

The “Invisibility” but “World-Disclosing” Potency of Philippine Local Languages in Doing Philosophy

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Abstract: In this paper I thematize the status of Philippine local languages in the practice of academic philosophy in the Philippines. In the mixed style of Axel Honneth and Nikolas Kompridis’ critical theorizing, I argue that local languages suffer an “invisibility” in academic philosophy yet its utility offers a “world-disclosing” capacity which could reappraise the very task of philosophizing in the Philippine setting. In the first part, I explain this invisibility as a denial of public recognition by academic philosophers themselves whose linguistic and cultural capital is invested in dominant state prescribed institutional language(s). This denial of public recognition is manifested by the non-utilization or lack of effort to use their local, native, languages in philosophical discourses. In the second part I argue that if philosophy is to be a truly public enterprise, it must be steeped in the particularity of languages and cultures which renders a more local and critical engagement with social reality. This pairing of local languages and view of philosophy as a public enterprise of social critique is anchored on the normativity of the everyday in which the former serves as its communicative expression and as the object of analysis or reflection by the latter. In the third part, I

retrieve this non-utility of local vernaculars as a neglected task by academic philosophy practitioners which resulted to its invisibility in academic institutions and in effect, to philosophy's lack of presence and relevance to the everyday lifeworld of the public. I advocate that by doing academic philosophy in local languages, a world-disclosing mode of social critique of contemporary Philippine society is activated which promises "new beginnings" for philosophy through the very agencies that have long remained invisible.

Keywords: invisibility, particularity, Philippine local languages, world-disclosure

INTRODUCTION

Based on the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino's (KWF) current linguistic inventory, the Philippines has 135 living languages¹ which shows the diversity of languages people use in their everyday normative "language games" or communicative interactions. The dominant languages are those which are institutionally officialized. The language proclaimed by law for communication of the government shifted according to the colonial historical episodes of the country. The 1899 Constitution of the Malolos Republic had Spanish as official language while the 1935 Constitution proclaimed English and Spanish. In post-World War II Philippines, a national language—Pilipino—was proclaimed in 1940, only to be developed into Filipino in 1973 in response to criticisms of purism. In the 1987 constitution, Filipino was decisively declared official language, unless changed by law, English. English and Pilipino were to become as well the language of instruction or the official language used in formal education in keeping with the 1973 Bilingual Policy up to the 1987 Constitution when Filipino—the national language was sustained to become the official language and language of instruction in the educational system.² The Filipino language was instituted based on Tagalog due to the latter's preeminence and relation to the national capital.³ Consistent with the logic of modern nation building, the institutionalization of Filipino as the national *lingua franca* sought to consolidate political and cultural unity across an otherwise linguistically diverse population, producing homogenizing effects despite the continued plurality of Philippine languages. Meanwhile the other Philippine languages were to become

¹ Arthur P. Casanova and Lourdes Zorilla-Hinampas, "Indigenous Peoples Languages and Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Philippines" (14 April 2025), <<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a495fb2714f60de249ef010e31d28cc3-0090012025/original/Day-1-KWF-Arthur-Casanova.pdf>>.

² Virgilio S. Almario, *Frequently Asked Questions on the National Language* (Manila: Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2017), 13-17.

³ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

“auxiliary languages” that is, as “additional help or support” in pedagogical instruction because it is “the language that the pupils or students in a classroom know much better than the official language of instruction so that the teacher can use it to be better understood by the pupils or students.”⁴

Philosophy education in the Philippines has likewise been carried out using the official languages of instruction in the Philippines—with Filipino being aggressively advocated by Manila based scholars since the early 70’s.⁵ The non utilization of local vernaculars and its treatment as mere auxiliary languages in the educational institution and in philosophizing appears to have set philosophy itself distant from the public. Its effect is that either local languages have not been perceived as potent enough for philosophical discourses or that if any attempt is made by a few audacious ones, efforts do not gain much approbation from peers mostly due to most scholars’ adherence to philosophical positions they have cultivated. Hence, the linguistically diverse Philippine public has not gotten themselves used to philosophical discussions for it has been confined to the formal structure and language of schools and never in their ordinary languages. The non-usage of local languages in philosophical discourses however is more an issue of choice for praxis which is not

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵ The philosophical education of the Philippine public using the *lingua franca* in academic institutions can even be implicated as complicit with the internal colonization inherent in the movement of Filipinization that implies epistemic violence, homogenizing effect, and marginalization of different and diverse Philippine cultures. See Michael Roland F. Hernandez, “Trapping Identities: Filipinization and the Problems of a Nationalist Historiography,” in *Suri*, 5:2 (2016). A possible counterweight to this may have just been articulated by national artist Virgilio Almario on his take on the continuing disappearance of native languages in the Philippines: “Regarding the issue of the imminent death of other native languages, this is not connected with the spread of the national Language. Instead this is the result of neglect precisely by the speakers of other native languages. Those who pretend to defend their other native languages are doing nothing by way of a real movement to advance, care for and protect, and truly serve their native languages.” Almario, *Frequently Asked Questions on the National Language*, 61.

without motivations stemming from the interest of philosophy practitioners. The traditional idea of “common experience” as the object of philosophical reflection has often been identified with the language commonly used in articulating philosophy in the academe to the forgetfulness of the intensity of human experience taking form in the diversity of languages. It is in this forgetfulness or worse, neglect, in articulating human experience with all its tensions and struggles in the language of one’s *particularity*⁶ that philosophers in the Philippines commonly display.

