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Article

On Grammatology and Eurocentrism: Deconstructing the Philippine Nationalist Fantasy[1]

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Abstract: This paper works upon Jacques Derrida's institution of grammatology as an emancipatory project that inaugurates the most radical subversion of Euro-ethnocentrism. Taking grammatology as a hermeneutical key, the manifold forms of deconstructive performance can be seen as different, yet unique, sides of the same multifaceted coin directed at the emancipation of thinking from the limits imposed by that original, powerful, and all-pervasive Western logocentric metaphysics. Given this emancipatory spirit, this paper undertakes a selective exorcism of the nationalist fantasy within Derrida's oeuvre. Specifically, it examines his deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality vis-à-vis the anticolonial enterprise that theoretically resisted the Western colonial order. Here, I claim that deconstruction reveals modern nationalism as haunted by discursive complicity. I illustrate this thesis by presenting Filipinization, taken as the obsessive-compulsive construction of "who or what a Filipino identity is" and its attendant processes of social inclusion and exclusion, as exemplar of this contradictory neocolonial predicament. Using a genealogical critique to recognize such differential construction, I philosophically demonstrate the claim that Filipinization effectively translates the colonial epistemic violence of Eurocentric racism and its consequent "horror of absolutism" into the homo-hegemony of Filipino nationalisms.

Keywords: Derrida, colonial translation, discursive complicity Filipinization

[1] This is a revised version of an invited paper delivered during the "Asian Conference on Jacques Derrida: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of His Death" with the theme: "Translations of the Other: War, Religion, Life-Death" held at the University of Tokyo on 28–29 September 2024.

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If I had invented my writing, I would have done so as an endless revolution.[2]

Forms of Deconstruction

In the Asian context—and more specifically within the Philippines—it is compelling to explore how Derridean deconstruction might be applied to interpret the diverse social and political realities of the region. Though it may be less prominent compared to more established traditions such as Scholasticism, Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy, and Critical Theory, deconstruction offers an alternative—yet promising—avenue for rethinking the familiar objects of philosophical and historical critique. The relative dearth of studies about Derrida and deconstruction in the Philippines may be attributed to the fact that there are no straightforward, clear-cut answers to how deconstruction can be made relevant or simply applied to the study of any subject. As Derrida himself has made clear, deconstruction is not a universal method that can be readily applied to any object of critique or analysis at will.[3] Rather, it is a form of a patient, meticulous reading that is opened by a contradictory double gesture defined by contexts which are "never absolutely determinable" or, whose "determination(s) can never be entirely certain or saturated."[4] Historically, Derrida even acknowledged that the word "deconstruction" never truly amounted to being "a *good word* [*un bon mot*]"[5] capable of encapsulating the discourse that he intended to convey particularly in his early writings.

Given the above insight, this paper advances a reading of deconstruction as a kind of homecoming—a performative re-turn to human dwelling that arises from an awareness of our urgent ethical responsibility to confront ongoing structures of historical domination and subjugation. Deconstruction, as I understand and propose here, invites us to inhabit thought differently: not as a means of arriving at fixed conclusions, but as a continual engagement with the conditions that shape meaning, identity, and justice. In advancing this, I highlight the fact about deconstruction as a non-monolithic approach to texts that can only be properly understood within specific contexts or moments of reading. It would thus be possible to speak

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview (with Jean Birnbaum)*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 31.

[3] Jacques Derrida has explicitly suggested that "deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one." Neither is it a critique nor analysis in the traditional sense of the word as if proceeding from a certain domain of authority. See Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Coventry: Parousia Press, 1985), 3.

[4] Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

[5] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 5.

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of "forms" of deconstruction or different "deconstructions" depending on the theo-philosopheme under consideration. Thus, deconstruction in an Asian or Philippine context will create more sense only if there is an appreciation of its multifaceted character.

Although originally stemming from attempts to translate Heideggerian notions of *Destruktion* and *Abbau*, the term "deconstruction" has transmogrified over time to denote a mode of reading that resists simple and direct methodological appropriation.[6] It is therefore not possible to speak of deconstruction as a singular method, simply because each instance or moment of deconstruction is unique and irrepeatable. For the perceptive reader, this implies that each deconstructive reading is a singular performance, revealing that there are indeed manifold forms of deconstructions, with each form being *irreducible* to the others.

I start with this idea of manifold forms of deconstruction because it allows us to conceive of the practice of reading as a performance that can illuminate the practice of translation. As a "performative writing," deconstruction is itself the act of *doing* or *making* of gestures that "posit and transform the 'concepts'" it analyzes or questions.[7] "Through these transformative performatives," deconstruction is able to create *affects* or to constitute a non-neutral *affectivity*. Derrida explains that:

> there is always a kind of physical engagement that makes it such that I am touched by what I speak of, touched as closely as possible to me, in my heart if you will, and so I try to touch the reader, whether him or her, in the same way. And these affective effects are part of the experience of deconstruction. There is no deconstruction without affect.[8]

Using this notion of performative writing into account, we can strategically understand the possibility of translation only as a deconstructive-performative transformation. Indeed, we can say that every moment of deconstruction is a form of translation, works as a translation, is

[6] See Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 1.

[7] Jacques Derrida, "Interview with Michal Ben-Naftali," in *Oxford Literary Review*, 39 (2017), 155. Responding to Ben-Naftali, Derrida notes that "you're right to recall that the deconstructive approach, at least as I try to practice it, is a thematic treatment, or the study of certain 'objects', certain 'concepts', certain philosophical problems in their historical genealogy. But this analysis that could be called theoretical and constative—it's a question of analyzing the inheritance of 'concepts', of 'values' and 'norms'—this consequently theoretical analysis of the constative type is accompanied, is of a kind with what you quite rightly called a 'performative writing'."

