

Becoming-Motherless in Vicente Rafael's *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation*

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Abstract In this research, I reconstruct Vicente Rafael's theorization of 'motherless tongues' in *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* using the Deleuzian-Guattarian principle of becoming-minoritarian. I explicate Rafael's theory of motherless tongues as an exemplification of 'becoming-motherless' through the distinction between translation as *war* and translation as *play*. *Motherless tongues* depicts how translation radicalizes language against the arborescent relations and hegemonic knowledge-formations authored by the U.S. Empire. To nuance this theory, I present some concretizations of becoming-motherless cited in the book, namely, the principles of *Filipinized English*, *Vernacular Accents*, and the *Tagalog Slang*. Lastly, I examine whether motherless tongues can overcome its metropolitan or academic configurations to assume an ethico-political stance. Hopefully, these tensions and new frontiers may lead us to a more fluid, inclusive, and critical understanding of becoming-Filipino today.

Keywords motherless Tongues; becoming-motherless; translation as war; translation as play; U.S. Empire

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Introduction

Vicente Rafael's life genealogy backbones the entire *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation*. His childhood is constitutive of a nuanced linguistic landscape that shapes his critical imagination. His mother tongue is reconfigured as an other's tongue—a tongue that does not belong to him. English is neither his primary nor secondary language since it serves as both. Meaning to say, English is his language only because it originates from and belongs to someone else (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 2). This linguistic nomadism resembles Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming-Greek." Becoming-Greek entails a creative process wherein one becomes a Greek philosopher in a time when becoming Greek is already an impossibility; hence, a becoming a nomad or a becoming neither Greek nor non-Greek.¹

Becoming-Greek is a variant of the principle of becoming-minoritarian. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorize the principle of "becoming-minoritarian" as a principle operating between majoritarian and minoritarian politics. Becoming-minoritarian "emancipates the subaltern concepts and entities from the molar line's territorializing characteristic and the molecular line's highly polymorphous appearance. Additionally, becoming-minoritarian abrades the minoritarian to the majoritarian to extinguish the latter's rigid fortifications and structures and the former's subaltern frontiers. Similarly, it differentializes the minoritarian and the majoritarian through interminable deterritorialization" (Reyes 137).

Through becoming-minoritarian, the striated and smooth spaces undergo immanent re-combination. Every time one space is transmuted into another, both retain something in its nature. When something is retained, there exists between the rigid striated and the fuzzy smooth spaces. Although the sea originally symbolizes smooth space, it can also be illustrated as a preliminary effort to striate the land with fixed routes, constant directions, and relative movements (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 387). In the past, the U.S.A. and Spain, for example, were known for cunningly optimizing the State apparatus' power to striate the sea and airspace as they navigated various seas across the globe as a preface to their territorial expansions. Unpredictably, their fleets in being produce results beyond the conventional or determined boundaries of the striated sea. One of the consequences is the molecular transformations in people's linguistic practices that allow them to

1 For a comprehensive discussion of becoming-Greek, see Rodolphe Gasché. *Geophilosophy: On Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's What is Philosophy?*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014, xi.

explore and employ different societal codifications critically. During the American colonization of the Philippines, the hegemonic instrumentalization of translation and the English language likewise portrays the relativization of the striated State apparatus that further crafted smooth spaces. Inevitably, it has ignited nationalist discourses and struggles and more importantly, has produced linguistic subversions that challenged the colonial grain. These forms of becoming-minoritarian dynamically move between segments and thresholds toward unmapped destinations.

Nomadic thinking appeals to becoming-minoritarian by virtue of its capability of fashioning lines of becoming that dismantles striated spaces or arborescent structures, such as the State apparatus and contemporary capitalism. Becoming-minoritarian maintains an ethics of prudence or moderation because it resembles a rhizomatic line between the line of rigid segments and the line of absolute deterritorialization.¹ Practically, the said middle existence assumes the role of being a “little alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal, a little guerilla” (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 157-158) just adequate to expand the crack.

Deleuze and Guattari cite Franz Kafka's writings as a lucid epitome of becoming-minoritarian in literature. Although a Czech, his use of a major language (German) immanently subverts the German language and culture, which further results in the crafting of novel identities and lines of becoming: “It is not a question of speaking a language as if one was a foreigner, it is a question of being a foreigner to one's own language” (Deleuze and Parnet *Dialogues* 59). Like Jose Rizal's *El Filibusterismo* and *Noli Me Tangere*, Kafka's writings disturbed the equilibrium of the German tradition, which prompted “the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority cut off from the masses” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16).

As a neocolony of the United States of America, furthermore, English assumed a hegemonic value in the Filipinos' lives. Paradoxically, in an archipelago of vernacular languages, a second language (English) learned in schools bridged the inter-subjective gap among Filipinos. Consequently, the usage of the Spanish language everywhere vanished. At this point, it is vital to note that these languages are secondary-languages-turned-primary and, as such, have overridden the vernacular. During the American colonization era, both the Spanish and the vernacular languages were equated with the church and oligarchy, as well as with illiteracy and mediocrity, respectively. However, the imposition of the verbal utilization of English encountered a creative tension with regional linguistic

1 See Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnett, *Dialogues II*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Athlone Press, 1987, 138.

cultures. As a result, English was Filipinized, spoken in various vernacular accents, and revolutionized through the Tagalog Slang.