This paper is a disclosure of the status of Philippine local languages in the practice of academic philosophy in contemporary Philippine society. I argue that local languages suffer an “invisibility” taken in the recognitive perspective of being denied of public recognition by academic philosophers themselves whose linguistic and cultural capital is invested in dominant languages. This denial of public recognition is manifested by the non-utilization or lack of effort to use their local, native, languages in philosophical discourses. But If philosophy is to be a truly public enterprise, it must be steeped in the *particularity* of languages and cultures which renders a more local and critical engagement with social reality. This pairing of local languages and view of philosophy as a public enterprise of social critique is anchored on the normativity of the everyday in which the former serves as its communicative expression and as the object of analysis or reflection by the latter. I retrieve in the last part this non-utility of local vernaculars as a neglected task by academic philosophy practitioners which resulted to its invisibility in academic institutions and in effect, to philosophy’s lack of presence and relevance to the everyday lifeworld of the public. I advocate that by doing academic philosophy in local languages, a

⁶ I will be using this term in reference to Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition where it is defined as the sphere that grants social esteem to individuals and groups as having characteristics and qualities capable of contributing to the society. I include here one’s belongingness to a culture and linguistic community. See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. by Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 122.

world-disclosing mode of social critique of contemporary Philippine society is activated which promises “new beginnings” for philosophy through the very agencies that have long remained invisible.

THE “INVISIBILITY” OF LOCAL LANGUAGES IN PHILOSOPHIZING IN THE PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, the low to non-frequency of philosophical works published in languages other than English and Filipino is symptomatic of the kind of public treatment by philosophy practitioners of (even their own) local languages which have been relegated to being “auxiliary” languages in learning institutions. This mode of public treatment is best described in what herein is borrowed from Honneth (and Margalit) as “invisibility”—figuratively taken from Ralph Ellison’s novel *The Invisible Man*.⁷ The concept of invisibility elucidates the epistemological status of misrecognition that is experienced by the first-person narrator of the novel. The narrator is a real person, physically present being, but is made to feel invisible by others who refuse to see him by simply looking through him. The inability to see by those surrounding him is not a literal visual deficiency “but rather an inner *disposition* that does not allow them to see his true person” (emphasis mine).⁸ The disposition renders the other “invisible” not as a cognitive fact but as “a kind of social state of affairs,”⁹ that is, as a recognitive fact. The figurative sense of invisibility presupposes already a literal visibility or cognitive identifiability within the spatio-temporal order performed privately. But it is the disposition that strips the narrator of the elementary affirmation based on publicly known modes of expression. Honneth and Margalit explains that:

⁷ Axel Honneth and Avishai Margalit, “Invisibility: On the Epistemology of Recognition” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 75 (2001).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

While by cognizing a person we mean an identification of him as an individual that can gradually be improved upon, by ‘recognizing’ we refer to the expressive act through which this cognition is conferred with the positive meaning of an affirmation. In contrast to cognizing, which is a non-public, cognitive act, recognizing is dependent on media that express the fact the other person is supposed to possess social validity.¹⁰

What the invisible man experienced in not being accorded these performative modes of expression that is supposed to grant normative social validity is a denial of (public) recognition.

In Honneth’s theory, the normative expectation of recognition is not simply a courtesy that is rendered to make the other feel good but a moral¹¹ condition for the formation of personhood. Personhood begins in the initial sense of self gained in childhood onwards increasing individuation via socialization conditioned by struggles for recognition.¹² We can also understand these struggles as the individual’s continuing struggle for freedom. But freedom here must be taken in both the Aristotelian context of human flourishing and the Kantian idea of an autonomous source of initiative which is reconfigured by Honneth in the intersubjective plane. Meaning to say, freedom must be understood in the context of mutual recognition that both subjects grant to each other. As a normative expectation therefore, recognition is intimately linked to justice. In everyday experience, the value of justice emerges more in people’s consciousness when an experience of injustice is experienced. For Honneth, this could only be the case because a public notion of what is good and normatively expected among people to grant is withheld from them.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹¹ For Honneth, recognition is a socio-ontological condition for the coming to being of a person gradually flourishing through the major spheres of care, respect, and esteem which are mutually accorded by individuals to each other.

¹² See Honneth’s *The Struggle for Recognition*.

The forms of recognition withheld accounts for the various forms of injustices experienced by groups and individuals. The figurative significance of invisibility could represent these experiences of injustices or what Honneth also signified with the term “moral disrespect.”¹³

To understand the gravity of disrespect for Honneth, the Kantian notion of respect must be remembered for its moral element of decentering the self in the face of the other’s worth that appeals itself as obligation to oneself.¹⁴ In Honneth and Margalit’s words, “by recognizing someone and conferring on him a moral authority over one in this sense, one is at the same time already motivated to treat him in the future according to his worth.”¹⁵ This makes clear the moral dimension of recognition and the element of obligation that one ought to fulfill. Fulfilling this obligation would again take form in various ways depending on the normative demands which are mutually and publicly recognized.