[8] *Ibid*., 156.

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accomplished and performed as translation, and even provides a theory of translation. But translation here is not a simple matter of traversing a thought from one language to another. Rather, it becomes a performative act that involves the transformation of a discourse. In translation, the translator actively interprets the source text, making choices that inevitably alter its meaning, tone, and nuance. This process is performative because it creates a new text that is simultaneously the same as and different from the original. Because it is possible to find in another language a word which would say the same thing or "speak of deconstruction" and "lead elsewhere to its being written and transcribed, in a word which will also be more beautiful,"[9] a most beautiful insight from Derrida is given us: a translation acquires a status on the same level as the original. Such conception of writing, however, is what puts translation in a "double bind,"[10] where it must simultaneously preserve and transform the original, navigating the tensions between fidelity and creativity. Derrida explains:

> In the limits to which it is possible, or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signified and the signified. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never, and in fact have never had, to do with some "transport" of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched.[11]

[9] Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," 5.

[10] A "double bind" is an aporetic situation wherein a given thing or object of analysis is inescapably inscribed within the traditional discourse that it aims to criticize and surpass while transforming the discourse itself through the very same conceptual resources which it criticizes. This can be exemplified in the way Derrida has attempted to carry out the deconstruction of Western metaphysics. Gayatri Spivak explains that "double bind" is "Derrida's newest nickname for the schizophrenia of the '*sous rature*.' We must do a thing and its opposite, and indeed we desire to do both, and so on indefinitely. Deconstruction is a perpetually self-deconstructing movement that is inhabited by *différance*. No text is ever fully deconstructing or deconstructed." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), lxxviii.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 20.

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Indeed, if deconstructive writing is performative-transformative, every moment of deconstruction is a translation because, as an open, meticulous, patient practice of reading, it involves the intimate act of de-structuration, dismantling and disruption of a text so that it can be reconfigured and re-inscribed in an ongoing, dynamic process of interpretation. Such action ensures that manifold meanings are continually generated through the interaction between the text and the reader.

Taking the above premises into account, my paper works upon Jacques Derrida's institution of grammatology (i.e., the science of writing) as an emancipatory project that inaugurates the most radical subversion of Euro-ethnocentrism. Taking grammatology as a hermeneutical key, the manifold forms of deconstructive performance can be seen as different, yet unique, sides of the same multifaceted coin directed at the emancipation of thinking from the limits imposed by that original, powerful, and all-pervasive Western logocentric metaphysics. Specifically, this paper undertakes a selective exorcism of the nationalist fantasy within Derrida's oeuvre by examining his deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality vis-à-vis the anti-colonial enterprise that theoretically resisted the order imposed by Western colonialism. Here, I claim that deconstruction reveals modern nationalism as haunted by discursive complicity. I illustrate this thesis by presenting Filipinization, taken as the obsessive-compulsive construction of "who or what a Filipino identity is" and its attendant processes of social inclusion and exclusion, as exemplar of this contradictory neocolonial predicament. Using a genealogical critique to recognize such differential construction, I philosophically demonstrate the claim that Filipinization effectively translates the colonial epistemic violence of Eurocentric racism and its consequent "horror of absolutism" into the homo-hegemony of Filipino nationalisms. To accomplish this, I proceed in three steps: 1) first, I show that grammatology is a science ultimately intent at the dismantling of Eurocentrism; 2) second, I highlight that an exorcism of the modern nationalist fantasy is a key moment within such dismantling; and 3) third, I reveal how discursive complicity precisely happens as the very translation of colonial oppression.

Grammatology and Eurocentrism

In his "Exergue" to *Of Grammatology,* Derrida's sets the project of grammatology as a science of writing (*gramma* meaning "letter" or "writing" in Greek) ultimately directed towards a dismantling of the "most original and

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powerful ethnocentrism," i.e., Eurocentrism.[12] He accomplishes this by challenging the traditional privileging of speech over writing (*phonocentrism*)—underpinned by a *logocentrism*, i.e., the metaphysics which has "always assigned the origin of truth in general to the *logos*."[13] This privileging, Derrida argues, represents an unjustified imposition of order by Western metaphysics and *epistémè*, effectively marginalizing non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge.

Grammatology, for Derrida, heralds a liberation from the pervasive limitations of logocentric metaphysics through the deconstruction of the concept of the "sign." Accordingly, writing is no longer the secondary representation of speech, but is, on the contrary, always already present at the play or movement of differences that constitutes and institutes the production of the signified (i.e., speech/*parole*) before the institution of any language (*langue*). Writing thus, is prior to speech and can no longer be considered as the mere "signifier of the signifier." Writing is "no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression, signification, constitution of meaning or thought, etc.), no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier."[14] It "was never a simple 'supplement'" to speech, no longer mere "technics in the service of language."[15]

In this way, writing "exceeds and comprehends" language. It designates "not only the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription but also the totality of what makes it [signification] possible"[16] at all. Writing therefore is what gives rise to any "inscription in general"—whether literal or not, or, outside the order of the voice (*phone*). Theoretically, it is even what is constitutive of any *experience* or system of *meaning* in general. The advent of writing thus institutes and inscribes science (which has hitherto been identified and idealized as logic) and by implication, the whole "philosophical idea of the *epistémè*" and its attendant *istoria* determined "*for the purpose of* the reappropriation of presence."[17]

This liberation of writing from the clutches of the metaphysics of presence[18] marks the decisive moment when *epistémè* and *istoria* are freed

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[12] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] *Ibid*., 7.