My primary objective in this article is to reconstruct Vicente Rafael's theorization of "motherless tongues" in *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* using the Deleuzo-Guattarian principle of becoming-minoritarian. To nuance this theory, I present some concretizations of becoming-motherless, namely, the principles of Filipinized English, Vernacular Accents, and the Tagalog Slang. The novel possibilities and tensions that these forms of becoming-minoritarian may hopefully engender a more protean, conjunctive, and self-reflexive theorization of becoming-Filipino today.

The Becoming-Motherless of Language via Translation

In the 1960s, this cultural interplay was also participated by some gay languages incorporated into popular culture and further consolidated with some vernaculars that pushed the limits of the Spanish and English languages. Therefore, "motherless tongues" entails the non-existence of a singular mother tongue. As such, talking about a particular tongue is identical to perceiving it as an assemblage of inter- and intra-linguistic mother tongues conditioned by cultural, economic, and political circumstances.

Motherless tongues negates the existence of a universal tongue. In this vein, speaking is always characterized by plurality. In Rafael's words:

Whatever I happen to be speaking at the moment is always comingled and contaminated with a whole train of other languages[...]. Whenever I speak or write in what seems to be coherent English, it is only because I have managed to momentarily repress this history of linguistic pluralism. It is a repression that amounts to an act of translation, transforming a train of possible expressions into a grammatically correct and stylistically recognizable discourse. For to inhabit a multiple mother tongues means that speaking any one language entails translating not only across different languages but also within the same language insofar as they are spoken in different ways in different contexts. (*Motherless Tongues* 5)

Like the Deleuzo-Guattarian theorization of desiring-machines,, motherless tongues does not presuppose a "first" or an overarching principle regulating hierarchical relations. Echoing Guattari in *Chaosophy*, "the fact that the machine is motherless does not speak for a cerebral father, but for a collective full body, the machinic

agency on which the machine sets up its connections and produces its ruptures" (96-97).

Further, inter- and intralingual translation defines the condition of speaking any language in the Philippines and in other countries (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 4). One's language is thus one that is already of and from the other.¹ The utterance of English is an event of linguistic multiplicity. It presupposes a social, assemblagic, open-ended, and dialogical *I*. In fact, it would be unimaginable to perceive language without any relation to a subject—the one who speaks (I) and is spoken to (You). As Emile Benveniste explains in *Problems in General Linguistics*, "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as 'I' in his discourse. Because of this, 'I' posits another person" (224-225). In short, one's identity is derived from external relations and difference, i.e., "drifting, and detouring, always intermediate and interconnected: always addressing, addressed by, and becoming, in turn, a *you*" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 6). The subject/person is a by-product of the critico-reciprocal relationship between these two pronouns, including a multiplicity of other factors. In this vein, the *I* emerges as a subject-in-transition towards becoming-other.

Language is inconceivable without the production of subjectivity and unusable without translation. Like Kafka's minoritarian literatures, it is crucial to know what happens when a Filipino utters the language of the colonial regime (English) while talking to an American public-school teacher: "Does my language continue to speak? What happens to the *I* that says across languages? [...]. And what of the native tongue, if there is one? [...]. How does it continue to speak in the face and space of another language?" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 7) Using the lens of becoming-minoritarian, the translative relation between the *I* and *you* also involves other things and operations that neither belong to them. Rafael calls this the *It* or the very impersonal force of language which underwrites subjectivity-formation and yet stands outside and before it: "The very possibility of transforming and translating I into you and vice versa is thus predicated on this it. Yet it remains fundamentally foreign and untranslatable into the dialogical domain of the person. Exceeding dialogical recognition, it is nonetheless the agency that generates the discursive agents of such recognition" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 204). However, the said minoritarian principle is basically foreign and without linguistic equivalent to the dialogical realm of the subject. Although it eludes dialogical recognition, Rafael emphasizes that the *it* serves as the agency that spawns the agents of such

1 See Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, 21.

recognition. Of course, language precedes subjects and communicative relations. However, despite its precedence, language only becomes communicative or historicized via translation's operative functions and effects, i.e., when personal pronouns are utilized. Likewise, the dialogical relation between the *I* and *you* issues from an impersonal force—the *it* middle principle that, despite exceeding translation, underwrites its effects.

Furthermore, the art of translation is inextricably linked with the “linguistic predicaments of postcolonial nostalgia and nationalist anxieties over authority and authorship” (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 204). Translation's critical engagement with these factors increases its complexities in relation to the antagonistic bearing of vernacular theorization of freedom, the creative play of slang under neocolonial predicaments, the triumphalist discourse of the masses craving for social justice, etc. (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 9).

Although translation was weaponized by the U.S. Empire, minstranslations and untranslatability exist in the interstitial spaces of the linguistic exchange between the colonizer and the colonized—events that can be understood as expressions becoming-minoritarian. In this manner, the histories of translation are incomplete if the narratives of the totalizing rubrics of imperial power is not juxtaposed with what eludes majoritarian codifications and principles—the untranslatable, marginalized, and virtual zones of linguistic multiplicity. But let me clarify that becoming-minoritarian refers to the affects and possibilities fashioned as these subaltern collectivities challenge the majoritarian. It is neither located to any polar opposites because it is perpetually characterized by radical alterity.