Applying the metaphor of invisibility to describe the state of local languages in doing philosophy may appear unjustified or unwarranted as a moral affront by philosophy practitioners in the Philippines unless the specific form of recognitive deficit is identified. Honneth and Margalit’s identification of meta-actions representing reciprocal recognition provides this needed basis. Meta-action refers more to the concrete form of recognition accorded to the other. They write:

If recognition in its elementary form represents an expressive gesture of affirmation, it follows, to begin with, that it also represents a *meta-action* (Italics mine): by

¹³ Axel Honeth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundation of Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Honneth and Margalit, “Invisibility,” 121; Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31. This is a similar argument I usher in developing the ethics of translation in Victor John Loquias, “The Ethics and Exigency of Translation Magnified by the COVID-19 Pandemic,” in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Special Issue (2020), 152-172.

¹⁵ Honneth and Margalit, “Invisibility,” 122.

making a gesture of recognition towards another person, we performatively make her aware that we see ourselves obligated to behave towards her in a certain kind of benevolent way. For this reason, the first-person narrator of Ellison's novel can conclude from his condition of social invisibility that those who 'look through' him do not have any intention of treating him in a respectful or in a benevolent way; on the contrary, in this case the absence of gestures of recognition is supposed to signal that the person affected must be prepared for hostile actions.¹⁶

Meta-action could be interpreted in a similar way to what Gottfried Schweiger pertains as "materializations" of recognition. "Recognition," Schweiger explains, "can come in all different shapes and is not just about identity politics but also includes material and social forms such as income, housing or political participation ... education, health ... which are embedded in social, economic and political institutions."¹⁷ These are the relative forms of recognition which Schweiger suggests should be looked at in making sense of recognition more concretely speaking.

What form of material recognition is withheld therefore in the invisibility of local languages in philosophizing in the Philippines? I contend that this could be categorized in the sphere which Honneth accorded to social esteem where individuals or groups are recognized in their *particularity*.¹⁸ Particularity is the sphere of recognition that accords affirmation of the qualities and characteristics of persons that allow them to be contributing agents in the society, and as belonging to their respective

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gottfried Schweiger, "Globalizing Recognition: Global Justice and the Dialectic of Recognition," in *Public Reason*, 4:1-2 (2012), 82.

¹⁸ This is the same claim I put forth in my reconstruction of the language of Indigeneity in Filipino philosophies. See Victor John Loquias, "The Language of Indigeneity in Filipino Philosophies (Second of Two Parts), *Kritike*, 17:1 (June 2023), 24-42.

cultures and solidarity groups.¹⁹ Different local languages are material expressions of cultural diversity, of differences in particularities reflecting the plurality of society. In the case of the Philippines, these diverse languages spread throughout the country persist as the communicative medium of interaction among Filipinos in their ordinary everyday lives but are relegated as “auxiliary” languages in formal education.

The non-utility or lack of effort to use the local languages in philosophizing is tantamount to a “looking through” the particularity of the immediate public in which the philosopher belongs. It is a non-recognition of the capacities of local languages for intellectual discourse which is not without basis on individual preferences and allegiance to educational institutional mandates. Common reasons for its non-utilization are imputed to the difficulty of using the language, the assumption of the language as not tailor-fit for philosophy, the limited coverage of intelligibility of the language, the charge of mere translation of foreign philosophies when using the language, the fear of being charged with orientalism, and the list of justifications could go on. In the empirical research of Pamela Del Rosario-Castrillo which is yet to be completed by similar studies in the other areas of the Philippines, academics are basically invested in the cultural capital of dominant languages through which careers could grow and research coverage and links could be strategically extended.²⁰ Apparently, philosophers in the Philippines equate philosophizing with the language(s) they are formally trained into and are more concerned with wider readability rather than as a critical response to the exigencies that emanate from the public.

¹⁹ Renante Pilapil, *Recognition: Examining Identity Struggles* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015); Heikki Ikaheimo and Arto Laitinen, “Recognition and Social Ontology: An Introduction,” in *Recognition and Social Ontology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Bart Van Leeuwen, “A Formal Recognition of Attachments: Expanding Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition,” in *Inquiry*, 50:2 (April 2007), 180-205.

²⁰ Pamela Del Rosario-Castrillo, “Text, Tension, and Territory: The Field of Academic Journal Publishing in Mindanao, 1968–2005,” in *Tambara*, 29:1 (2012), 5-36.

In Demeterio and Kahambing's interviews of philosophy scholars, although one can get have a general impression of openness to the use of local languages by philosophers in their philosophical pursuits, an atmosphere of non-preference is apparent among their testimonies and more evident in the actual outputs of research and studies.²¹ While the use of the Filipino language is gaining momentum in the continuously increasing publications of scholars (who are also native of their own regions and can speak the language of their region), the use of other languages in the Philippines remains to be seen. The invisibility of local languages, as exposed, is due to the choice stemming from the disposition of philosophy practitioners—an issue of practice and therefore of preference. Philosophizing as an academic enterprise has been successfully carried out by its practitioners in formal educational institutions but has yet to connect with the public which, as I have described, is plural in their particularities. Public engagement is even more wanting in the immediate local regional communities of philosophy practitioners. The local public, in which philosophers are included, has yet to witness the agency of philosophizing. Going back to our local languages allows us to go back to the public, in their particularities. In a rather peculiar way of mixing the insights of Honneth and Kompridis I will attempt at showing in the next part the world-disclosing potency of local languages.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE WORLD-DISCLOSING POTENCY OF LOCAL LANGUAGES

