

Filipino Philosophy as Ethnographic Philosophy: Particularism and the Anthropological Approach

Jairus Diesta Espiritu

Mapua University, Manila

Abstract: The project of decolonizing philosophy in the Philippines has been underway for decades, beginning with the pioneering works of Ferriols and Mercado. The anthropological approach in Filipino philosophy, begun by Mercado, has encountered many criticisms on two fronts: methodological and motivational. Methodologically, Mercado’s approach has been plagued with hasty generalizations stemming from assumptions of homogeneity among the distinct worldviews that Philippine languages carry. Motivationally, the approach has been helplessly searching for a “genuine” Filipino identity that unfortunately does not exist. Addressing these issues, this paper attempts to formulate a particularist-ethnographic approach for Filipino philosophy, enhancing and reframing the project laid down by Mercado almost fifty years ago. Being particularist, the outlined approach avoids hasty generalizations and recognizes the impossibility of generalizing over a multiplicity of cultures in the Philippines. As ethnography, the approach historically reveals the place of specific practices, providing more nuance to the way we

do philosophy. Ultimately, ethnographic data should be brought in dialogue with the wider philosophical practice both locally and globally, making Filipino philosophy truly a work in philosophy.

Keywords: Mercado, anthropological approach, ethnographic philosophy, Filipino philosophy

DECOLONIZING PHILOSOPHY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Among all the academic disciplines, philosophy might just have the most peculiar question of decoloniality, perhaps because it is the only one that claims to be unequivocally universal. Given this pretention, it is therefore difficult to think of how philosophy can be properly decolonized.

Decolonization speaks of particularity while philosophy, as far as its history is concerned, has been on the opposite end of the spectrum. Gordon talks about different ways for philosophy to be colonized, including giving primacy to a single nationality (i.e., the Greeks) as the progenitor of the tradition.¹ In this sense, philosophy can properly be decolonized if its origins could properly be decentered from a single point in Ancient Greeks, towards recognizing different springs from which philosophy came forth.

In the Philippines, the beginnings of the decolonization of philosophy can effectively be traced from two thinkers: Roque Ferriols in the 1960s and Leonardo Mercado in the 1970s. Roque Ferriols began his attempt at decolonization by employing Filipino in the teaching of philosophy in the Ateneo back in 1969.² During this time, teaching in the vernacular was quite unheard of, especially in an Americanized institution like the Ateneo. While teaching philosophy in Filipino can be mere translation, his way of doing it was unique and groundbreaking.

His approach to philosophy is evident in his most well-known work, *Pambungad sa Metapisika*. Instead of merely translating philosophical concepts into Tagalog, he reframed traditional philosophical problems using the unique categories that the vernacular has to offer. In the book, he tried problematizing ontology by employing the term “Meron,” stretching it to mean “being”³ and also using its conjugation “pagmemeron” as “be-

¹ Lewis R. Gordon, “Decolonizing Philosophy,” in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (2019), 18.

² Wilhelm Patrick Joseph S. Strebel, “Pitong Sulyap sa Pilosopiya ng Wika ni Padre Ferriols,” in *Kritike*, 12:1 (2018), 41.

³ Roque Ferriols, *Pambungad sa Metapisika* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991), 71-77.

ing.”⁴ “Meron” is also used at times to mean “presencing,” a meaning which is already inherent in the term.⁵ He was not only translating philosophical terms, as expected of someone who just uses the vernacular in teaching. His method can be characterized as the first attempt to use Filipino in philosophizing and not just in teaching it.

Mercado, on the other hand, took a different approach. While Ferriols used his own positionality in philosophizing, Mercado took a third person point-of-view to study indigenous concepts that may have some philosophical import, inventing what is now called the anthropological approach in Filipino Philosophy. Using a so-called metalinguistic analysis, the goal was to “present the philosophy of the Filipino masses”⁶ as a “form of nationalism”⁷ in order to have “a philosophy that we can consider Filipino”⁸. Mercado’s project was therefore the deliberate establishment of a unique way of philosophizing for Filipinos, earning it the label “anthropological approach”⁹.