Rather than acclimatizing itself with the re-emergence of previously repressed zones, the U.S. imperial power instrumentalized translation to domesticate English viz-a-vis the irreducibility of language. Although the Spanish colonial regime preceded this effort of linguistic instrumentalization by the Americans, it was accomplished through a different infrastructure. In the Spanish period, religious conversion actualized as a consolidation and solidification of the Spaniards' reign over the Filipinos. Catholic faith, has re-defined the notion of authority and submission in our country. More importantly, “it furnished the natives with a language for conceptualizing the limits of colonial and class domination” (Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism* 7).

The U.S. empire's weaponization of language evidently portrays a striated space relativizing its distribution to craft detrimental smooth space. Spanish friars translated some prayers and doctrines into the native's language for they knew that teaching the Spanish language first before converting the people is laborious. In other words,

the missionaries adjusted their language based on the major Filipino vernaculars to inculcate in the people's minds the authority of God and Spain's king. These religious mercenaries perceived translation as a noble conversion of the native's language into a gift coming from God (Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism* 22-32).

Whereas the Spaniards' armament of conquest, conversion, and translation, was Catholicism, the Americans' weapon was education or what is famously known as "Benevolent Assimilation." In other words, education was America's counter-resistance mechanism against the natives. The colonial government built many public schools across the archipelago, where English served as the singular medium of instruction. For this goal of assimilation to bear a legal force, the U.S. passed Act No. 74 in January 1901. The said law established the Bureau of Education which acted as the regulatory institution for the mandatory adoption of English in the colonial education system (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 44-45).

The totalization of the Filipino's language hinders linguistic differences in Philippine society, thereby creating a hierarchy of language from the divine to the secular. Worse, this brand of what Glenn May calls "social engineering" transformed into a cultural domination. Such a predicament inspired Renato Constantino to write his famous essay, "The Miseducation of the Filipinos," in 1959. His essay argues that the reason behind the Philippine society's incessant socio-economic estrangement and politico-culturally impoverishment is its colonial and conscious subservience to the U.S. The more Filipino students were taught and trained to blindly embrace American ideals, the more they became incapable of developing their critical acuity, creativity, and nationalism. Likewise, the knowledge and pedagogy of teaching English entailed the repression of diverse vernacular languages. However, the more vernaculars are universally translated into English, the more Filipinos become dislocated from their historical rootedness and relationship with their archipelagic life-worlds. In other words, rather than promoting historical consciousness and critico-nationalist dissent, American education produced one-dimensional subjects that further strengthened the Empire. Constantino supposes that this phenomenon portrays the demise of Philippine nationalism on one hand and education on the other. The hegemony of English has numbed the people's revolutionary impulse and estranged them from their revolutionary past. Moreover, the totalization of their critical imagination debilitated them when facing the future (Constantino 20-36).

For Rafael, both the projects of the stratification of translation include the mastery of language over others and the standardization of the play of speech (*Motherless Tongues* 9). It can thus be claimed that despite the emancipatory

import of the nationalist struggle led by Constantino, it is likewise guilty of the linguistic blunder initiated by the U.S. empire—the instrumentalization of language that presupposes the dominance of one speech over others. In other words, these cultural engineering projects committed linguistic stratification which confronts the immanent antagonism posed by various minoritarian zones and affects.

However, even though escaping the stratification or instrumentalization seems inevitable, the problem of totalizing translation and language is always faced by its internal propensity of indeterminacy, untranslatability, and insurgency. In my view, the conflict between the majoritarian powers and the minoritarian regions and discourses is the very reason for producing a thousand mothered and motherless tongues. In the context of language's insurgency, translation enables us to operate within the speech act, meta-linguistic operations, and across languages. Such radical aptitude to speak in multiple tongues allows us to treat language as a majoritarian principle on the one hand and minoritarian concept on the other. Through the principle of becoming-minoritarian, the belief in the possibility of a universal translation is identical to betraying other possible translations, which entails the suppression of other voices, affects, and intensities.

Translation as a speech activity can create and re-create society, relations, and the world through the incorporeal transformation of bodies. Consequently, a democratized plane consisting of bodies, movements, and cultures in perpetual conjunctions and becomings, is constructed. These linguistic activities characterize the language of minoritarian literature, i.e., being “affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16) that subsequently leads to new vibrations and stutterings.

The problematization of translation and conversion paved the way for the emergence of nationalist sentiments or consciousness in the cultural, linguistic, and historical domains. Such liberatory possibility presupposes that Filipinos devised ways to creatively domesticate, appropriate, and antagonize anything colonial in-between the complex process of conversion as translation.

Rafael's theory of motherless tongues enunciates the principle of becoming-minoritarian or what I call becoming-motherless. It primarily uses translation as a minoritarian device to critically diagnose colonialism, power-relations, and language, especially in relation to Philippine postcolonial history. Although language and translation bear impersonal and untranslatable features, they were unavoidably weaponized during colonization. Sadly, translation historicizes language as a mouthpiece of majoritarian language and the imperial regime. For the colonized, translation is synonymous with conversion and colonization. The

more it is weaponized, the more it succeeds, and the more its redemptive aspects are marginalized.

