~" under erasure as a recognition of the precarious and undefined limitations inherent in the anachronistic and naïve employment of historical categories by traditional nationalist thinking. In the introduction to her English translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la Grammatologie*, Gayatri Spivak describes *sous rature* as a "philosophical exigency" borne out of the inaccuracy, yet indispensability, of the "word" to convey what it is supposed to communicate. It is to "write a word, cross it out and then print both word and deletion." ("Introduction" in *Of Grammatology*¸ translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], xiv). For more explanation about this Derridean quasi-concept, see Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 128. Lucy writes that *sous rature* "refers to the practice

understood as an exclusive/inclusive social class, is to constitute a distortion of historical events in the name of a nationalist ideology that does not really articulate the material interests of the concrete, marginalized subjects of Spanish colonial oppression. Instead, by privileging a primordialist-nativist account of what a Filipino identity is, a nationalist historiography stands complicit with the elitist construction of a decadent *ilustrado* ideology that merely preserves their privileged position within the oppressive colonial status quo. By positioning itself as anti-colonial, these nationalist discourses have arrogated unto themselves the power to represent the concrete, suffering majority and consequently, to chart the course of how the struggle against colonial oppression should take. At the heart of this arrogant assumption of power, however, comes the privileging of the particular, exclusive interests of the elite Filipino class divorced from the real interests of the concrete subjects of colonial oppression. Thus, we see clearly how instead of serving the real interests of the concrete, marginalized subjects of oppression, a nationalist historiography reveals itself ultimately as the unfortunate, subtle and unwitting repetition or translation of the language of colonial violence and oppression. By taking as point of departure a fetishized notion of *who or what a Filipino is* as the only avenue for the acceptable and normative anti-colonial struggle, these nationalist discourses, whether from the elite *ilustrado* construction of history or the putative history from below, find themselves trapped into articulating not the real material interests of the those located at the underside of history but, unwittingly, those of the elite *ilustrados* whose own interests are promoted at the expense of the suffering majority.[68] Trapped within the notion of a Filipino identity, these nationalist discourses compromise the project of human emancipation from colonial oppression. Borne out of Europe's civilizing mission, the imposition of social (or national) identities from the West's inescapable Orientalism, are ideological traps that we must utilize cautiously within emancipatory, anti-colonial discourses. When they are borne out of religious motives, as in filipinization, they risk becoming complicit with the very structures of oppression that they aim to overcome. Within the social field of exploitation and domination, they become "necessarily self-alienating."[69] As Rizal astutely points out:

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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" (ibid.).

[68] Thus, with Slavoj Žižek, we can locate a strange summary of nationalist thinking in the "fetish" here—in the form of a valorized, hero "Filipino" identity—as the "sublime object of ideology" (see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [London and New York: Verso, 2008]).

[69] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 215.

> . . . Catholicism not only did not free the poor class from the tyranny of the oppressor but with its coming to the Philippines it increased the number of tyrants. Time alone and education that brings with it more gentle customs, will end up by redeeming the *parians* of the Philippines, for we see against their oppressor, the priests of peace do not feel courageous enough to fight, and that is in times of great faith, but rather they contribute indirectly to their misfortune. . . .[70]

Conclusion

The epistemic violence of the filipinization process renders the impossibility of the poor, marginalized Other from letting her concerns be heard. Trapped inescapably within the language of the colonizer, the "subaltern" must learn that the possibility of speaking, and thus, of being heard, can only consist in ceasing to be a subaltern, i.e., of ceasing to use the language and identity within which she has been captured by colonial ideology. The project of letting the "subaltern speak" is therefore radically compromised, from the start, by epistemic violence. This impossibility of speaking, i.e., that the subaltern cannot speak, however, is not a practical truth but an epistemic position: it reminds us of the impossibility of doing away with the effects of Western colonialism. These evils, necessarily conjured by the ghosts of the past, are what come with our inheritance from the dead.

Spivak herself explicitly says that she does not "have any interest in preserving subalternity."[71] For us, this means that any nostalgic preservation of marginalized positions of subalternity must be avoided. There is no benefit, within the discourse against colonialism, being trapped within the socio-cultural identities romantically constructed by nativist nationalist discourse. As Freud reminds us in *Civilization and its Discontents*, might we be better off spending a large quota of human energy to improve the human lot than to baffle in the mysteries of religion?[72] Similarly, in the face of the monstrosity brought about by global techno-capitalism and environmental apocalypse, there is a demand to honestly consider the proposition that filipinization, or any kind of romantic cultural nationalism, might actually be the last thing that a decadent Philippines, or any other country in search of historical and social justice, needs now.

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[70] Rizal, *Events*, 281. Footnote no. 119.

[71] Spivak, "Interview with the Editors" (29 October 1993) in *The Spivak Reader*, 287-308; 289.

[72] See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 91-2.

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