Citing the lack of tenses in both Cebuano and Tagalog¹⁰ (which later included Ilocano),¹¹ Mercado argues that the Filipino has a non-dualistic view of the world. He also talks about the Tagalog pronoun “kitá” that unifies the “I” and the “you” into one single pronoun.¹² From these

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

⁶ Leonardo N. Mercado, “Reflections on the Status of Filipino Philosophy,” in *Kritike*, 10:2 (2016), 1.

⁷ Emmanuel C. De Leon and Marvin Einstein S. Mejaro, “An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,” in *Kritike*, 10:2 (2016), 4.

⁸ Ian Anthony B. Davatos, “Towards an Experimental Turn in Filipino Philosophy: A New Way Forward,” in *Kritike*, 14:2 (2020), 84.

⁹ Romualdo Abulad, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the 21st Century,” in *Suri: Journal of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines*, 5:1 (2016), 6.

¹⁰ Leonardo N. Mercado, “Filipino Thought,” in *Philippine Studies*, 20:2 (1972), 211-216.

¹¹ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word Publishing, 1976), 73-79.

¹² Mercado, “Filipino Thought,” 217.

particular characteristics of these two or three languages, he concludes that the “Filipino” veers away from a dualistic worldview.

Ferriols himself was skeptical, albeit not directly, of Mercado’s project. Still in the *Pambungad*, he argues that looking oneself in the mirror and asking if one looks Filipino does not constitute philosophizing.¹³ The real philosophical act is to work one’s way around one’s ontological context using the categories provided by one’s language. To ask if what one is doing is “genuinely” and “uniquely” Filipino is, for him, a waste of time.

Even with objections such as Ferriols,’ Mercado’s approach to Filipino philosophy continued to be employed by him and his subsequent followers.¹⁴ As the first work bearing the name “Filipino Philosophy,”¹⁵ Mercado’s *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* continues to be the standard for the anthropological approach,¹⁶ making it practically unchanged in almost fifty years after its inception. Although Davatos proposed the use of Experimental Philosophy in the anthropological approach, the project remained the same—to look for a “genuine” Filipino philosophy.

Consequently, the anthropological approach has been repeatedly dismissed for these criticisms, among other inadequacies found over the decades. These inadequacies include methodological questions that put into question the very plausibility of its purported methods. Owing to his followers’ faithful explication and application of his method, the anthropological approach has practically been equated to its form laid down in the 1970s. It has since forced scholars either to accept Mercado *in toto*, or to dismiss it as a work better left to social scientists.

¹³ Ferriols, *Pambungad sa Metapisika*, 234.

¹⁴ See Emmanuel D. Batoon, “Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (First of Two Parts),” in *Kritike*, 8:1 (2014), 1-23; “Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (Second of Two Parts),” in *Kritike*, 8:2(2014), 1-18. Also see Florentino Timbreza, “Mga Hugis-Pag-iisip ng Pilipino,” in *Malay*, 4:1-2 (1985), 7-19. “Pagkataong Pilipino: Kaalaman, Gamit, at Etika,” in *Malay*, 5: 2 (1986), 11-22; “Mga Ugaling Pilipino,” in *Malay*, 10:1 (1992), 52-64; and “Artikulyasyon ng Katutubong Pilosopiya,” in *Malay*, 30:1 (2017), 86-98.

¹⁵ Abulad, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 6.

¹⁶ Romualdo Abulad, “Pilosopiyang Pinoy: Uso Pa Ba? (The Relevance of Filipino Philosophy in Social Renewal),” in *Kritike*, 13:2 (2019), 17-18.

This paper, however, attempts to chart a way forward for the anthropological approach without being dismissive of the criticisms hurled against it over the decades. I propose a particularist-ethnographic bent that will address both motivational and methodological problems evident in Mercado's anthropological approach.

CONTRA MERCADO

The revolutionary nature of Mercado's approach is definitely laudable; its revolutionary project of looking into indigenous ways of philosophizing has earned it an irrevocable place in the history of philosophy in the Philippines. Given that "philosophy" was only thought to be Western during the time, proposing an indigenous type of philosophy distinct from European traditions was indeed revolutionary—a necessary first step in decolonizing academic disciplines in the Philippines. But as with any first step, succeeding steps must also be taken for one to get somewhere.