Western translation is generally associated with war or conflict. Aside from its etymological origin, translation involves a history of violation and oppression, i.e., the violent elimination and transfer of words and principles from one culture or language to another. For the U.S. Empire, translation is a geopolitical weapon used to assert and fortify its global dominance. Upon its geopoliticization, translation is no longer a mere transfer of meaning. Instead, it transforms into a transmittal identical to meaning-manipulation. One implication is the hierarchization of values that privileges anything American or English.

Similarly, in a capitalist society, language is demoted as a mere device to achieve homogenizing and narcissistic ends, and its capacity to engender the becoming-other of life is desecrated. Its standardization or mastery murders translation. When everything is stratified, the communicative value, linguistic nuances, and the principle of untranslatability are marginalized. Practically, the goal of eradicating all translation is aggravated via the formulation of an automatic translation mechanism. This hegemonic initiative perceives everything as transparent, pornographic, and devoid of alterity or excess. This form of violence may lead to the destruction of the community and our relationship with the Other (Han 22). A theory of translation that seeks the obliteration of all *translation* presupposes that everything can be mechanically translated into a universal medium of communicative exchange (English) and commodity (market economy). Universalizing English demolishes linguistic pluralism and the cultural heterogeneity of other languages.

Against translation as war, Rafael formulates the notion of the *insurgency of language* to highlight that this war on translation can also be repelled in various ways through jokes, pidgins, and tropes. These means are vectors of more speech, writing, and interpretation. More significantly, the insurgency of language is a thriving concept in minoritarian literature. Like Kafka's writings, the more works of literature are written, the more style, possibilities of overcoming, escape, and hope emerge because more translation is conducted. Since language's insurgency and its various conduits open us to a redemptive existence, there is also a critical alternative to translation as war—*translation as play*. Translation as play opens us to the other and initiates an enduring alterity. It is a nomadic principle that delays and deviates from the previous. The utter obliteration of conflicts is impossible; that is why this alternative merely seeks to reformulate translation as war into a brand of indeterminate, perpetual derangement and displacement that averts the coagulation

of any type of power-relations. In this vein, it also depicts the possibility of freedom, for it liberates us from a world of imperial relations that reduce language and translation as means to achieve amplified potency and hegemony towards a world of becoming.

Through becoming-minoritarian, becoming is achieved neither in colonialism (English) or nationalism (vernaculars) but in between these two ideologies. Albeit merely occurring at the fissures of both ideologies, such initiative is noteworthy since it gives a glimmer of hope in overcoming the dominance of one speech over the other. In the section “Sonic Monstrosities and the Recalcitrance of the Vernaculars” of *Motherless Tongues*, Rafael narrates how Najeeb Saleeby was fascinated with how the vernaculars resolutely endured the forceful implementation of the use of English in all public schools since an enormous number of Filipinos remained loyal to the vernacular languages (50).

Redemptions Within the Interstices of the Empire

From Culpability to Capability: Filipinized English/Vernacular Accents

During the turbulent years of U.S. colonization, the incarceration of Filipino bodies inside public schools faced a radical adversary. The English language and the vernacular underwent a process of becoming-minoritarian. The Filipinization of English transformed the classroom into a space of perpetual phonetic mutation, cultural interplay, and opened the possibility of academic advancement. On one hand, it enfeebled the stratified/striated structure of English; on the other, it enriched the value and configuration of the vernacular. From the standpoint of becoming-minoritarian, the Filipinization of English likewise expanded the milieu of the English language and freed the vernacular from its myopic nationalist configuration. Of course, it goes without saying that the becoming-minoritarian language through the Filipinization of English is a purely creative and affirmative process. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that not all processes, spaces, and lines that are smooth, dynamic, and free are beneficial. There is always a possibility that a minoritarian activity or line of flight may convert into a line of destruction or retrogression: “we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 474). In addition, it is apparent that on both ideological opposites (colonialism and nationalism), people inevitably experienced a linguistic and cultural betrayal or sonic perversion every time a case of Filipinized English occurs. Therefore, the reconfigured classroom gave the students a daily experience

of incessant transformation, struggle, and contingency.

The becoming-minoritarian of language through the Filipinization of English concretized Rafael's conceptualization of translation as play in the classroom. According to Monroe, "The Filipino child learns to attach meanings to familiar objects and actions that have been named by his teacher in strange sounding words. He listens to the new sounds; he tries to utter them. He hears these strange English words uttered with the familiar Filipino intonation" (Monroe 155, as cited in Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 55). The Filipinized version of English clothed the English language with Malay sound patterns. Creatively, the students effortlessly recognized the vernacular, configuring the materiality of the foreign vocabularies. This moment of becoming perplexed the Americans and led to a *terra incognita*—an excess within the American phonetic system.