In terms of public engagement, the observation of Nikolas Kompridis in his book *Critique and Disclosure* is a fit description of our status as philosophers in our own setting. He says that “the philosopher is not a

²¹ See Jan Gresil S. Kahambing and Feorillo Petronillo A. Demeterio III, “Doing Philosophy in Central and Southern Philippines: Interviews with PHAVISMINDA Presidents Velez, Gallamaso, and Suazo,” in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 17:1 (May 2018), 161-198.

common sight in the lifeworld; he is more often out of sight (and when in sight, just as often out of place or out of sorts.”²² In our case in the Philippines, one of the reasons for this absence in the lifeworld or in the public sphere is the language distance that we have kept from the public which is a symptom of the deficit in our “critical intimacy with culture.”²³ The deficit in the public recognition of our local languages in our philosophizing is apparently correlative to our literal invisibility in local publics.

We say philosophy is supposed to be concerned with everyday experience, but this appears to have very small impact beyond our classroom walls. In our case, social and practical engagements of philosophy remains to be seen beyond the academic language. It is important to raise once more the question “Why should local languages be used, or at least thematized in our philosophical pursuits?” to re-articulate the need for a more engaged and particularized philosophical praxis. Philosophy as a critical engagement of the everyday experience could be a common sight in the eyes of the public if it speaks in their particularity—that is in their language, and about their social-material concerns.²⁴ However, what this critical engagement of the everyday is must be clarified to identify the import which local languages could supply.

I glean from the contemporary critical theorists Honneth and Kompridis who both appraise the everyday as the locus of philosophical praxis albeit anchored in different theoretical positions. Honneth focuses on the everyday struggles for recognition by groups and individuals which serve as the normative basis for social critique. Honneth takes philosophy as the task of providing semantic bridges for articulating social pathologies

²² Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 160.

²³ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁴ I build on Paolo Bolaños advocacy of shifting towards a “theoretico-materialist-practical stance” in doing philosophy using critical theory. See Paolo A. Bolaños, “The Ethics of Recognition and the Normativity of Social Relations: Some Notes on Axel Honneth’s materialist Philosophical Anthropology,” in *Suri*, 1:1 (2012), 15-24.

or forms of disrespect in the various spheres of recognition. In this mode, philosophy becomes a disclosing-critique of society wherein experiences of misrecognition attain forms of articulation and attain the agency for struggle (consequently for socio-political action). Kompridis on the other hand treats philosophy as a task of “world-disclosure” described as an always future-oriented,²⁵ yet culture-based critique²⁶ towards a “new beginning.”²⁷ Although he disagrees with Honneth in the apparent confinement of this enterprise of disclosure in the Hegelian inspired recognitive framework, Kompridis is in concert with Honneth’s firm localization of philosophy in the immediacy of everyday experience. For Kompridis, “everyday life ... is the only medium in which the ‘need of philosophy’ can be heard and answered.”²⁸ This valorization of the everyday is puissant if we take again from him that “philosophy receives its concept of itself from the need/s of its time, and it is from the quality of philosophy’s response to the need/s of its time that it can be in a position to act responsibly as an agency of critical enlightenment.”²⁹ For where else does the need/s of the society emerge but in the everydayness of human experience. As a critical enterprise “philosophy must do what it can to speak in the name of the human, disclosing and redisclosing the meaning of human being in the face of all that threatens it—including those expert cultures which claim to know the human.”³⁰ Yet philosophy must speak in the language in which these forms of social needs and threats take communicative expressions normatively taking shape in peoples intersubjective relations.

Employing local languages in philosophizing both within and beyond the academic institutions deploys and actuates what these critical theorists speak of as a disclosing critique of society or world disclosure in

²⁵ Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

that (a) the diversity of languages in the Philippines demands the recognition of particularity in the agency of philosophy which (b) could in fact become avenues for new possibilities of disclosures. Local vernaculars which are used in everyday communicative interaction by the local public in other words await becoming new disclosures of worlds or life-forms spoken from a plurality of particularities. In plural societies like the Philippines, this convergence of Honneth and Kompridis' theory emerges as a necessity in the actuation of local language in doing philosophy. The articulation of forms of disrespect across the spheres of recognition provides a "semantic bridge"³¹ for struggles of recognition to take on collective consciousness and action. For Kompridis on the other hand, "human beings can experience their freedom as their own only in so far as they can initiate a new beginning for themselves through which they break free of something oppressive and debilitating in their relationship to one another, to their institutions, or to their commonly shared world."³² Breaking free from social problems and pathologies need not only a consciousness of those debilitating structures but modes of articulation or semantic bridges in order identify and name them. Where else would these structures of human experience linguistically take shape and metamorphose into something new but in the very local vernaculars that keep and sustain them?

The invisibility of local languages in doing philosophy can be traced as an offshoot from the struggle for recognition in the agency of philosophizing in post-colonial Philippines.³³ The nationalist ideology pursued by the *illustardo* class for independence against Spain and the revolt of the masses against American imperialism was supposed to be

³¹ I borrow this term from Charles Bingham, *Schools of Recognition: Identity Politics and Classroom Practices*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

³² Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 196.