Methodological Concerns

At the onset, the hasty generalizations and methodological inadequacies of Mercado's approach are glaringly obvious. In discussing his method, he openly admits that "what is deduced from Cebuano Visayan, Tagalog, and Ilocano can mostly be applied as well to the other Philippine languages" because "they are linguistic relatives and have a common ancestor, Original Indonesian or Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian)."¹⁷ While it is true that these languages have a common origin, it is quite reductionist to collapse 187 different conceptual systems into a single one just because they share the same ancestry.

Back in 2015, Abulad delivered a keynote lecture at the midyear conference of the Philosophical Association in the Philippines in San Pablo, Laguna. The lecture was entitled "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines" and

¹⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 10.

was subsequently published in this journal. In the paper, Abulad offered the following remarks on Mercado:

Leonardo Mercado, as far as I know, continues to be the main voice for the anthropological approach to Filipino philosophy, mainly on the basis of his fortunately titled book, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*. Fortunately, because, besides being decently written originally as a Ph.D. dissertation, it is the first book with ‘Filipino Philosophy’ in the title, and so there is no reason why it should not be taken, even if perhaps not completely accurately, as also the first book on the subject. The book, however, is not free from flaws, as attested to by ensuing reviews, principally because of its relatively thin documentation, still too small for a work of anthropology. Perhaps it would have been better had anthropologists themselves written the book, except that our Filipino anthropologists might have been busy doing other things¹⁸

Mercado’s work has paved the way for the acceptance of the idea that our own culture bears its unique conceptual framework.¹⁹ As Mercado himself admits, his work was a revolt against the well-accepted idea during that time that there was no Filipino Philosophy.²⁰ Because of trailblazers like him, we are today able to talk about Filipino Philosophy.

While we must recognize its significance, we must also recognize, like Abulad did, that it had glaring flaws. After decades of linguistic research, no academic today can, in good conscience, accept Mercado’s generalizations from just three Philippine languages: Cebuano, Tagalog, and Ilocano. If we have learned anything from Wittgenstein and the Sapir-

¹⁸ Abulad, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 6.

¹⁹ Mercado, “Reflections on the Status of Filipino Philosophy,” 22.

²⁰ de Leon and Mejaro, “An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD,” 5.

Whorf Hypothesis, each language offers a different worldview. And if we think that three languages could properly represent the rich conceptual frameworks of hundreds of others, we are making a very dangerous and at the same time careless assumption. As Guillermo scathingly remarks:

Hindi talaga matatanggap ang mga hungkag na ispekulasyon ni Mercado sa pagkarami-rami niyang aklat hinggil sa pilosopiya at “pagkataong Pilipino” na punung-puno ng ganitong uri ng pangangatwiran. Ang nakakapagtaka ay marami pa ring sumasakay at napapaniwala sa ganitong ispekulatibong pagtingin sa kulturang Pilipino.²¹

(Even with his numerous works on philosophy and on “Filipino identity,” Mercado’s empty speculation that happens to be filled with these arguments is indeed unacceptable. What’s more curious is that many still believe this kind of speculative view on Filipino culture.)²²

Guillermo rightly points out the same methodological inadequacies of Mercado’s work that Abulad himself noticed. And we know for a fact that such speculative Filipino Philosophy continued in subsequent works on the anthropological approach.²³

In a 2017 work, however, Timbreza was already able to recognize some sort of multiculturalism and its import on philosophy. He admits: “Dahil magkakaiba tayo ng kultura ay magkakaiba rin ang mga tunog o mga

²¹ Ramon Guillermo, *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009), 52.

²² Translation adopted from Jairus Diesta Espiritu, “Towards a Filipino Metaphysics: Particularist Narratives of Traditional Healing Practices,” in *Banwaan: The Philippine Journal of Folklore*, 2:1 (2022), 11.

²³ See Leonardo de Castro, *Etika at Pilosopiya sa Kontekstong Pilipino* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995) and Jeremiah Reyes, “Loob and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics,” in *Asian Philosophy*, 25:2 (2015), 148-171.

salita na ating binuo't nilikha bilang pantukoy sa iba-ibang bagay sa ating kapaligiran" (Because we belong to different cultures, the sounds and words that we created to point to different things in our environment are different too).²⁴ In the immediately succeeding sentence, however, he begins to talk about *a* Filipino culture in comparison to an English culture as if forgetting that the differences in sounds also mean differences in worldview.