Rafael's alternative to translation as war, translation as play, represses neither the foreign nor the local. Rather, translation transfigures into an "alertness to the sound of the first, retracing itself around the appearance of the second" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 55). The playful and radical character of Filipinized English blurred the artificial and hierarchical demarcation between colonial and non-colonial values and introduced novel ways of thinking. In its contemporary variant, Philippine English is recognizably English, except that it is infused with creative vocabulary, syntax, and intonation that only Filipinos can decipher correctly, such as *balikbayan box*, *carnapper*, and *salvage*. Philippine English turned out to be indigenized through the addition of vocabulary from native dialects, the adaptation of English words to local needs, and modifications in pronunciation and grammar (Yumul-Florendo 566-571).

The becoming-motherless of language, where translation entails a creative movement, produced a new subjectivity diverse from what the colonizers imagined and manipulated. A minoritarian subjectivity emerges that makes English a foreign tongue to the Americans. The newly fashioned minoritarian subject is characterized by movements "of the speaker moving back and forth between his own and the other's language" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 57). The said description of the dynamic subject resembles what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the nomadic subject/subjectivity not only in *A Thousand Plateaus* but also in its prequel, *Anti-Oedipus*. In the latter, they explicate the kind of subjectivity that emerged from the tension between desiring-production and anti-production—the "schizophrenic." This nomadic subject grips the forces of production and anti-production affirmatively and radically by pushing them to their limits (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 20). Although Rafael's principle of motherless tongues or subjectivity does not directly

focus on the juxtaposition of psychoanalysis, capitalism, and schizoanalysis, he theorizes motherless subject as a by-product of various tensions, improvisations, and relations in the colonial classroom. By virtue of the English language's Filipinization, he claims:

What comes across is neither the meaning of words nor the settled identity of the speakers and the hearer, but rather the sense of the unstable and shifting relationship of language to one another and to their users.... It is one where the vernacular escapes the physiological control of the native body and the pedagogical supervision of the American teacher, smuggling its way into the spaces of English, transforming its sounds, and displacing its referent. (*Motherless Tongues* 57)

Another source of minoritarian redemption for Filipinos during the American colonial regime is the *Vernacular Accents*. Through language's insurgency, vernacular accents offer immanent resistance to the imperial and linguistic system of American colonial education. It subjects the dominant system to the process of becoming-minoritarian. Amidst the utterance of these languages, vernacular accents persist, as they undermine linguistic hegemony because the aesthetic voice of their motherless tongues manifest as we speak our majoritarian languages. Every time a Filipino speaks Filipino, "the origin always comes back in displaced fashion: in the form of an accent. The accent is the trace of an operation—you might think of it as a kind of insurgency—of the first language within the second [...]. They always speak with accents and those accents always betray where they came from. Their accents always reveal another speech or world" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 199).

The vernacular accent exhibits a kind of stuttering in dislodging the existence of a minoritarian language within a majoritarian (Deleuze, *Essays* 109). Vernacular accent exhibits what Deleuze claims as the possibility in writing/literature where saying actualizes as doing. It is the author of the story or the speaker of the word/statement who becomes a stutterer in language, which is tantamount to making the language as such stutter.

A Filipino native who speaks English always speaks with style, i.e., "a non-style and one's language lets an unknown foreign language escape from it, so that one can reach the limit of language itself" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 113). As a style, vernacular accent allows us to speak and translate in another language within a language, to fashion a new world within a pre-existing one. Thus, we are always speaking in motherless tongues, and utterance always involves the dynamic process

of translation. It is only by betraying one tongue over a multiplicity of other tongues that we can make ourselves understood (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 200).

Moreover, the vernacular accent is a middle principle of linguistic becoming. It stays phonetically between the English language and the vernacular. In other words, it stays (in a fleeting fashion) in the middle of the imperial and native accents. The creative stuttering that the vernacular accent produces “makes language grow from the middle, like grass” (Deleuze, *Essays* 11). Increased speech denotes the emergence of more accents, translations, fissures, and stutterings. In fact, even accents are subjected to rhizomatic variations, so they are also perpetually translated like language. Such cultural and linguistic transfiguration dynamically grounds our nomadic and assemblagic subjectivity. Lastly, accents are not only manifestations of translation at work and translation in play. It is also an emblem of a certain kind of resistance to intentionality and manipulation, as well as to the fascist tendency of oneself to master and totalize language, relations, and life (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 201).

From the *Manila Cochero* to Tagalog Slang

Even though some people criticized Filipinized English as a mere “little brown language,” that is, an inchoate mimic of the original, the case of the “Manila Cochero” or coach rider for Rafael, is an exemption. He resembles the nomad that moves rhizomatically in all the major and minor streets, conversations, and life in the city. The Manila Cochero, as the city’s “master of the profane,” resides in spaces betwixt and between the school and the native’s home (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 58). More importantly, he operates in the city’s geographic, linguistic, and cultural interstices. This is the reason why he was able to extend the expression of becoming-minoritarian outside the walls of the classroom. In *Motherless Tongues*, Rafael explains:

He no doubt would have a place to call home and perhaps would have one or two years of schooling. But his works situates him in between and at the boundaries of the two places.... he moves between the affective hold of the mother tongue, and the war of translation waged daily in the school [...]. He is outside the authority of the school and the maternal conventions of home, he is there to speak in ways that would be intolerable in either place [...]. The cochero’s linguistic freedom opens up certain expressive and historical possibilities. (59)