³³ In my two-part paper, "The Language of Indigeneity in Filipino Philosophies," I pointed out that the clamor for an identity of (Filipino) philosophizing was a socio-political response amongst its practitioners channeled in the state-endorsed nationalist project where the establishment of a national language was deemed instrumental.

brought into completion in post-world war two Philippines mandated by the state in its political formation and socio-cultural reproduction through education. The identification of “indigeneity” with national Filipino consciousness (deemed singular) was forged and justified on the grounds of liberation from foreign political control. Today, the very ideology of nationalism has already been problematized.³⁴ Nationalism itself is not immune to subtle forms of injustices that eclipse or, as I describe in this paper, invisibilize forms of life in the name of nationalist agenda. The invisibility of local languages in doing philosophy was facilitated by legal maneuvers which institutionalized dominant languages in educational institutions. The dominant languages continually gained an increase of what Sibayan referred to as the “controlling domains of language”³⁵ which has led to a two-fold effect upon the public: a) the non-maximization of recipients of the aims of education because of its concentration on the few who can afford private education (where officially high resource languages are taught and mastered) and increase their intellectual capital³⁶ and b) the reduction of local languages to “auxiliary” or “transitional” languages which denied public recognition of the potency of local languages for flourishing or increasing of its controlling forces.³⁷ The effect is that local

³⁴ See Michael Roland F. Hernandez, “The Fantasies of Filipino Identities: The Ironies of Racial Discourse in the 19th Century Philippines,” in *Mabini Review*, 15:2 (2025), 175-197.

³⁵ This refers to “the domains that dictate what language to learn and aspire for, because that language is the effective working language in the domain, namely those of government administration, legislation, the judiciary and. The law, business, commerce, industry, science and technology, the professions, media, and education on all levels.” Bonifacio P. Sibayan, *The Intellectualization of Filipino and other Essays on Education and Sociolinguistics* (Manila, Philippines: The Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 1999), 448.

³⁶ I base this on some of the unexpected findings of Gonzalez’s study where the bilingual education program where it was found out that there was a “widening gap between Manilans and non-Manilans on the one hand and between Tagalog and non-Tagalogs on the other hand.” Andrew Gonzalez, “Evaluating bilingual education in the Philippines: Towards a multidimensional model of evaluation in language planning (1990),” in *Readings in Philippine Socio-Linguistics*, ed. by Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista (Maila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 1996), 333.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

languages—displaced as an educational tool—moved the people’s language of particularity distant from educative public spaces. Local languages have been disenfranchised from its capacity not only to flourish as an educative medium but as an institutionally esteemed mode for articulating social experience. The invisibility of local languages however in educational institutions is not synonymous to its non-existence because it persists as languages spoken by the diverse Philippine public in their everyday communicative relations. Local languages remain the living, normative, communicative expression of people in various aspects of their personal and social interactions be it economic, political, and cultural. Here lies the very potency of local languages that philosophy practitioners have first to recognize—before, and so that—it becomes a language for philosophizing. And this recognition will entail an overhauling of the meaning and praxis of philosophizing itself, at least in our part of the world (possibly transversing with a multitude of ways there is in doing philosophy).

If the task of philosophizing is a disclosing critique of society, then its medium of articulation must be the very language of the social reproduction of values and practices that philosophy take as its normative bases of critique. In the socio-historical condition of the Philippines characterized by diversity and post-coloniality, local languages **are** in fact the very sites of new possibilities of disclosure. This is because a disclosing critique of society needs situatedness in the very medium of the society’s particularity which will serve as the normative basis for critiquing values and practices towards its reconstruction. This is implied in Kompridis’ insight that philosophy “is a task that not only requires intimate knowledge of my culture but also a critical understanding of the intimacy I share with my culture, particularly, since I may need to break with my culture to inherit it and pass it on differently.”³⁸ It is clear that Kompridis equates disclosure with social critique. But if this critique is to be grounded, it must be borne out of the intimacy with the social body that local languages

³⁸ Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 176.

incarnate communicatively. In Honneth, this could very well be a way of doing what he called as “internal critique” which is a way of showing “that certain normative ideas and principles are already institutionalized, which means that they are not only accepted but that they are somewhat already informing our practice.”³⁹ Kompridis’ thinking was not distant when he describes that (philosophical critique) “the process by which old habits (practices, institutions, traditions, languages) are transformed into new ones is a process in which reflection, criticism, and semantic innovation are intertwined.”⁴⁰ Philosophy needs to return to its very ground—the everyday experience—from which its task gains meaning on the first place as Kompridis decisively declared. And there is no other medium more proximate to, if not the communicative embodiment itself of, the everyday than local languages. With local languages being utilized in philosophy as a disclosing critique of society, human experience will gain new ways or forms of articulations and an internal critical identification of problems towards a reconstruction of social experience using the very normative resources in those particular languages. This manner of doing philosophy morphs into a praxis beyond mere interpretation. A reconstruction of philosophizing in the context of Philippine experience emerges therefore as an imperative.

RETRIEVING A NEGLECTED TASK OF ACADEMIC PHILOSOPHIZING IN POST-COLONIAL PHILIPPINES

The genesis of philosophizing in the Philippines has always been an academic enterprise.⁴¹ And educational institutions have always been a

³⁹ Goncalo Marcelo, “Recognition and Critical Theory Today: An Interview with Axel Honneth,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 39:2 (2013), 209-221.