[15] *Ibid*., 7-8.

[16] *Ibid*., 9.

[17] *Ibid*., 10.

[18] For Derrida, the term "metaphysics of presence" denotes "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for … a [transcendental] signified" that underlies the whole tradition of western metaphysics." *Ibid*., 49. This is the view that gives rise to *logocentrism*, i.e.,

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from the system of presuppositions governed or ordered by the whole history of Western metaphysics. By protesting against the imperialism of the *Logos*, grammatology "must deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to ontotheology, logocentrism, phonocentrism."[19] This way, grammatology "*inscribes* and *delimits* science" by appealing to a system of non-phonetic writing that both *marks* and *loosens* the very limits of classical scientificity.[20] Operating between "an overturning deconstruction and a positively displacing, transgressive, deconstruction"[21] this moment of subversion establishes one trademark, among others, of what properly constitutes a deconstructive reading. In subverting the priority of the *phone*, grammatology has effectively dismantled the very language of universal Reason and the notion of scientificity that constitute the very pillars of Western culture. The subversion of Western metaphysics is thus, the deconstruction of that "White Mythology" that has always tied racial and linguistic superiority with European whiteness and "camouflaged [itself] as the [very] language of Reason." Qua grammatology, Derrida ushers the indictment of Western metaphysics as the precarious ground for Eurocentrism and its inescapable justification for the violence of Western colonialism. He explains: "Metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest."[22]

At this juncture, it is obvious that I take Derrida's institution of grammatology as a model for ushering a critique of Eurocentrism and its inescapable Orientalism. This effectively aligns deconstruction as always already engaged with the ethico-political negation of colonialist ideology. This view, which risks constructing a grand narrative of deconstruction as a homogenous unity,[23] has been held by the scholar Robert Young. In his groundbreaking book *White Mythologies*,[24] Young explains that Derrida, being "anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of Western ethnocentrism from *Of*

"the belief that the first and last things are the *Logos,* the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and closer to our time, the self-presence of self-consciousness" (Spivak, "Translator's Preface," lxviii), and *phonocentrism*, i.e., the view that speech or voice is prior to writing because of the "absolute proximity of voice and being , of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning …." *Ibid*., 11–12.

[19] Derrida, *Positions*, 35.

[20] *Ibid*., 36.

[21] *Ibid*., 66.

[22] Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 231.

[23] See Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 13.

[24] Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

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Grammatology's very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice," had always "developed deconstruction as a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonization."[25]

Exorcising the Nationalist Fantasy

Taking the project of subversion and emancipation explicit in the grammatological critique given above, I now turn to Derrida's deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality to illustrate the inescapable Orientalism embedded within Filipino *ilustrado* nationalism. Here, I cautiously note that my analysis must only be taken as a representative critique of what deconstruction can aspire to when applied to the examination of the nationalist fantasy. By nationalist fantasy, I mean the fictive, often distorted, vision of the modern nation whose identity is traced to the myth of pure and sacrosanct origins away from the contamination of Western (viz., Spanish and American) colonialism. By concentrating my particular analysis on *Filipinization*, taken here as the specific discourse establishing "who or what constitutes a Filipino identity" and the attendant anti-colonial project by which a specific Filipino identity is historically constructed within the context of a nation-state formed by a *differantial* complex of economic, socio-cultural and political factors, I show that Filipino nationalist fantasies commit the contradictory logic of discursive complicity with the inescapable violence of the colonialist ideology that they wish to combat. Utilizing the genealogy of nationalist ideology provided by the most illustrious representatives of the nationalist construction of Philippine history, viz., from Padre Jose Burgos to Jose Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados*, I instantiate this complicity by showing how the epistemic violence of racism and the absolutism of *Empire* were merely transmogrified into perfect tokens inscribed within the theatrical effigy of Eurocentrism.

As early as his work on *Of Grammatology*, Derrida admits that deconstruction "was already politically critical of nationalistic ideologies associated in principle … with nationalism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and so on."[26] By lumping these historical forces together, this clarification, given in response to Kojin Karatani's "Nationalism and *Ecriture*," reveals Derrida's eventual conflation of nationalism with ethnocentrism. Whether as an anti-colonial reaction against the West or in its early European incarnations directed at the removal of monarchic power, nationalisms suffer from a

[25] Robert Young, "Deconstruction and the Postcolonial," in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Royle (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 193.

[26] Jacques Derrida and Megan Becker-Leckrone, "Introduction to Kojin Karatani's 'Nationalism and Ecriture': Discussion Summary by Megan Becker-Leckrone," in *Surfaces*, 5 (1995).

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discursive parasitism which reveal an ambivalence at the heart of its construction of the social and political field. As Becker-Leckrone summarizes: "Nation-states…are born not out of nothing, but rather out of empires and initially articulated within them—at once brought into being *against* the empire and potentially subsumed by it, included *within* it."[27]

By the *technics* of language,[28] modern nationalism is inescapably contaminated by the very same discursive violence that has characterized Euro-ethnocentrism. In the context of Filipinization, this happens precisely at the moment when the articulation of the demand for social and political reforms against an oppressive Spanish colonial rule became based on the identity politics of a "Filipino people" which provided a very strict criteria for social inclusion and exclusion. Here, I turn to the pioneering work of Jose Rizal, the most illustrious of the Philippine nationalists to instantiate this Filipino nationalist construction of history.