Rafael cites Nick Joaquin, the 1976 National Artist for Literature, as one of the

best personifications of the Manila cochero. Primarily, Joaquin perceived himself as neither a disciple of nationalism nor a vanguard of politics. never identified himself as part of the political vanguard. Although from a wealthy origin, he never placed a 38th parallel between himself and the street life-world. He can be seen from “the presidential palace, to political rallies, the boxing ring to reception, for visiting dignitaries. As the editor of various weekly magazines, he spoke with everyone from janitor to typesetters and in 1971 even led a writers’ labor union” (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 59). Joaquin reminds us of the radical psychoanalysts and activist Guattari. He travelled to different places and countries like Brazil to immerse with the people and help them to organize 'subject groups' through the Worker's Party capable of destabilizing several manifestations of domination in Brazilian society (Guattari and Rolnik *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*). Like Guattari, Joaquin was an omnivore of variegated spaces, resources, and causes.

Whereas Constantino’s “The Miseducation of the Filipino” was a critical and pessimistic essay about U.S. imperialism or English’s hegemony, as well as the debasement of the Filipino mind, Joaquin’s essay, “The Language of the Streets,” was an optimistic opus. Through the *Tagalog Slang*’s valorization of the ordinary, criticisms troubled him, especially the nationalist scholars. What aggravated this censure was his utilization of the American H.L. Mencken’s theorization of slang as the very basis of national literature (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 59). Tagalog slang, as a language of the streets, is not a degenerate kind of speech; that is why it forms a basis of a true national language. According to Joaquin:

In fact, it is the national language, not Filipino, [one that is] a natural growth from below, not a decree from above. This language [...] is the most daring, the most alive, the most used language in the country today [...]. It is being created by the masses, out in the open, to express their lives, to express their times [...]. That’s why it promises to be a great language; because it’s being created for the sheer joy of creating. *Happy-happy lang!* (*Language of the Streets and Other Essays* 4)

The emergence of the Tagalog slang proved that there existed a minoritarian history beyond the panoptical regulation of colonial education. Against the possibility of essentialism or linguistic-colonial hierarchy, Joaquin’s Tagalog slang does not maintain a hierarchy of values or relations like the one imposed by colonial education. Instead, it posits a rhizomatic movement that traverses socio-linguistic boundaries with incredible velocity through mass media, which further capacitates

speakers of different mother tongues to understand each other. While it escapes the colonial grasp of American education/language, it remains indebted to the Spanish culture and the Castilian language. It is undeniable that Spanish colonialism introduced to the Filipinos novel ways and perspectives in agriculture, education, and the geopolitical construction of the Philippine nation. These colonial dividends, critically speaking, are indispensable to the formation of national consciousness. After reconfiguring the natives' identities, Spanish colonizers paradoxically provided an opportunity for Filipinos to respond to the variegated challenges authored by what is "foreign" or "outside" (Joaquin, *Prose and Poems* 275-475). Spanish colonialism, as Hau explains in *Necessary Fictions*, "helped create the possibility of differentiation ... [which] did not merely entail differentiation of the 'Filipino' from the Spaniard, but a differentiation ... based in part on a growing sense of affinity for what is other to Filipinos' which implies a double process of 'Westernization' and 'Asianization'" (103-104).

Meanwhile, Joaquin perceives the Spanish linguistic legacy as intricately and unconsciously embedded into our culture up to the present, such as the vocabularies *silya* [chair], *libro* [book], and *gobierno* [government]. These words were vernacularized over time, which is why, from previously being a language of colonial power or dominion, they procured "the foundation of a national language" (Joaquin, *Language of the Streets* 4). In other words, for Joaquin, the foundation of a national language is not Tagalog *per se*, but rather an assemblage of languages, minoritarian relations, and rhizomatic movements which are open-ended.

Paradoxically speaking, the Tagalog slang is a kind of becoming-Spanish that non-identically resurrects the Spanish language, minus the Spanish colonial regime. In this manner, Spanish converted into a motherless tongue already detached from its original speaker and system of colonization. The becoming-minoritarian of the Spanish language through the Tagalog slang does not establish a novel gradation of values. Instead, it differentialized Spanish and interlaced it with the various configurations of vernacular languages. Additionally, the process of becoming-minoritarian transfigured translation from power or domination to play. The Spanish's foundational importance "lies not in its ability to dominate the vernaculars from above or to serve as their horizon of their reference. Rather, it has to do with its capacity to connect and conjoin them while leaving them distinct. It allows, that is, for the recognition of something held in common among languages without reducing their differences" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 63).¹

1 See also Vicente Rafael. *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Rafael claims that for Joaquin, the Tagalog slang flows through all the vernaculars without acknowledging the source or directive (*Motherless Tongues* 63). In this sense, the Tagalog slang can be considered as a motherless machine, i.e., without a cerebral father acting as its primordial origin. It owes its existence to anonymous tongues and sporadic creativity with the people in the streets. Hence, the formulated status of Tagalog slang (or presumably any other vernacular), Rafael opines, like Spanish necessitates an explanation. Tagalog slang "cannot be seen to form the bedrock on which the national language is built; rather, it is a shifting and protean node linking various languages as in a network. Slang, as the contingent formulation of a common speech, operates in a distributive and decentralized fashion. Hence, it can have only variable and unknown authors, obscure and unverifiable origin, indiscriminate interlocutor, along with uncertain and erratic life span" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 64).

