

## BOOK REVIEW

**Jovito Cariño *Muni:*  
*Paglalayag sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino***

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2018, 164**

*Muni* is a Tagalog word connoting contemplation, reflection, speculation, and introspective wondering. It is an exploration of thoughts and a practice of letting ideas wander imaginatively. Jovito Cariño's *Muni: Paglalayag sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino* does exactly what its title suggest, it is a collection of essays exploring his philosophical thoughts on contemporary Filipino issues. The book features 10 essays written in Filipino with the English version of the foreword from Paolo Bolaños and Cariño's essay "Re-thinking Filipino Philosophy with Gilles Deleuze." Readers will find Cariño's collection of essays refreshing as it moves beyond the usual problematisation of the concept of Filipino identity which we find in other authors such as Emerita Quito, Leonardo Mercado, Florentino Timbreza, and Rolando Gripaldo. The language of the essays was well balanced, on the one hand, Filipino readers will find the language relaxed, flowing, and in more instances than one humorous and witty. On the other hand, readers looking for a depth of content in philosophical scholarship will find themselves sated by the rigour observed in the documentation of Cariño's essays. While his essays do not necessarily focus on the exposition of a specific philosopher or theory, Cariño extensively confers to philosophers from a wide variety of disciplines such as Thomas Aquinas, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre, Herbert Marcuse, just to name a few. The ideas that are brought to the table by these thinkers are not simply there to add a perspective to the issues that Cariño tackles in his essays. These ideas are also interrogated and expanded in the context of Filipino issues.

The ten essays contain convergent themes that resonate philosophical issues in the Philippines. Cariño's approach to these essays is dialectical, not only does he attempt to look at issues using the lenses of philosophy, he also interrogates philosophy through the perspective of a Filipino. In his essay "Ang Dialektiko ng Pilosopiyang Filipino" (The dialectic of Filipino philosophy), he confronts the issue of Filipino identity and how it is belaboured by Filipino philosophers as a static and reified construct. Using Adorno's critique of enlightenment and the idea of the non-identical, Cariño (2019,13) argues that Filipino identity is "not a concept but a living truth that changes

and moves along with history.” (“Sa labas, ang Filipino ay hindi isang konsepto kundi isang buhay na katotohanan na gumagalaw at nagbabago kasabay ng kasaysayan.”) The essay also argues that the Filipino identity is not ought to be a product of mere nationalism that shuns external ideas, Filipino identity is what we develop from the constant engagement from the inside and the outside. In contrast to the perspectives offered by Quito by extracting “grassroots” native philosophical ideas akin to how Indians would identify to Hinduism and Buddhism, Cariño opines that this pursuit is no longer productive. This problem of identity is articulated further in his essay “Ang Larawan ng Migrante bilang Filipino” (The Portrait of the Migrant as a Filipino). In this essay, he reflects on the migrant condition of Filipinos whose identities are displaced as they struggle to survive in a world of eroded modernity. Through his reading of works such as Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is In The Heart*, Jose Dalisay’s *Soledad’s Sister*, and Miguel Syjuco’s *Ilustrado*, Cariño notes the erosion of the utopian visions of modernity as these stories depict the despair, disappointment, dissociation, and disconnection of Filipino migrants in their pursuit of economic stability and success. Cariño points out that our identity is not merely a matter of continuing or maintaining our historicity, it is also a matter of realising what we have lost and our struggle to rebuild ourselves.

The third essay, “Arkitektura at Globalisasyon sa Pilipinas” (Architecture and Globalisation in the Philippines), reflects on the cultural and philosophical problems of urbanisation in the Philippines. Cariño looks at the possibility of constructing a critical theory of culture through Gilles Deleuze’s concept of deterritorialization of spaces where the elements of nature become displaced resulting in catastrophes of nature. He notes that with the proliferation of urbanization driven by economic agenda, the spaces in the Philippines are rapidly displacing the environment. The role of architecture must be subject to the scrutiny as it begins to pursue economic agendas instead of its artistic vision.

“Kurso at Diskurso ng Etika sa Pilipinas” (Course and Discourse of Ethics in the Philippines) is Cariño’s take on the state of ethics courses in the Philippines. He covers the changes on how ethics is taught in schools and universities as it experienced reforms in education such as the shift from a religious-based approach to specialised iterations such as bioethics, business ethics, media ethics, and professional ethics. Cariño argues that this proclivity towards specialisation creates a pedagogical tendency to treat ethics as if it were a techne or a manual of operation that separates the discourse on human nature from ethical issues. Another essay that reflects on the state of education in the Philippines is “Ang Tradisyon at Wika sa Konteksto ng Nagbabagong Pag-uunawa sa Pagkabansa” (The tradition of language in the context of a changing understanding of nationalism). In this essay, Cariño criticizes the discontinuation of Filipino language courses in higher education courses in the Philippines. True to the theme of his critique, Cariño argues that the pervasive nature of globalization is gradually eroding the Filipino language due to the demand of foreign employment. What makes this worse is the compliance of the state through the Commission on Higher Education’s (CHED) mandate to enforce the dissolution of Filipino language courses in tertiary courses. What Cariño laments is the quick surrender of the autonomy of education to

the demands of economic forces, as the Filipino language gradually loses its imaginative potential for communication.