For many scholars, Jose Rizal's nationalism saw itself as a struggle for social and political reforms that is inescapably tied up to two notable events within Philippine history: the *criollismo* of Luis Rodriguez Varela at the outset of the long 19th century and the secularization controversy that ended the life of Padre Jose Burgos in the aftermath of the 1872 Cavite Mutiny. This developmental connection, held by the most eminent Jesuit social historian of Philippine history, Fr. John Schumacher, clarifies that nationalist thinking was, *initially*, not really intent at the separation of the *Islas Filipinas* from *Madre España*.[29] This can be clarified by considering the etymology of the term "Filipino" as it was utilized in this early nationalist discourse.

At the outset of the 19th century, the Filipino Creole Luis Rodríguez Varela (1768–1824) advocated for equal rights for Filipinos—a term hitherto used exclusively for Spaniards born in the Philippines—challenging the

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[27] Derrida and Becker-Leckrone, "Introduction to Kojin Karatani's 'Nationalism and Ecriture'," 9.

[28] I understand *technics* as the assemblage of linguistic practices that produce discourses that effect specific social and political ends. For a deeper understanding of the connection between *technology* and *nationalism*, see Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Mandaluyong: Anvil, 2006). Bernard Stiegler's elaboration of the relation between *technics* and *being* is insightful in this regard. He defines *technics* as "the pursuit of life by means other than life." See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus*, Vol. I, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.

[29] Still unsurpassed, Fr. John Schumacher's two excellent books, viz., *The Propaganda Movement 1880–1895* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) and *The Making of a Nation: Essays on Nineteenth Century Filipino Nationalism* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991), are studies that historically situate our theoretical problematic within the objective historiography of the Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. This colonial period, traditionally conceived as spanning more than 333 years, is the only proper background within which we can set objectively the genealogical discourse on national identity and nationhood.

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dominance of the *peninsulares*, or Spaniards born in Spain, who regarded themselves as the only true ruling class within Spanish colonial Filipinas. Varela's efforts for social and political reforms were interpreted by the nationalist historian Fr. Schumacher and the National Artist Nick Joaquin[30] as a type of proto-nationalism that sparked the formation of an early form of "Filipino" social consciousness and consequently, of a distinct "Filipino" identity. However, this *criollismo* of Varela and other early Spanish writers clearly revealed that Filipino identity was only limited to a select, elitist class. Their identity politics never intended to include the native lowland *indios* much less the various ethnic mountain groups within Spanish *Filipinas*. Rather, it only designated an extremely specific political identity for purposes of their own legal and economic advantages.

For the scholar Ruth de Llobet, this was a form of "political opportunism" wherein Varela and his fellow Hispanophiles exhibited their utmost loyalty to the Spanish Crown so that they can gain privileges that will make them at par with the Spanish *peninsulares*.[31] Clearly, we see at this precise historical period that Varela's *criollismo* was a process of defining a "social inside" against a differentiated "racial outside" composed of *peninsulares, indios naturales* and *mestizos.* Filipino identity, it seems, only applies to privileged creoles who are the only class worthy of being Spanish citizens too—a glaring manifestation that this *criollismo* was neither liberal nor revolutionary, if we mean by those terms a movement aimed at combating general social injustice brought about by colonialism.

Such parochial mindset became the progenitor of the succeeding discourse advanced by Padre Jose Burgos' proto-nationalism and by later nationalist writers like Wenceslao Retana and Nick Joaquin.[32] Here, Burgos regarded Varela as an exemplar of the "Filipino creole" and adopted his ideas as a ground for the secular Filipino clergy's own struggle to regain the parishes previously assigned to them by Governor Simon de Anda's policy of secularization. In doing so, he furthered the identity politics initiated by Varela, but with an important variation: he included the mestizos and upper-class *indios* within a multi-ethnic conception of Filipino identity. In the context of his conception of a secular "Filipino clergy," Burgos infused a stronger devotion to the Catholic faith into elements already established in Varela's early *criollismo*: 1) geographic affinity; 2) ability to speak Spanish and immersion in Hispanic culture; and 3) economic affluence leading to social prestige. Like Varela, Burgos grounded his notion of Filipino identity in the

[30] See Nick Joaquin, *Culture and History* (Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2004).

[31] Ruth de Llobet, "Luis Rodríguez Varela: Literatura Panfletaria Criollista en los Albores del Liberalismo en Filipinas, 1790-1824," in *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, Año XLIV:88, Lima-Boston (2do semestre de 2018), 131–153 and 147. Translation supplied.

[32] *Ibid*., 133ff.

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cultural fantasy of Hispanophilia which eschewed any idea of revolution or emancipation from Spanish tutelage. On the contrary, Burgos emphasized loyalty and submission to both Church and empire as ultimate markers why their reformist agenda must be viewed favorably. The "Filipino" is one truly hispanized and Christianized—such that away from the Spanish flag, the "Filipino" "will be nothing, and perhaps worse than nothing …."[33]

Yet, while Burgos' notion of "Filipinoness" has a more expanded "inside" than that of Varela, it still effectively differentiated itself against an "outside" composed of the poor and lower-class *indios* and those unchristianized populations within the *Islas Filipinas.* Like Varela's identity politics, Burgos' anti-friar rhetoric merely reproduced the epistemic violence of the racist ideology sustained by the Spanish Empire. Both were therefore united by a discursive complicity that neither challenged the violence of Empire nor strived against the oppression brought about the social, economic, and political order it imposed.