⁴⁰ Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 173.

⁴¹ Alfredo Co, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Fifty Years Ago and Fifty Years from Now,” in *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines and Other Essays: Across the Philosophical Silk Road A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*, Vol. VI (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009).

colonial construction. It is for this reason that “the education of the Filipino people in the schools has been carried out mainly through two foreign languages: Spanish during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries and English in the twentieth century.”⁴² In post-colonial Philippines, the urgency to educate Filipinos in the national language gained urgency after World War II.⁴³ While the imperial languages and in a qualified way, Filipino (unmasked as a product of an ideology complicit with internal colonization)⁴⁴ were institutionalized, the other local languages were perceived either unfit or incapable of carrying out educational aims.⁴⁵ Philosophy practitioners have followed suit. Specialization differs in their philosophical traditions learned either in the mainstream west or east but the language used remains the dominant ones and never the diverse languages of local publics to which they belong.⁴⁶ In other words, academic philosophizing has always been distant from the public. To bring philosophy closer to the people, they must identify themselves with it. It must be an enterprise that if they themselves do not

⁴² Sibayan, *The Intellectualization of Filipino*, 447

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hernandez, “The Fantasies of Filipino Identities.”

⁴⁵ In the case of Spanish colonization, local languages were learned by friar-scholars as instruments of evangelization but not as a medium of instruction in educational institutions mostly afforded only by a few. This is evident in the translation of the Bible in different languages of Philippine regions and other devotional materials. See Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988).

⁴⁶ While local languages are continuously being advocated and developed in catechism and literature, only a handful of works in diverse Philippine languages (other than Filipino) are visible in philosophy which only mirror the kind of public treatment it gets from philosophy practitioners. See for instance Amosa L. Velez, *Pagtuang sa Ulan Ang Pilipino ug Ang Tawo sa Pamimilosopiyang Pamanlandong* (Quezon City: Central Book Supply, Inc., 2022); Regletto Aldrich Imbong, “Mahinungdanong Kabilin: Ang Panghuahuna ni Jose Maria Sison (A Significant Legacy: The Jose Maria Sison Thought),” in *Aguipo 3* (2024), 51-66; Wilmer Joseph Tria, *Ako asin an Kapwa Ko: Sarong Pilosopiya nin Tawo* (Naga City: Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2009); Victor John Loquias, “An Edukasyon bilang Pagsusog sa Gawing Marhay Sarong Pagkasabot gikan ki Konfyusyus para sa Ngunyan na Panahon,” in *Bikolnon: Journal of Ateneo de Naga University*, IX:1 (2023), 28-49.

perform, at least the people most proximate to them speaks their particularity—a linguistically recognitive turn in academic philosophizing. Since philosophizing has always been done in educational institutions—the very place where local languages have been invisibilized—it is where a more publicly engaged philosophizing can likewise be activated.

A significant insight can be gleaned from Paulo Freire which can highlight the role of philosophy in educational institutions vis-à-vis the utility of local languages. In the book *Learning to Question*, Freire discussed “the language question” where he declared that “education cannot escape from the depths of the people, from their productive activity, from their culture.”⁴⁷ One of the fundamental expressions of culture is language. And the utility of the language itself is a way of being in solidarity with the people. One of the most important insights that Freire contributed to education which became a pillar of critical pedagogy is that for education to be emancipative, the people themselves must take possession of their emancipation in a long-term basis.⁴⁸ Philosophy, just like any other discipline of learning, should never be disentangled from the people’s cultural expression. If critical thinking is one of philosophy assignments, it can only be truly public if it speaks the language of the diverse public itself. The dominant perception is that local languages are low resource languages and not ready for philosophical discourses. But this was the same state of the Tagalog language before its popularization and before being used as the basis of Filipino after state mandates facilitated its use in educational institutions and other public transactions leading to its wider familiarity in various regions of the archipelago while the other local languages were reduced to auxiliary languages. Manila based intellectuals, some of whom were actually natives of different regions in the Philippines chose to use Filipino in writing—an effort that should in no way be underestimated for

⁴⁷ Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, *Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 105.

⁴⁸ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2005), 54.

its contribution in the normalization of philosophical writing in this language in the present. The advocacy of writing in Filipino, in compliance (whether directly or by implication) to state mandates taken by post-World War two philosophy pioneers and succeeding younger generation of scholars, was the praxis that established doing philosophy in the Filipino language. Other local languages meanwhile have received scant attention from philosophy practitioners. Again, this is for the reason that intellectual capital is invested in the institutionally dominant language and local languages are perceived incapable of intellectual discourse. It is this denial of public recognition itself which led to this perception and treatment among philosophy practitioners. It was not because the languages were incapable of embodying philosophical discourse but that it was *perceived* as not *strategic* enough to perform it leading to their non-preference of its utilization.