With the hundreds of languages in the Philippines, therefore, we cannot possibly say that concepts such as *kapuwa* or *loob* can be the basis of Filipino Philosophy in general. If this were the case, we will be led to deny that Philippine languages without the words "kapuwa" or "loob" are not Filipino at all. Therefore, the problem begs the more fundamental question: who is the Filipino? And the only answers that Filipino Philosophy has offered have been homogenizing and essentialist—characteristics constitutive of the problematic motivations of the anthropological approach.

Motivational Concerns

Aside from the abovementioned methodological concerns, the motivations of the anthropological approach seem to be equally problematic. Even more recent enhancements to the anthropological approach continue to be animated by the same problematic motivations. In a recent proposal to incorporate Experimental Philosophy, Davatos locates his aims in the wider "search for a genuine Filipino philosophy."²⁵ Batoon, in his defense of Mercado, admits that Mercado:

... merely interpreted the ordinary mainstream Filipinos' produced cultural philosophy that is shown in their everyday language and behavior. By adopting an

²⁴ Timbreza, "Artikulyasyon ng Katutubong Pilosopiya," 90. Translation mine.

²⁵ Davatos, "Towards an Experimental Turn in Filipino Philosophy," 76.

anthropological perspective, he wished to show that Filipino philosophize about their life as a culturally organized people.²⁶

It is therefore clear that the anthropological approach only aims to describe the Filipino worldview in order to prove that Filipinos have a distinct way of philosophizing—proving the avowed nationalist motivation behind the approach. This very tendency has been embedded in Mercado’s approach at the onset.

Assuming that “language reflects the thought..of its native speakers,”²⁷ he adopts a metalinguistic analysis coupled with a phenomenology of behavior that Pada describes as a “methodological concoction ... in which the semantic content of the linguistic data is verified and supported by observable practices.”²⁸ The point is to use this twofold method in making explicit what is already implicit in the Filipino’s mind, as if giving birth to Filipino philosophy that is supposedly already there.²⁹ And Mercado, in giving birth to this indigenous thought, sees it as an end in itself.

The problem comes from how Mercado frames the approach by asking “Is there a Filipino philosophy?”³⁰ It presents a binary between a *present* Filipino philosophy that is also *distinct* from other philosophical traditions. The very phrase “*genuine* Filipino philosophy”³¹ represents the scholastic undertones of Mercado’s project³² as if there is a unifying notion of Filipino identity that hovers above everyone in the archipelago, waiting to be discovered by philosophers engaged in the anthropological approach. Such Filipino identity is, at best, an unqualified assumption.

²⁶ Batoon, “Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (Second of Two Parts),” 3.

²⁷ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 8.

²⁸ Roland Theuas DS. Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” in *Kritike*, 8:1 (2014), 30.

²⁹ de Leon and Mejaro, “An Interview with Leonardo Nieva Mercado, SVD.”

³⁰ Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 3.

³¹ Davatos, “Towards an Experimental Turn in Filipino Philosophy,” 21.

³² Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” 32.

There is no *single* Filipino identity waiting to be discovered; as subjectivity, Filipino identity is practiced in each and every unique way that we, Filipinos, conduct our lives.³³ It is precisely from this Platonism of sorts that one can observe the obvious ahistoricity in Mercado's analysis. Whenever he draws conclusions on Filipino philosophy from linguistic categories, Mercado fails to distinguish between diachronic or synchronic contexts.³⁴ Exactly *when* and *where* do certain words mean a *certain way*?—questions that could have had significant ramifications in the purported analysis.

Because of these lapses, critics like Abulad have remarked that “it would have been better had anthropologists themselves written the book.”³⁵ Indeed, if the goal of Filipino philosophy is to merely describe how Filipinos think, how different is the enterprise from the social sciences?

PARTICULARISM: THE WAY FORWARD

As far as the literature is concerned, there are two glaring difficulties that the anthropological approach faces: the first one methodological, and the second one motivational. As the more fundamental issue, the latter should first be addressed.

The search for a “genuine” notion of Filipino identity must be put to rest. We should begin to recognize the impossibility of arriving at a distinct and unified idea of what the Filipino is. Aside from the fact that such descriptive endeavor rightly belongs to the social sciences, the category “Filipino” encompasses 187 distinct languages scattered throughout the archipelago. Asking what concepts are *indeed* Filipino

³³ See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), especially the so-called “Formal Theory of the Subject” in Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2009). Identity is created in the subject's engagement with truths to which it is faithful—no essences to be discovered, only existence to be practiced in relation to generic truths.