By articulating a Catholic Hispanophilia, Burgos merely perpetuated the ideological continuation of Spanish Imperialism through the glorification of a "Filipino subject-consciousness" divorced from any genuine vision of emancipation. In deferring to imperial power, both Varela and Burgos revealed their reformist discourse as impotent for articulating social justice for the downtrodden and most marginalized. They merely revealed Filipinization as an identity politics that merely articulated their desire to be elite, i.e., to be equal with the *peninsular* class and to enjoy their privileges. As in Varela's elitist discourse, Burgos's construction of Filipino identity clearly excluded the lower-class *indios* and other marginalized ethnic groups who cannot share in their "Filipinoness" (e.g., the Chinese and the savage, mountain tribes).

Such inescapable cognitive failure merely recreated the same structure of oppression that they purported to resist. In the years surrounding the events of the Cavite Munity of 1872 and the execution of the Gomburza, Burgos' brand of identity politics would find itself reincarnated in the *ilustrado* nationalism by Jose Rizal and his fellow propagandists. As we shall see, Rizal's pursuit of the same identity politics inescapably contaminated ilustrado nationalist discourse with the negative violence (effects or evils) of Spanish colonial power.

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[33] Jose Apolonio Burgos, "To the Nation," trans. by John Schumacher, in *Philippine Studies*, 54:2 (2006), 168–209 and 196. This article is a translation of the original 1864 document "*A la nación*" that appeared in *La America*, VIII:17 (12 September 1864), 11–13.

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Translating Colonial Oppression

In Rizal's ilustrado nationalism, we see the full circling back of the epistemic violence of Spanish colonialism. If there is an undeniable intellectual legacy linking Burgos to Rizal, and from the *ilustrados* to the 1896 Philippine revolutionaries, then what we see in Rizal's understanding of Filipinoness was a repetition of the same obstinate Hispanophilia that both Varela and Burgos espoused. Like them, he conceived of a "social inside" that must be separated from an "excluded outside" based on stringent criteria of national belonging.

Following Burgos, Rizal displaced "Filipinoness" from its merely creole referent to encompass the natives—especially the wealthy and elite *principalia*—who can be united through a common legal and political representation. However, the *ilustrado* fixation on the cultural fantasy of Hispanophilia (language, education, wealth, and culture) as basis for their social inside prevented majority of the colonized natives from inclusion within the fiction of Filipinoness. This can be seen in the way the *ilustrados* looked down on the poor, the marginalized, and those who cannot achieve such exalted Hispanicity that it prompted Graciano Lopez Jaena to complain that Europeans are so thoughtless in their failure to realize that "Chinese, chinks, blacks and *Igorots* are not Filipinos."[34] Although Rizal and his cohorts would eventually renege on this blatant racism by claiming that those lowland Christianized natives (e.g., Bikolanos, Ilokanos, Bisaya, Pampanga, Tagalogs, etc.) are "filipinizable," they remained obstinate about the exclusion of the Muslims and the various mountain tribes like the *Agta*, *Dumagats*, from their imagined nation. Simply, only those who can fit into the *ilustrado* brand of Filipinoness can be considered part of the "Filipino nation" and thus, be eligible for the possibility of being Spanish citizens too.

To justify the *ilustrado* restriction of legal and political equality only for a select few, Rizal had recourse to the racial science of his day to claim that the early ancestors of the "Filipinos" were already originally in possession of an "ancient nationality."[35] But the advent of the Spanish colonizers and imposition of their culture destroyed this golden age when ancient *Filipinos* "gradually lost their old traditions and memories, they forgot their writings,

[34] Graciano Lopez Jaena, *Diskursos y Articulos Varios* (*Selected Speeches and Articles*) (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1951), 171, cited in Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Tracing Origins: Ilustrado Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64:3 (August 2005), 605–637.

[35] See Jose Rizal, "A Reply to Don Isabelo de los Reyes," in *La Solidaridad*, II:42 (31 October 1890), 505–507. Cesar Adib Majul speaks of "ancient nationality" instead of the word "civilization" in his short monograph about Rizal's work on Morga. See Cesar Adib Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation* (Diliman, Q.C.: Department of Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 1959), 10–12.

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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."[36] Due this, these proud ancient ancestors, a once glorious race, were reduced into servile work, economic dependence and passive believing:[37] "… 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."[38]

Just who these ancestors were, however, was a more difficult question to answer. Initially, Rizal asserted that not all races in the Philippines were equal in terms of culture and capacity for [European] civilization.[39] For this reason, he made a distinction between those "civilized Filipinos" [*los Filipinos civilizados*] and the "mountain tribes" [*los tribus montañesas*]. The former accepted conversion into Catholicism hence showing greater capacity for civilization, while the latter resisted, thus showing barbarity and cultural backwardness. He deliberately excluded the first wave inhabitants called Negritos or the *Aetas* whom he believed to be primitive and are incapable of, or "beyond the reach of civilization,"[40] and the second wave of invading Malays who eventually intermarried with the Negritos and settled into the mountains.

For Rizal and the other *ilustrados*, it was only the third wave of Malays who settled in the lowlands and who converted into Catholicism that can be considered as "real" Filipino ancestors. Belonging to the Malay race,[41] these "hispanized lowlanders" possess "a higher civilization and milder morals" as opposed to the ancestors of the mountain tribes. This third wave included the hispanized and Catholicized lowland populations of Luzon and the Visayas but excluding that of Mindanao.[42] To these groups belong the ancestors of the *Tagalogs, Bicolanos, Pampanguenos, Bisaya, Ilokanos, Cagayanos, Pangasinans* and other lowland Christianized groups, which were collectively

[36] Jose Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," in *La Solidaridad*, 1:377–379 and 377 (30 September 1889). The concluding part is located in *La Solidaridad*, 2:31–39 (1 February 1890).