This misrecognition of local languages becomes even more apparent when we look at the translations of the Bible in the different regions of the Philippines even prior to the upsurge of nationalism and establishment of the independent nation which can only testify to the efficiency of local languages to efficiently facilitate religious conversion (no matter how contestable the process of conversion in relation to colonization may be). Local languages needed to have as strong as an impetus as the aims of conversion for it to be deployed as a linguistic expression of what is to become the people's faith during and beyond colonialism. Through translation, the performance and officiating of the Christian rituals gained a social body in the respective local vernaculars of the Philippine regions. Of course, conversion as a purpose for the utility of local languages may be charged as a form of hegemony. But historians have likewise shown that Christianity, once deeply embedded in Philippine social life through the colonial project itself, was appropriated by Filipinos as a normative resource for articulating anti-colonial resistance. Rather than merely functioning as an instrument of Spanish domination, Christian narratives, symbols, and devotional practices furnished the moral vocabulary through

which popular movements imagined liberation and political emancipation.⁴⁹ Continually passed on from generation to generation through social reproduction centered on the family, the religion previously imposed in the early days of colonialism has become a distinguishing mark of Philippine society, as dominantly Christian. Would it not be wrong to say then that the Philippine public in their particularities may be said to be deeply converted—religious, in the expression of their faith through their native language, but philosophically uninclined because it has never really been shown in practice especially by the practitioners who were supposed to model it in educational institutions? But no less than Emerita Quito herself, an esteemed pioneer in philosophy in the Philippines and staunch advocate of Filipinization, identified the significant role of intellectuals in the utility of language. She wrote:

nakasalalay sa ating mga intelektwal at dalubhasa ang pagtatatag at pagtataguyod ng pambansang kamalayan na siyang matatawag na sariling kultura at patrimonya ng mga Pilipino. At tungo sa lyuning ito, ang unang hakbang ay may kaugnayan sa wika, tayo ay magbabalik sa ating mga ugat, sa pinakamalalim na adhikaing namamayani sa ating bansa.⁵⁰

This admonition remains to be heeded by intellectuals in the country, but the use of the Filipino language as a medium of doing philosophy was not singularly accepted by scholars in the other regions of the Philippines as I have shown elsewhere.⁵¹ As an intellectual of her time reacting to colonialism, nationalism was the strategic response. Quito may

⁴⁹ See Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University, 1979).

⁵⁰ Emerita S. Quito, “Ang Kaugnayan ng Wikang Pambansa at Edukasyon,” in *Malay*, 22:1 (2009), 29.

⁵¹ Victor John Loquias, “The Language of Indigeneity in Filipino Philosophies (First of Two Parts),” in *Kritike*, 16:2 (December 2022), 27.

not have seen through the “illusion of unity” in Filipinization as a homogenous representation of a collective, singular, history which is inimical to difference and diverse normative struggles for recognition.⁵² The very necessity of utilizing the local languages however is implied right in her own words when she recognized *the need to return to the roots, to the deepest aspirations of the people*—the people marked by cultural and linguistic diversity.

Sociolinguist Bonifacio Sibayan described accurately the reciprocal relation between language and people development:

The development of a language and the development of a people are interrelated. A language does not develop by itself; it is the people who develop a language. In turn, a developed language, once highly intellectually modernized, is needed in education and developing a people. The relationship is reciprocal: the people develop the language which in turn is needed by the people to develop themselves.⁵³

By development, Sibayan was referring to the Intellectual modernization of language (IML) where an indigenous language takes over the “controlling domains of language.”⁵⁴ And this intellectualization can be accomplished by the utility of the language. As Andrew Gonzalez optimistically put it, “switching to the indigenous language in a post-colonial situation will be enough to develop a language, as the language itself will have to undergo the process of cultivation (or elaboration), one specific aspect of this cultivation being its intellectualization or its use as a

⁵² Loquias, “The Language of Indigeneity in Filipino Philosophies (Second of Two Parts),” 35.

⁵³ Sibayan, *The Intellectualization of Filipino*, 450.

⁵⁴ He was describing here what the national language (Filipino) must become against a colonial language (English for instance), in order to be truly called developed or intellectualized. *Ibid.*, 448.

language of scholarly discourse.”⁵⁵ Conversely, the stagnation, or worse, death of local languages is facilitated by its non-utility in educational institutions where knowledge is re/produced and where the dominant languages will always have advantage in the controlling domains. For “as long as the local indigenous language is not yet sufficiently developed, then the transfer of skills is more from the developed dominant language to the less developed language than the other way.”⁵⁶ Both Sibayan and Gonzalez located the intellectualization of language at the tertiary level, where educators and practitioners across various disciplines are expected to assume primary responsibility for its development. The caveat to be considered in my reference to Sibayan and Gonzalez however is that both scholars were concerned with bilingual education, the tension and relation between English and the Filipino language. They were scholars both fueled by the nationalist agenda working in allegiance to the 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education where other local languages in the Philippines were treated as “transitional languages”⁵⁷ and “linguistic minorities.”⁵⁸

In his 1985 empirical study of the state of the linguistic minorities in the Philippines, Sibayan was led to conclude that “minor languages have no function in national life” due to the absence of printed educational materials and its literal invisibility as linguistic medium in mass media (radio, newspapers, magazines, *komiks*). It was for this reason that people who speak these minor languages needed to be educated in the high resource language of English and the now dominant Filipino language gaining traction in the national level. The bilingual language education would practically integrate the masses into the high resource languages needed for everyday transactions and to keep up with the ever-increasing demands of the national and international society.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Gonzalez, “Evaluating bilingual education in the Philippines,” 333.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁵⁸ Sibayan, *The Intellectualization of Filipino*, 519.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 525-526.