³⁴ Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” 32

³⁵ Abulad, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 6.

would risk homogenizing these 187 different conceptual systems and the worldviews that they all carry—an obvious disservice to nuances that philosophy prides itself in.

The meaning of the term “Filipino” has also changed over the centuries, first referring to Philippine-born Spaniards, then to the *indio* who has claimed the category as his own.³⁶ Such historical contingencies further emphasize the importance of synchronic and diachronic analyses that are endemic to linguistic studies. More importantly, given these historical contingencies, one cannot talk about anything “purely” Filipino, given the various influences that have shaped its identity over the centuries:

... what can be characterized as “Filipino” can only be considered dialectical, and therefore dynamic and heterogenous. As with any identity, indigenization happens dialectically; the creation of the Filipino as Filipino happens in the practice of *being* Filipino instead of participating in a pseudo-Platonic specter of Filipino-ness which the likes of Salazar, Mercado, and Timbreza assume.³⁷

Giving up philosophy’s Platonic burden, we can now begin to see particular instances of the *practice* of Filipinos as constitutive of the dialectical Filipino identity. While we cannot pin down what the Filipino *is*, we can definitely pin down how the Filipino is *practiced* in the everyday.

Keeping this heterogenous and dialectic nature in mind, one must proceed (if one must) in the anthropological approach with much caution. Each description of a certain activity or phenomenon that is rightly called Filipino cannot be taken to represent *the* Filipino identity, but only as a particular token of Filipino-ness. In this way, the homogenizing tendencies

³⁶ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1990), 102-126.

³⁷ Espiritu, “Towards a Filipino Metaphysics,” 113.

of the anthropological approach are avoided, properly shying away from a Platonic notion of identity. And as a descriptive approach, a truly *particularist* approach continues Mercado's method, not as phenomenology of behavior but as ethnography.

Scott-Fordsmand talks about a so-called ethnographic tradition in philosophy. Recognizing that there is no single definition of what ethnography is, she admits that ethnography is a style that can only be recognized in terms of the resemblance of its practices with each other. She characterizes it thus:

1. Ethnography is the study people's actions and accounts in uncontrolled everyday contexts (*in situ*).
2. Ethnography is idiographic, it focuses on one or a few cases to facilitate in-depth enquiry.
3. Ethnography relies on 'data collection' from a range of sources, including documents and recorded interviews, but participant observation and informal conversations are usually central.
4. Data collection is relatively 'unstructured' or open in two ways: (a) ethnography does not implement a fixed research design at the outset, but reworks the design as the study evolves and (b) the analytical focus of the study is not fixed but develops or arises out of the analysis—which runs parallel to data collection.
5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices.³⁸

We can see here that ethnography covers a lot of practices that can be characterized as part of qualitative methods. And one must admit that ethnography itself is not philosophical at all. Ethnography, as a qualitative method, is a way to enrich our philosophical discussions without necessarily supplanting it. It cannot, in any way, displace our usual highfalutin discussions, but it can certainly inform them.

³⁸ Helene Scott-Fordsmand, "Ethnographic Philosophy: A Qualitative Method for Naturalised Philosophy," in *Philosophy Compass*, 20:3 (2025), 2.

She mentions three areas where ethnography has found use in recent years: phenomenology, critical theory, and the philosophy of science. In these areas, Scott-Fordsmann enumerated many ways in which ethnography has been used, including a so-called two-tier methodology in the work of Hoffdin and Matiny in phenomenology.³⁹ In their methodology, ethnographic fieldwork is done on tier-1 in place of the introspection done in traditional phenomenology. On tier-2, philosophical work is done on the basis of the data collected in tier-1. Here, the usual phenomenological reflection can take place, but instead of using “data” from armchair introspection, there is real, hard data involved in the process.

Bioethics has also benefitted from these ethnographic models. In one study discussed by the same paper, some recommendations for a certain bank were proven to be ineffective when it was practiced.⁴⁰ In the said study, 18 months of ethnography suggested that the sustainable banking model that channels funds to developing economies did not matter much—an insight that would otherwise be absent if it were not for ethnography.