[37] See 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* (Paris: Garnier, 1890), 40ff.

[38] Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," 377.

[39] Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 612.

[40] *Ibid*., 613.

[41] Following Morga's assumption that the "people of Manila and its surroundings were not natives of the island of [Luzon] … [but] Malayan natives …." (Rizal, *Events*, 258–259; quoted in Aguilar, 618) Rizal would eventually claim that these ancestors were originally from the island of Sumatra [in modern Indonesia]. See *Ibid*.

[42] See Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 616–617.

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called "*indio*s Filipinos"[43] by the *ilustrados*. Eventually though, Rizal would transmogrify this collective into "pure" *indio*s[44] whose meaning was "bounded and restricted."[45] Constructed in a nationalist fashion, the word "*indio*" only applied to those docile natives who have opened themselves to Catholic conversion and Spanish civilization. This way, Rizal and the other *ilustrados* were able to limit the extension of the word "*indio*" to those lowland Catholicized "Malays" whose majority status gave them the exclusive right to be *filipinized* or to be called "Filipinos." It is only to this last group that Rizal restricts the privilege of Filipinization as a process to determine those who can be included in the *ilustrado* imagination of what a modern Philippine nation is and thus also enjoy the full benefits of Spanish citizenship. This nativist exclusivism, which echoes the general *ilustrado* sentiment by Marcelo del Pilar, Graciano Lopez-Jaena and Antonio Luna, was so clearly adamant when he claimed that the "non-*indio*s" or those savage tribes who cannot be filipinized only constitutes a small and insignificant portion of the peoples living in the Philippine colony.[46] These latter peoples cannot be accorded the "right to the name of Spaniard."[47]

From the above, we can see that while Rizal grounded his identity discourse on Burgos, he also advanced it by relying on two elements: 1) first, the belonging to a "pure Malay Race"; and 2) openness of the same lowlanders to civilization, viz., Catholic conversion and Spanish colonization. In so doing, Rizal created the basis for a nativist racial exclusivism to determine who can be demographically included within the social and political *inside* of the then nascent Filipino nation. This exclusivism allowed Rizal to separate the "pure *indios*" from the non-Christian tribes who are uncivilizable and therefore cannot be filipinized. Simply put, only the *indios* (i.e., lowland Catholicized natives) can be made Filipinos. As Filomeno Aguilar Jr. succinctly summarizes it, the word

> "Filipino" stood for the internally superior and dominant "race" led by an "enlightened class," whose members, although charged as inferior by racist outsiders, were equal to Europeans in their being civilized and civilizable, deserving liberty and indeed their own independent nation.[48]

[43] *Ibid*., 618.
[44] See *Ibid*., 626.
[45] *Ibid*., 619.
[46] See Rizal, *Events*, xvii.
[47] *Ibid*., 134. Note 121.
[48] Rizal, *Events*, 631.

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In this vein, what we see in Rizal's nationalist discourse is a dialectical movement that traces the idea of *who or what a Filipino is* from its being 1) first, an appropriated social class of *naturales* (i.e., a native is defined as anyone born in the *Islas Filipinas* regardless of ethnic or racial stock totally disregarding its creole referent); to its 2) second, socio-political and legalistic meaning in the *ilustrado* construction of the Filipino as a "Spanish citizen" too; and ultimately, 3) to his mythological grounding of the concept of Filipino identity in the scientific concept of the Filipino race [*la raza filipina*]. It is this last reduction of the Filipino as a race, in which he argues for a pure and sacrosanct origin that essentially completes Rizal's theorization of what it means to be a Filipino. In Rizal's mind, the recourse to ethnological science would give the necessary rational ground for a secure ontology of Filipino identity whilst securing his privileged position as the chief architect of the then nascent nationalist movement.

How, then, should we assess the status of colonial emancipation from the perspective of Rizal's nationalist construction of history and discourse on Filipino national identity?

From the above, it has become clear that Rizal utilization of Burgos' proto nationalism as a ground for his own conception of Filipino nationalism and identity reveals that he also partook of the same biases and prejudices. Like Burgos, he also grounded his idea of Filipino identity on a Hispanophilia that effectively marked a *social inside* based on European racial superiority against an excluded *social outside*—considered as the "internal others" of the nation—comprised of the Moros and mountain tribes who cannot share in this racial unity. This appropriation of Eurocentrism was evident in the way he insisted on the myth of a "pure Malay race" as a basis for a purist nativist understanding of national belonging.

To solidify his argument, he accepted the biological premise that there are undeniable differences between human brains such that a hierarchy among the races is justified. This recourse to biologism constituted a striking paradox in Rizal's nationalist mythmaking. On one hand, Rizal's belief in equality among peoples was contradicted by his admission that the *indio's* "*poco capacidad*" (low capacity) or "*inteligencia limitada*" (limited intelligence) can be lifted so that they can somehow be included into the nationalist fantasy of Hispanophilia. Those non-Christian *indios* (internal others)[49] can also be civilized and thus, by nationalist inclusion, be part of their imagined modern Philippine nation. For the scholar Ramon Guilllermo, this clearly means that

[49] That is, those mountain tribes indigenous to the colony who share the geography of Spanish colonial *Filipinas* but are not considered part of the *ilustrado* imagined modern nation.