The sixth essay is entitled “Diyos at Politika sa Pilipinas: Bakit Nga ba Pabalik-balik ang Multo ng Metapisika?” (God and Politics in the Philippines: Why does the ghost of metaphysics persist in its haunt?). This essay covers the issue of the Reproductive Health Bill and the conflict between the institutions of the Catholic Church and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* religion. In between this conflict, Cariño argues for the necessity of metaphysics insofar as it provides a stable normative foundation for politics. As an alternative to a discourse of power, Cariño proposes a theological metaphysics as an alternative insofar as the theological is ultimately political. The seventh essay entitled “Ang Pilosopiya ng Pagpapakatao ni Santo Tomas Bilang Kabanata ng Pamimilosopiyang Filipino” (The Philosophical Anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas as a Chapter in Filipino Philosophy), is a reaction to F.P.A. Demeterio’s essay on the direction of Filipino Philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Cariño defends the scholastic tradition of philosophy in the Philippines and argues that the foundation of philosophy in the Philippines is rooted in the discourse brought by scholasticism. The eighth essay is on an alternative hermeneutic involved in the reading of Marx and Thomas Aquinas through Alasdair MacIntyre’s rationality of traditions. Cariño entitled this essay as “Alternatibong Pagbasa kay Tomas ng Aquino at Karl Marx” (An alternative Reading of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Marx). The resulting discourse for Cariño is one that can provide an alternative to modernity’s extremes. In this sense, Cariño believes that despite being contrary theories, Thomas Aquinas and Marx’s reading in MacIntyre’s hermeneutic can provide a humanistic confrontation of modernity’s excesses.

The last two essays are on Cariño’s critique of the EDSA phenomenon and reconfiguration of Deleuze’s philosophy in the context of Filipino philosophy. “Ang Tagumpay ng EDSA at ang Bangungot ng Demokrasya” (The Triumph of EDSA and the Nightmare of Democracy) is an essay that confronts the attitude of a post-EDSA democracy in the Philippines. Cariño confronts the issue of whether the Philippines is ready for a liberal form of democracy. He argues that there is an issue of dependence rather than independence as Filipinos have the tendency to cater to political groups that only benefit individuals that support such a group. Moreover, there is also a tendency for Filipinos to treat politics as regional affinities which creates a preference for politicians or political views that are aligned with their language and ethnicity. These tendencies sustain the legitimacy of political dynasties, where families and groups of people alternate places in office to retain political power. While the overall tone of the essay seems pessimistic, Cariño emphasises that the importance of EDSA is that it symbolises the possibility that at one point in history, Filipinos were able to converge and unite for a common goal. What is commendable here is that Cariño’s portrayal of EDSA is no longer about the personas in EDSA, instead the focus is on the *people* of EDSA. The last essay is entitled, “Muling Pagsipat sa Pilosopiyang Filipino Gamit si Gilles Deleuze” (Re-thinking Filipino Philosophy with Gilles Deleuze).<sup>2</sup> In this essay Cariño investigates the compatibility of Deleuze’s critique of identity and capitalism as

an appropriate starting point for what I would surmise as Cariño's own iteration of critical theory in the context of the Philippines. At the end of the essay, Cariño's recommendation was to take a transformative effort towards understanding Filipino philosophy as "philosophy becoming Filipino and Filipino becoming philosophy."

Readers who go through the range of motions of Cariño's ideas will find certain affinities with Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of modernity in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) they will also find Cariño's collection of essays rewarding since it reflects on the status of modernity in the Philippine context. On the other hand, readers who appreciated the humanistic tendencies and witticism of Florentino Hornedo's *Pagpapakatao* (2002) will find Cariño's writing style engaging and equally refreshing. This collection of essays is a must-read for philosophers as well as scholars engaged in Philippine studies since this work provides a pioneering effort in ideologies coming from the perspective of a Filipino intellectual.

## NOTES

1. Demeterio. 2013. "Status of and Directions for 'Filipino Philosophy' in Zialcita, Timbreza, Quito, Abulad, Mabaquiao, Gripaldo, and Co." *Pilosophia*, Vol.14, No.2, 185-214.

2. The English version of this essay is also included in the book.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. California: Stanford University Press.
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