The becoming-motherless of language engenders a becoming-minoritarian of history, which involves differential ways of societal relations. Some of the specific words cited by Joaquin are *stamby* [bum], *genoowine* [anything of great value], *serbis* [paid sex], *T-Y* [thanks], *type* [somebody you are aroused by], *high na high* [very high in drugs], and *jeproks* [hippie, mod, rebel, flamboyant] (Joaquin, *Language of the Streets* 6-21). The molecular inventions and genealogies of these vocabularies only proved that a minoritarian linguistic history and subculture (sex, culture, and leisure) existed alongside the majoritarian discourse incarnated without the anticolonial struggle of the Filipinos, in conjunction with the American and Japanese occupations of the Philippines, the early periods of the new gay culture, history of drug culture, etc. (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 64-65).

Deleuze and Guattari remind us that becoming-minoritarian only seeks to expand all majoritarian standards and codifications in society by subjecting them to perpetual transformation (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 106). Meanwhile, William Connolly, in *Why I Am not a Secularist*, describes the principle of becoming-minoritarian as a politics of becoming that "changes the shape and contour of already entrenched identities, as well" (57). The Tagalog slang terms, as they are incessantly used and reconfigured by people, retain their fragmentary or minoritarian existence. They remain fragments "of larger narratives yet to be written, the traces of social histories that may never be told. The bits and pieces of slang instead suddenly triggering the recollection of the past as fractured, inconclusive moments through a series of linguistic association" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 65). Take the case of the Tagalog term *barkada*. Popular since the 1950s, it is a collective term that refers to a person's closest friends. Its etymology is derived

from the Spanish barko [boat] in relation to the precolonial Tagalog word, *barangay* [boat and village]. Barkada is a microcosm of the manifold possible linguistic associations and the entire network of other words that lead away from these conjunctions—trobol, rambol, diahe, and lespo.

Whereas Constantino and the nationalist anti-colonial struggle substituted American colonial education's war on translation (translation's instrumentalization) into another war on translation (the displacement of the English language with a vernacular-configured national language in the postcolonial classroom), for Rafael, the nationalists just aggravated the linguistic predicament of postcolonial Philippines, if not inadvertently connived with the Americans (Cariño 1-15). Meanwhile, Joaquin diverged by conceptualizing his philosophy of Tagalog slang before the principle of translation as play or becoming-motherless/minoritarian. In this manner, English, like Spanish language, decentralizes itself and frees itself from totalizing the vernaculars' linguistic alterity.

The chain of linguistic associations is made possible by virtue of Tagalog slang's speed, spontaneity, creativity, and more importantly, its nomadic possibilities. Another thing, Tagalog slang's aptitude to critically absorb and decentralize all kinds of language engenders English to be entangled in it, as "when the writer himself is carried away to the point of dispensing with translation altogether" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 68). Take the cases of "Happy-happy lang!" and "No trobol!" (Joaquin, *Language of the Streets* 17). The former means to drink together, especially with your *barkada*; the latter is derived from the former's last word, "lang!" which means, no trouble is going to happen. In these two examples by Joaquin, some English phrases were untranslated, such as the word "lang." In English, it traditionally means *only* or *merely*. However, upon its conjunction with the slang "Happy-happy," its meaning converts into another slang, "no trobol!" In other words, rather than developing a novel hierarchy of linguistic values, the Tagalog slang folded itself based on the English language's spelling and syntax. The minoritarian transition or translation of "*happy*" to "*happy-happy lang!*" attests to the Tagalog slang's capacity to escape the war of and on translation. As Rafael profoundly explains, "In lieu of war, it allows for translation as promiscuous and ongoing play. Veering from the serious responsibility of an officially mandated national language, Joaquin's translation of the language of the streets is underwritten by an ethos of attentiveness to what is new and what passes for new regardless of its provenance or precise meaning" (*Motherless Tongues* 68).

Translation as play is therefore capable of experiencing and reconstructing the nation during the postcolonial period. Since the hierarchy of values and power

is eradicated in the fluid usage and transformation of the Tagalog slang, the 38th parallel between the people of the streets like the *cocheros* and *tinderas*, and the academics, for example, is already non-existent.

The aftermath of the dismantling of English's pedigree over colonial or vernacular languages is a new democratized world where English could possibly or comically appear as a mere derivative of the Tagalog vernacular: "pussy comes from *pusa*, mother hen from *inahen* [...]. What pronoun came first: the Tagalog or the English? [...]. The friction of our *kiskis* undoubtedly sparked kiss, as the laceration of *gasgas* grows bigger in gash, and the dangle of *lulus* swings again in loose, and the sibilance of *sipsip* is scissored in sip [...]. Even the English word for nurse, nanny, is obviously a derivative of *nanay*" (Joaquin, *Language of the Streets* 17-18).