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Rizal unwittingly accepted the legitimacy of the racial hierarchies which he was trying to dismantle.[50]

On the other hand, Rizal's conception of the "Filipino" as a racial category grounded in the myth of a pre-Hispanic ancient civilization functioned as a privileged basis for asserting ilustrado superiority over "non-indio" populations—such as the Chinese, Moros, and the diverse communities later homogenized as *Lumads*—who were never intended to be incorporated into the imagined community of the modern Philippine nation. This coherent ilustrado elitism did not rupture the epistemic violence of the imperial project so much as it translated it into the racial logic of nationalist mythmaking. By positioning the modern Philippine nation as the sole legitimate heir to empire, Rizal and his fellow ilustrados reproduced imperial hierarchies under the guise of anti-colonial emancipation. Their nationalism thus emerges as a transmogrified continuation of imperial racist ideology and colonial domination—an obstinate racism that even led Rizal to reduce these excluded populations to mere quantitative insignificance.[51]

This double bind—advocating human dignity and equality while simultaneously seeking to reclaim colonial privilege as the new stewards of a Hispanized *Filipinas* transformed into a modern nation—constituted the precise translation of Spanish colonial oppression into ilustrado nationalist rhetoric. Philippine nationalist ideology, in modeling itself after the image of Spanish imperial power, inevitably carried with it the very specters it sought to exorcise.

Conclusion

If there is any virtue in applying deconstruction to the analysis of modern Philippine nationalism and its history, it lies in Jacques Derrida's caution against the simplistic identification of nationalist struggles with genuine emancipation. The concepts of indigeneity and the people, often central to nationalist movements, remain entangled within the very Eurocentrism they seek to resist. Thus, nationalist emancipation, through its own autoimmune process, risks becoming another form of *enslavement*—ironically, one that may equally and paradoxically be called "liberation."[52]

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[50] See Ramon Guillermo, "The Problem of *Indio* Inferiority in Science: Rizal's Two Views," in *Philippine Studies*, 59 (December 2011), 483. Guillermo mentions that the letter is dated 4 July 1895 and is found in Jose Rizal, *The Rizal–Blumentritt Correspondence*, Vol. 2 (National Historical Institute, 1992).

[51] Jose Rizal, *Cartas Entre Rizal y el Professor Fernando Blumentritt*, xvii, cited in Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 622.

[52] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 131.

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His apparent indictment of nationalism, as Pheng Cheah[53] would have it, is not without ground. Derrida has always been consistent with his subversion of any system within the history of thought of which European colonialism and the anti-colonial movements it engendered are merely the exemplar binary. Inscribed within the inescapable economy of war, nationalism for Derrida has no future. Its institutionalization as an elite, bourgeois ideology prevents it from partaking of the "messianic structure" that obliges us to hesitate in the name of justice and a certain democracy to-come. It might be well to recall here, that the *messianic,* as differentiated from the *messianism* of religious institutions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is a universal structure within our experience that allows us to encounter the other, as "something that we could not anticipate, expect, fore-have, or fore-see, something that knocks our socks off, that brings us up short and takes our breath away."[54] For Derrida, the technics of nationalism has not allowed us to think of the justice to-come "without killing the future in the name of old frontiers." He cannot be any clearer about this sentiment in *Specters of Marx:*

> Like those of the blood, nationalisms of native soil not only sow hatred, not only commit crimes, they have no future, they promise nothing even if, like stupidity or the unconscious, they hold fast to life.[55]

As we have seen, the deconstruction of nationalism and its history can only be opened up once we have gone beyond its signifying ethnocentric structure. This demands that we look for a new *technics* of freedom, of justice, and of a democracy to-come that must not be reduced to the limitations of a metaphysics of identity that is ultimately underlined by an obstinate ontotheological nationalism.[56] These limits, always already determined by a

[53] Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[54] John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 162.

[55] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 213.

[56] See Jacques Derrida, "Ontotheology of National Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis)," in *Oxford Literary Review*, 4 (1992).

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given natural language[57] and directed towards the teleological[58] achievement of a chosen people's destiny, must be continually disturbed by the "differantial deployment of *tekhnē*, of techno-science or tele-technology" which

> obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, "real time" to "deferred time," effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.[59]

This new technics of freedom should allow us to think of any language (or all languages) as freed from the limitations of nationalist statecraft, i.e., as a bureaucratic apparatus emphasizing the primacy of the state as the principle for the "social monopoly of organized violence, notably in the form of the armies and police."[60] It is thus a technics that would allow languages to become "motherless,"[61] freeing them towards the potentialities

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[57] See Derrida's discussion of what counts as a "natural language" in contradistinction to what is formal and artificial. Within the context of Rene Descartes's decision to write in his native French as opposed to Latin, Derrida outlines the dilemma between what Descartes calls as the natural language, "native or national" and thus "particular and historical," as opposed to what "is in principle universal, ahistorical, pre- or metalinguistic" characteristic of "natural reason." See Jacques Derrida, "If There is Cause to Translate I: Philosophy in its National Language (Toward a "licterature en françois")" in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2,* trans. by Jan Plug et. al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

[58] "A teleological history, as exemplified by Hegel, is a history with a future that is already apparent in its past. This programmatic history, a history that always knows where it is going, is not only chased by historical memory; it also facilitates a memory of the past that can reside in the present and anticipate the future. This kind of history serves historical memory as cohesive circle, giving it access to what has not yet happened but has happened before." Sean Gaston, *Derrida and the Challenge of History* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 227–228.