It is significant however that Sibayan's study on the status of minority languages in terms of its usage among Filipinos establishes the very necessity—obviously unperceived, if not ignored—of using local languages especially for thought disciplines like philosophy. This can be gleaned from his lines that write:

The minor languages are useful or used only in the domain of the home (spoken form), in religion (the Bible or potions of it have been translated into 66 languages and translation work is in progress in 23 other languages), and for functional literacy. For functions in most other domains or subdomains (that is, the domains that dictate the languages of other domains or subdomains; e.g., those of higher education which dictate the language of the professions, science and technology, or even the language of the larger community), the minority language speaker has to learn the dominant language and/or the official languages.⁶⁰

It is clear that the asymmetry in the controlling domains of the minor and dominant languages lie between the everyday (home, religion functional literacy) and the politically/educationally mediated forms of knowledge (professions, science and technology, larger community). Of all disciplines in the humanities, it is only philosophy which takes common human experience as its object of study and reflection but not articulated in the language of its common everyday expressions (local languages). And because academic philosophy has always used the other, dominantly controlling, languages in its discourses, it has also kept its distance and relevance from the everyday public in their particularities. The potential of the local languages to become mediums and avenues for new disclosures has been missed by philosophy practitioners in their neglect to articulate

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 525.

and develop thinking in the particularities of their minority languages. In the case of post-colonial Philippines, bilingualism (English-Filipino) is not sufficient if philosophizing is to be an enterprise that goes beyond mere academic requirements and reach the proximity of the public. It needs a multilingualism which must include the philosopher's local language(s) in the actual praxis of thinking.

Philosophy practitioners are not supposed to choose only one or the other language, the minor and dominant (using Sibayan's term). Both must be a part of the philosopher's linguistic arsenal. Kompridis interestingly puts together two requirements in being philosophers today parallel to this. On one hand "philosophers are not only highly competent speakers of the various expert dialects but also competent speakers of the multiplicity of languages in use within the culturally pluralistic lifeworld/s of modernity, able to translate smoothly from one set of languages to the other," but it would also require that "philosophers could be educated in such a way that they would become equally intimate with the various languages of science and the many dialects of our pluralistic lifeworld, and that philosophy is (or can be) institutionally positioned at the borders between expert cultures and the lifeworld to perform this translating/mediating function, without philosophers themselves turning into a special class of mediation experts, thereby reproducing the problem for which they represent the solution."⁶¹ Kompridis warns of this this appeal to authority in being hermeneutic experts, or "speakers *for* the lifeworld."⁶² If philosophy is to be a disclosing critique of society, the philosopher's role is as modest as "clarifying and criticizing everyday life and practices in partnership with those whose life and practices they are." For what could constitute a more fundamental, albeit not exclusive, act of attributing epistemic authority to a community

⁶¹ Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 163.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 169.

of shared practices and meanings than speaking and writing in solidarity with the language that gives expression to its particularity?⁶³

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have demonstrated that the invisibility of Philippine local languages in academic philosophy is ultimately a problem of public recognition. I traced this invisibility to the continued investment of academic philosophers in dominant state-prescribed institutional languages which rendered the local vernaculars underdeveloped despite their capacity to articulate the lived realities from which philosophical reflection itself arises. This denial of public recognition has not only marginalized local languages within academic institutions but has also contributed to philosophy's diminishing presence and relevance to the everyday lifeworld of the diverse Philippine public. Against this condition, I have argued that the pairing of local languages and philosophy as a public enterprise of social critique reappraises the very task of philosophizing in the Philippine setting. Anchored on the normativity of the everyday, local languages function both as the communicative expression of lived experience and as the very object of philosophical reflection. Their employment in academic philosophy therefore does not only diversify the linguistic medium of philosophical discourse but restores philosophy's critical relation to the particularity of languages, cultures, and socio-political realities that constitute its material ground. The retrieval of this neglected utility of Philippine local vernaculars is not just an advocacy for linguistic inclusion but a recognitive act that reorients academic

⁶³ I merge the insights of Kompridis and Freire in this statement. For Kompridis "philosophy needs to think of itself as its [lifeworld] ally, ready to speak *with* rather than speak *for* the lifeworld." *Critique and Disclosure*, 169. Whereas Freire hinted at the necessity of using language for an emancipative education: "literacy education cannot escape from the depths of the people, from their reproductive activity, from their culture. It will not become hardened I the soulless cold of bureaucratized schools." Freire and Faundez, *Learning to Question A Pedagogy of Liberation*, 105.

philosophy toward the public. By philosophizing in local languages, a world-disclosing critique of society is activated that employs the agencies that have long remained invisible and reveals the neglected possibilities within contemporary Philippine society. It is through these previously invisibilized languages and communities that philosophy may discover its new beginnings, not by abandoning the other roles that it has always taken but by fulfilling what it has always claimed as a situated, public, and transformative practice of philosophizing. Perhaps the formation of a “new public” with a different “self-conception” and “collective sensibility”⁶⁴ is what is needed first before the reformation of Philippine institutions takes place—a new beginning that a disclosing critique of society style of doing philosophy could help facilitate.

⁶⁴ Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure*, 167.

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