In the world of difference or translation as play, no language, principle, or concept, maintains a hierarchical relation with others since the demarcation between the colonizer and the colonized disappears, and all are transformed into motherless machines. In Rafael's view, the creative possibility that English really originated from the Tagalog must be seen as a "joke [...]" that the vernacular words are neither the semantic equivalents nor the etymological origins of the English. Rather, a series of phonic similarities is made to resonate between the two, loosening the authority of English to delimit the vernacular and vice versa" (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 69). Lastly, the Tagalog slang's dynamic rendition of translation as play entails being attentive and vigilant to all languages' material configurations, especially with their sonic qualities. Translating a fashion Tagalog into English discloses both languages' fleeting kinship.

Conclusion

In this article, I reconstruct Rafael's motherless tongues as a manifestation of becoming-minoritarian—becoming-motherless. In my view, translation can never be totally detached from cultural or historical appropriation, and it will always be assemblagic, protean, and at work. If ever it metamorphoses into a deterritorialized state, it must still be territorialized to assume a historical value. In its territorialized yet fluid form, it incessantly operates in between speeches, pedagogies, and cultures. Minoritarian zones and spaces of indeterminacy can be found in the fissures and tensions every time language is weaponized, and culture is totalized. Ultimately, translation offers us new conceptual and practical apparatuses in understanding and radicalizing language, culture, and social relations. Thus, it provides us opportunities and challenges to transfigure language and the world perpetually.

Although Rafael's becoming-motherless appears to be guilty of overvaluing

the minoritarians, we must not forget that it does not occupy a sedentary location, and the spaces of emancipation it fashion are not geographical. In fact, becoming-motherless is not literally in the middle. It is a fleeting in motion, a ceaseless process moving in between manifold codifications of power and relations, which may further lead us to the twin possibilities of creation and destruction. Subjecting the middle into a state of becoming may anytime accommodate the imperial Other. The fissures the motherless tongues radicalize resemble a space that can easily be infiltrated by global capitalism or its gaseous infrastructures, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the ASEAN Integration Project.

Speaking of the inevitable possibility of destruction, the Filipinization of English and the Tagalog Slang did not guarantee learning among all colonial students and increased appreciation of life among Filipinos. Despite the creative potentials of becoming-motherless, other factors hindered the students and other Filipinos from fully maximizing the creative and revolutionary potentials it offered, such as large-scale economic poverty, distant geographic locations, and cultural differences. Meaning to say, the minoritarian zones and emancipatory possibilities it cultivated and mobilized inside the classroom were not wholly successful in effecting change in the larger society where the other constellations of imperial power operated and where the nationalist sentiments functioned fervently. Although non-teleological, these limitations and inadequacies should likewise subject becoming-motherless itself to self-criticism or reconfiguration. It needs to be diagnosed against the backdrop of an archipelagic Philippine society—an assemblage of heterogeneous materialities, subjectivities, and geographies. In this manner, it is also significant to search and examine the possibility of becoming-motherless/minoritarian outside Manila or Luzon, where other ethnolinguistic and indigenous cultures, as well as emancipatory potentials exist. More importantly, the very idea of using the principle of becoming-minoritarian to a society fundamentally characterized by heterogeneity must also be critically examined.¹

Writ large, motherless tongues should engage with pre-existing scholarship wrestling with a new grammar of translation, resistance, and nationhood against the backdrop of our changing times.² Its revolutionary possibilities are indeed theoretically praiseworthy, for it effectively shows how translation as play can

1 For a more recent problematization of translation as telecommunication, see “The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the EDSA II Uprising (Rafael, *Motherless Tongues* 70-96).

2 See Resil Mojares, *Waiting for Mariang Makiling: Essays in Philippine Cultural History*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002; Epifanio San Juan Jr. *The Radical Tradition in the Philippine Literature*. Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing, 1971.

subvert the numerous power-relations and knowledge-productions under the U.S. Empire. However, its potentialities will merely become futile if isolated from other scholarships and formulations of resistance against the U.S. Empire and other causes of societal predicaments.¹ For example, through Almario's *Sapantahang Wika*, the brevity of Rafael's motherless tongues should not stop us from still pursuing a more rigorous genealogical study of the Filipinos' intellectual and cultural linguistics based on our language (Wika) beyond the Noceda (1-23). Additionally, motherless tongues lacks the ethico-social fervor of the 1896 Revolution—a revolution that sought to confront physical, political, and cultural evils, in pursuit of *magandang kalooban* [beautiful soul] and [meaningful personhood] (Almario 24-25). More importantly, it must be examined in the context of the global capitalist society (the new Empire) concomitant with the noble goal of understanding profoundly the Filipino culture.² Hopefully, these tensions and new frontiers may lead us to a more fluid, inclusive, and critical understanding of becoming-Filipino today.

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1 See E. San Juan jr., *The Radical Tradition in the Philippine Literature*. Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing, 1971; Virgilio Almario, *Sapantahang Wika*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022.

2 See Gonzaga, *Globalization and Becoming-Nation: Subjectivity, Nationhood, and Narrative in the Period of Global Capitalism*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009; Cariño, *Muni: Paglalayag sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino*. Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2018.

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