[59] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 212.

[60] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassell, 1995), 116. Another description from Bookchin can make this idea clearer: "Statecraft consists of operations that engage the state: the exercise of its monopoly of violence, its control of the entire regulative apparatus of society in the form of legal and ordinance-making bodies, and its governance of society by means of professional legislators, armies, police forces, and bureaucracies." *Ibid*., 220.

[61] See Vicente Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016). A "motherless tongue" would refer to the initial condition of impossibility of identifying an originary, primary language into which one may reduce an "identity" since our speech is always already contaminated by the

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that linguistic natality provides. Taking cue from Derrida himself, this requires a deconstruction of language that reveals the im/possibility of the conditions for a purist tongue, or simply, of any monolingualism.

In a performative undoing of the very statement he wishes to affirm, thus, Derrida declares the impossibility of linguistic ownership by declaring two contradictory statements: 1) "*Yes, I only have one language;*"[62] "*We ever only speak one language*;"[63] and 2) "[*Yet*] *it is not mine*;"[64] "*We never only speak one language*."[65] By claiming himself as a monolingual speaker born in Algeria yet with French as mother tongue (his first language being from the colonizer), Derrida doubts "whether we can *ever* call a language our 'own'," and whether an identity can really be grounded "in a geo-political home."[66] Such impossibility reveals that every linguistic moment is always already inscribed within a plethora of inter- and intralingual translation that articulate the play of *différance* (i.e., the spatio-temporalizing movement) as the condition of any speaking/writing.[67] The possibility of bilinguality or of multiple mother tongues, and thus, of linguistic ownership, can therefore only be possible as an act of translation, a transformation that is opened up by the advent of the other, making it free from the ethnocentrism of nationalist discourse. Echoing Derrida, Vicente Rafael writes: "My language is thus one that is already of and from the other."[68]

Within an anti-colonial framework, a new technics of freedom and justice would thus be one that translates linguistic responsibility beyond the limits of nationalist ethnocentrism. This responsibility must be, therefore, "non-religious, in the sense of a positive religion," or "not mythological" or "not national—for beyond even the alliance with a chosen people, there is no nationality or nationalism that is not religious or mythological, let us say 'mystical' in the broad sense."[69] This separation of language from the nation, state, nation-state, race, sex and gender, or what Derrida (commenting on Martin Heidegger's work on Trakl) collectively terms as *Geschlecht*,[70] is what

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foreign/other. He writes: "Whatever I happen to be speaking at the moment is always commingled and contaminated with a whole train of other languages I grew up speaking and hearing in the past and to this very day." *Ibid*., 5.

[62] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other: Or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

[63] *Ibid*., 7.

[64] *Ibid*., 2.

[65] *Ibid*., 7.

[66] Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial*, 17.

[67] See Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 5.

[68] Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 8.

[69] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 113.

[70] For a comprehensive understanding of the dictionary senses of this term, see the "Introduction" by David Farrell Krell in *Phantoms of the Other: Four Generations of Derrida's Geschlecht* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).

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allows language to become emancipatory. A particular language is never the property of any given people or a nation because it is never self-contained but rather, always a product of *différance*—only able to come to its own through differentiation from all the others.

A new technics of language is one that allows us to be cosmopolitan, enabling us to embrace the world beyond our immediate borders. At the same time, it is also what allows us to be forgiving, hospitable, and welcoming to the advent of the Other. It fosters the capacity to return to a singular homecoming—where we welcome the Other in both peace and war, in life and in death—creating a space where what is "to-come" is met with openness and compassion.

This paper concludes by reflecting on the pharmacological potential of tele-technological advancements, particularly in the context of language learning. These technologies offer a remarkable opportunity to explore and acquire new languages through various mobile applications. The experience of learning a foreign language through a mobile app like Duolingo is both intriguing and insightful. While the process of language acquisition through a mobile app may appear trivial—spending only 3–5 minutes a day on basic phrases—one can come to recognize the profound freedom that modern technology provides in this endeavor. Despite the absence of a personal *sensei* (or teacher in Japanese), which makes achieving fluency a formidable challenge, the experience can nonetheless bridge the geographical and cultural distance between the student and the foreign (language and country). Through this technological medium, one can gain more than just linguistic knowledge. It has the potential to open a window into the "other" that is foreign, as a country or nation with deep historical ties to one's own. This connection, facilitated by technology, gestures toward the possibility of *aimance*—a form of friendship that transcends the economy of violence, as Derrida might suggest. It is "an experience of friendship which eludes the distinction between active and passive," where *aimance* becomes a middle voice,[71] embodying the mutuality and complexity of such a bond. In this sense, language learning through technology becomes more than a mere educational tool; it becomes a pathway to understanding, empathy, and a shared experience that defies traditional boundaries. The promise of this engagement is not just linguistic proficiency but a deeper, more intimate connection with the world beyond us.

[71] Derrida writes: "that which lets itself be designated by 'différance' is neither simply active nor simply passive, but announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice, that it speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which lets itself be thought neither as a passion nor as an object of a subject upon an object …." "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 9), cited in Alex Thompson, *Deconstruction and Democracy: Derrida's Politics of Friendship* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 15.

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Coming full circle, how, then, should we translate this form of friendship? Following a Derridean grsture, perhaps the most fitting translation is simple yet profound: *"Come. Hello!"*—an invitation that transcends formalities and welcomes the unknown Other. And perhaps, in another language, this could be rendered even more elegantly, if not more beautifully: *"Konichiwa!"*

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