It is clear, therefore, that ethnographic methods help philosophical reflection. More nuances can be taken into account since the loose, dirty, unrefined categories on the ground are now made available in philosophical discussions. Moreover, ethnography allows for the element of surprise; as opposed to traditional armchair thought experiments whose dilemmas are artificial to the point of comedic absurdity, ethnographic data could provide unexpected inputs in what philosophers do.

Therefore, as ethnographic philosophy, the anthropological approach cannot stop at the point where Mercado and Timbreza did; the ethnography necessary in this approach is only the first step. This is also the difference between a particularist-ethnographic approach from the experimental approach proposed by Davatos. Taking the cue from Pada who argues that philosophy could only be discursive, the anthropological

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

approach can only be a truly philosophical enterprise once its ethnographic data are brought into dialogue with existing philosophical discourses.⁴¹ African philosophy, for instance, has done the same, most notably in bringing the notion of “ubuntu” in dialogue with existing existentialist⁴² and moral⁴³ theories.

Given the foregoing, a truly particularist ethnographic approach does not only address the motivational problems in Mercado’s approach. The particularist-ethnographic approach properly addresses methodological concerns such as ahistoricity and generalizing hastily. Emphasizing the particular, the ensuing data can no longer be said to represent the rest of Philippine society without any qualification. More importantly, the particularity of descriptions within this new approach will definitely showcase the temporal and spatial nuances from which ethnography was conducted.

Ultimately, this approach removes the burden of having to “fit” specific practices into a generic framework of what a Filipino is, much like how Mercado and Timbreza have been doing it for decades. Instead of the practices contributing to a general notion of the Filipino, a truly particularist approach lets these practices speak for themselves and show their own profound philosophical insights regardless of their origin: indigenous, Western, Chinese, or even a mixture of everything. While more traditional philosophers might see this approach as unsatisfying, it is only

⁴¹ See the attempt made in explicating the metaphysical assumptions of Philippine traditional medicine in Espiritu, “Towards a Filipino Metaphysics: Particularist Narratives of Traditional Healing Practices.” In the work, ethnographic data are used in order to philosophize about reality, juxtaposing indigenous and Western metaphysics, not in order to prove the uniqueness of the Filipino worldview, but to bring them into a productive dialogue. The aforementioned paper can be considered as an early attempt at executing the particularist-ethnographic approach outlined in the present study.

⁴² See Aribiah D. Attoe, “A systematic account of African conceptions of the meaning of/in life,” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 39:2 (2020), 127-139 and Thaddeus Metz, “African theories of meaning in life: A critical assessment,” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 39:2 (2020), 113-126.

⁴³ See Thaddeus Metz, *A Relational Theory of Justice: African Political and Legal Philosophy in and Beyond the Continent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

this way that Filipino philosophy can remain true to itself: admitting that it is heterogenous as Filipino identity is.

CONCLUSION

The decolonization of philosophy in the Philippines can adequately be traced back to the works of Ferriols and Mercado. Their respective opuses provided a break from the dominant Western tradition, with the former using the categories of Tagalog to philosophize and the latter investigating an indigenous way of doing philosophy.

Mercado should be taken credit for his pioneering work, but his method has remained unchanged until now, almost fifty years since the first publication of his seminal work; revising the approach in light of criticisms is long overdue. Considering methodological and motivational problems with the anthropological approach, this paper outlined a particularist-ethnographic approach that addresses these two issues.

Avoiding generalizations about the Filipino from flimsy documentation, a particularist-ethnographic approach recognizes the particularity of ethnographic data that showcases a particular point in space and time. Without denying that the particular practice *is* Filipino, the approach recognizes a heterogenous and dialectical notion of *being* Filipino—an identity that is practiced more than it is discovered. In this way, the approach avoids the homogenizing motivation inherent in Mercado's project: establishing what is uniquely and distinctly Filipino. Following Pada, a particularist-ethnographic approach uses the collection of ethnographic data as a first step in enriching our philosophical discourse. Ultimately, these data should not be the end of doing Filipino philosophy; they are the necessary first step in bringing these Filipino concepts in dialogue with the wider philosophical discourses in the Philippines and in the world.

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