



BOOK REVIEW

Menelito Mansueto. *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South*. USA: KDP Publishing, 2024.

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Menelito Mansueto's book *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South* begins with an exposition of the Philosophy of Liberation of Enrique Dussell. Dussell has been critical of the Eurocentric model of epistemology. Mansueto writes: "Dussel traces the history of dominant morality from the history of the modern colonial world which was founded on Western exceptionalism, racial discrimination, sexism, patriarchy and gender discrimination, and power differences of societies in Europe, and which was extended over to their power objects – the peripheral colonized world."¹ Mansueto follows the discussion with Miranda Fricker, who according to him identifies two types of epistemic injustice – "Fricker positively identifies two forms of epistemic injustice which she refers to as testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice."²

Mansueto argues in a chapter on Nietzsche that "the will to truth has its origin in a moral imperative "not to deceive" which in turn is grounded upon metaphysics – a morality that is grounded in a faith in metaphysics. However, metaphysics, for Nietzsche, always signifies an explanation of this world, *our* world, by reference to another."³ As a corollary to this, the fourth chapter of the book discusses the Filipino

¹ Menelito Mansueto. *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South*. USA: KDP Publishing, 2024), 16.

² Ibid., 40.

³ Ibid., 46.

value system. The author writes: “Generally, indigenous Filipinos are nature-oriented people. Even up to this day, we would rather attract tourists with natural attractions, such as the Banaue Rice Terraces, the Chocolate Hills, man-made forests, the underground rivers and caves, the pristine white beaches, more than to museums and old stone structures and ruins.”⁴

The book is relevant. It provides context to the work in the peripheries of Philippine society.⁵ In 2002, I was at the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center there below the majestic front range of the Colorado Rockies in Boulder. Father Roy Bourgeois was visiting to discuss the situation at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, where the United States trained the paramilitary commanders for proxy wars in Latin America. With Father Bourgeois were American Indy singer/songwriter David Rovics and political commentator David Barsamian, who is from Boulder and happened to live right behind me in the neighborhood on Walnut Street where he published his syndicated show. Rovics had just produced a song “Coke is the Drink of the Death Squads” commemorating the massacres by paramilitaries supported by the U.S. and corporations, particularly of union leaders in Colombia where competitive conditions of the market morph into the predatory conditions where extraction occurs.

Bourgeois had worked as a priest in the Americas, particularly on challenging U.S. presence and then reporting back to US citizens. He had been jailed numerous times including one in particular. He had organized a protest at Fort Benning, where he climbed into a tree with a beatbox and proceeded to play Archbishop Oscar Romero’s final sermon, the one where while speaking, Romero was gunned down by a US-supported militia. Romero had been increasingly alarmed and outspoken about the conditions in El Salvador and had written a letter to US President Jimmy Carter, asking him to stop sending weapons, which were being used to escalate massacres of almost anyone, particularly indigenous peoples. In another case, in 1989, six Jesuit Priests and their housekeeper and 15-year-old daughter were taken at gunpoint into the courtyard of their home. For this massacre, there has yet to be any major studies, though at the time, in fact, in the same

⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵ Anesito Cutillas. “Indigeneity and the Politics of Recognition: Honneth’s Recognition Theory and its Relevance to the Manobo’s Struggle for Justice.” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* Volume 7 (2021): 123.

year, Czech dissident Vaclav Havel was addressing the U.S. Congress on the Soviet Union. It was these events that led Bourgeois to devote his life to exposing injustices as he continues to do today.

During this time, I was living in Mexico for part of the year and traveling to Veracruz and Chiapas. In Chiapas, I had been invited by the midwives and farmers to teach about molecular biology due to the increased loss of their indigenous knowledge to biotechnology corporations such as Monsanto. While I was there, a professor from the University of Georgia was also at his home. He had been involved in the plunder of the biodiversity and there was much talk of the matter in the city. One matter of note, when visiting Indigenous communities, I was always welcome and people wanted to express their cares and concerns, sometimes they wanted to show pictures of the caskets. In Chiapas, in 1977, there was a massacre at Acteal, and the caskets of the victims were lined up on the ground in the front of the church. While such photos are heartbreaking, the little caskets of children are always difficult to see. All I could do in most cases was listen and then later share what I knew about the DNA molecule. DNA and despoilation, death, and decolonization were part of life, and yet the people remained human, lighthearted, smiling, and determined. That all is a difficult mix to experience and not be changed by it.

Mansueto's words echo the truism that it is in this global milieu that decolonization proceeded, ugly and difficult at times, and successful and momentous at other times, all in a fluctuation back and forth as conditions became somewhat better in places such as mining centers of Cecil Rhodes' and Elon Musk's South Africa or in the forests of the Amazon in Brazil. In the New Millenium, a democratic wave swept across Latin America seeing one of the first Native American leaders of a nation-state in Bolivia, a tremendous leap in the well-being of the poor in Brazil as Ignacio Lula was elected, and then as country after country expelled U.S. military personnel and shutting down bases. Such progress continues today as this process of two-steps forward, one-step back continues and under dire circumstances of the rescue of people sinking into poverty or further into desperation and then critically emergent necessity of salvaging as much of wild nature as is possible as the advancing collapse of the biosphere under the 'weight' of industrial capitalist civilization will affect all species.

The short essays in the final chapter of the book, lifted from the author's philosophical diaries, can be viewed as a way of looking into the reality of everyday life.⁶ There is hope and it can be found in such groups as those in the Mindanao Bioregion of the Philippines and globally with the People of La Via Campesina, who are advancing, or regenerating the Indigenous Model. Such a model, which we call 'Bioregionalist' today involves a few major principles and practices. These involve a security structure of democratic confederation, guaranteed abundance and shared prosperity, ecological sustainability, and the minimization of coercion in society. It is in this direction or an engaged or responsive biorealism that I think real hope lies or what I call an advanced technical bioregional orientation. Such an orientation can and will help to focus on where to direct discovery, invention, and innovation both technically and socially, where I hope that a better emergence can occur. Bioregionalism is the direction for hope, in order to heal the centuries of wounds from European conquest where calls for reparations are nearly absolute and war and retribution always a temptation. Mansueto also tries to advance the works of Romulo Bautista and Christopher Ryan Maboloc by way of the emergence of what is called a revolution from the South, both in politics and now, in philosophy.⁷ The latter, in his Foreword to Mansueto's work, explains the book's moral position and political motive:

Mansueto's work is not just philosophical. It is also about the mind of a revolutionary who loves his country. It should be seen as a way of looking at things beyond the usual bias and perspective of a dominant paradigm. He views reality differently and writes not on the dictates of a central doctrine. He explores the peripheries and gives a voice to those who have been silenced even by those who say that they are the purveyors of truth when in reality, they represent another scheme of a malignant type of hegemony that tries to undermine the views of people whose positions they do not agree with. The truth does not stay in one place,

⁶ Raymundo Pavo. "The Introspective Turn at the Time of Covid-19." *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* Volume 6, Number 2 (2020): 4.

⁷ Christopher Ryan Maboloc. *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*. (Cotabato City: Elzstyle Publishing, 2022), 57.

says Foucault. This book is part of a continuing struggle against a dominant discourse or metanarrative that seeks to kill the truth.⁸

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⁸ Mansueto, *Decolonial Turn in the Philippine South*, 6.