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**Elmo Gonzaga**

**Globalization and Becoming-Nation: Subjectivity, Nationhood and Narrative in the Period of Global Capitalism**

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# Book Reviews

ELMO GONZAGA

## **Globalization and Becoming-Nation: Subjectivity, Nationhood and Narrative in the Period of Global Capitalism**

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2009. 144 pages.

The book argues that nation is obsolete. Although it claims nation is still a worthwhile project, the kind of nation that must be attained in the period of global capitalism should be open, immanent, and dynamic—a nation that is becoming, a nation that operates on the principle of inclusion rather than exclusivity, a nation that is interrogated less in the center than in the boundaries and margins.

There is really nothing new with this proposition since we know that nation is a modernist concept, that there is a sense of artificiality and romanticism involved in its construction specifically when nationhood is articulated and depicted through its laws, performances, history, and so on. But, accordingly, the nation as a modernist concept is limited and it fails to include the marginalized, and more so it fails to account for the myriad forms of performing nationhood as in fiction, consciousness, folklore, jokes, and others. Hence, for this book and the postmodernists, such project perpetuates violence committed by early colonizers against the colonized subjects, systemic and otherwise. Modernism internalizes imperialism with its center-periphery dichotomy, subjugating others, repressing desires, and homogenizing culture. In the end, modernism is fascist.

In order to move away from this kind of constricting framework, the book uses Deleuze and Guattari's tropes of flight and rhizomes as a way not only to understand nationhood but also to read Filipino novels in English such as Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* and Charlson Ong's *An Embarrassment of the Riches*. For the book, therefore, orthodox Marxism is outmoded and as a framework it cannot incorporate alterity or otherness as a nation or the nation as depicted in the novels.

This is where I think the book is making a big claim for the primary reason that Deleuze and Guattari's reading strategy is not far from being Marxist. For one, otherness or alterity has always been part of the dialectical method of Marxism. Otherness, whether in the form of alienation of oneself or as experienced in the repression and subjugation of people, has been a veritable topic of almost all studies that use the Marxist critique. Secondly, the proclivity for Marxist studies to locate such repression in macropolitics or in the state and institutions does not necessarily deny the existence of repression in micropolitics or in cultural formations, performances, fictions, or narratives, the everyday life, submerged communities, and so on. In fact, for Marxism, otherness or alienation is the very condition necessary for confronting contradiction and gaining an understanding of oneself in relation to society. Despite Deleuze and Guattari's renunciation of dialectics, their method of using rhizomes, or a thousand plateaus, stems from their desire to eliminate our fetish for dogmas, concepts that seem to precede thinking itself, autonomous subjectivity, and so on. For them these dogmas, concepts, subjectivity are all immanent or relations of concepts and things that take place in between say an exterior or an interior, strata, folds, or recesses. They believe that there can never be an absolute author, or a definitive book, or a nation. Likewise, at the very core of dialectical thinking, there can never be an absolute synthesis, one that ends history, repression, and struggles.

Dialectical thinking helps us to accept that the nation is always an incomplete project, a work in progress, a becoming. Dialectics enables us to see the nation not only as a performance but also as a pedagogy by which we strategically essentialize our collective experience. Despite our discrepant histories, we still continue to narrate our nation in myths, fictions, dreams, longings, and hopes. The book's disavowal of Marxism is totally unfounded and the use of Deleuze and Guattari as a reading strategy for Philippine literature in English is not totally indispensable.

Lastly, one should also be critical of reading our time, specifically, Philippine experience, in light of postmodernity. Many Filipino writers and

artists have called themselves postmodern and yet have never even bothered to think if we have arrived at our own modernity and what constitutes our modern experience. Alex Callinicos in his book, *Against Postmodernism*, has argued that much of postmodernist aesthetics and sensibilities can be traced back to early modernist projects. Perhaps this fetish for calling and claiming our time and experience as postmodern is a symptom of the unevenness of knowledge production between the West and the rest of the world, such that our scholars, mostly US educated, are quick to reduce everything in light of how the US academia fashion their own experience. Postmodernism is hip and anyone working on grand narratives like imperialism and neocolonialism is outdated. We need to understand that postmodernity, despite its claim to radicalness, can also work against its politics because sometimes the level of engagement can be reduced to a battle of signs, virtual communities, to the interior life or the personal. If one has to take Deleuze seriously, his philosophy is not just a reading strategy to help us formulate a postmodern community or nation but also how we can articulate our own nation in the context of global forces. The challenge therefore for Deleuzian philosophy is how Philippine literature can inform Deleuze and Guattari. Instead of using Deleuze and Guattari to formulate a nation, why not use our becoming-nation as a philosophical addendum to Deleuze and Guattari's works. It will indeed be more exciting to figure out what relation can be derived from Hagedorn's novels and global capitalism, or to the Philosophy of Immanence, or even to scientific rationality and empiricism. It should be the book's ethos to make such relations possible and work. Anyhow, in the Deleuzian sense, nothing is obsolete.

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RUNDELL D. MAREE

## **Ibatan: A Grammatical Sketch of the Language of Babuyan Claro Island**

Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 2007. 410 pages.

*On language documentation.* The Philippines is home to more than a hundred autochthonous languages. The *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (16th edition, edited by Paul M. Lewis; SIL International, 2009;