

Acceptance speech of Dr. Rowena Azada-Palacios

Acceptance Speech, OSWA-SOH 2025
Dr. Rowena Azada-Palacios
Department of Philosophy

I am humbled to accept this year's award for Outstanding Scholarly Work in the School of Humanities. Thank you to Ateneo de Manila, the School of Humanities, and the RCWI team. And congratulations to my fellow nominees and awardees.

In the 1990s, the American public intellectual Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that the world had reached the end of history. Ideological evolution had reached its peak, he declared, and liberal democracy had triumphed.

Thirty years later, we know better. Today, we are witnessing a war in Ukraine, ethnic cleansing in Palestine, the rise of rightwing ethnonationalism across all of the continents, and the growing power of expansionist and fascist discourse reminiscent of previous centuries. The old standard Western account, that countries progress steadily towards a liberal order, no longer corresponds to our world.

Our work as philosophers comprises developing concepts to help make sense of reality. In this case, the old ideas no longer work. We need to stretch our imagination, find new ways to speak across divides, and a new language to help us imagine a peaceful and just future.

The book that you so kindly honor today grew out of a belief that we in the Global South have useful ideas to share with the rest of the world. The dominant Western account pits nationalism, and other particular partialities, against liberalism. It sees communitarian identities as backward and inimical to the smooth workings of just societies. Drawing on Philippine history and anti-colonial thought from the Global South, my work attempts a more nuanced articulation of national identity and nationalist partiality. Then, drawing on the educational work of philosopher Hannah Arendt, I argue that nationalist feelings have not only historically been channels for justice, but they also need not be conceptually opposed to the liberal value of freedom. I end by proposing new justice-oriented ways that we might teach schoolchildren what it means to belong to a nation: what it means, for example, to be Filipino.

There is a personal dimension to this work as well. I wrote this manuscript as a PhD student in the United Kingdom, a place to which I had dragged my husband and children, uprooting them from the only home they had known. I completed it as a Filipino stranded overseas because of the Covid-19 pandemic, listening to news reports of how at least a hundred frontline kababayan healthcare professionals working in British hospitals had sadly succumbed to the virus. While I was writing this work, I was writing about home, the loss of homes, and the way that home is both the place we return to, and the place we carry within us wherever we are.

Several institutions and people made this work possible. I am thankful to my PhD supervisor Paul Standish and my mentors and collaborators at University College London and across the world. I am thankful for the funding I received from the Commission on Higher Education, Ateneo de Manila, the Hockerill Foundation, and Santander UK. I am thankful to the team at Bloomsbury Publishing House. And I am grateful to my Philosophy department colleagues and collaborators across different Philippine universities, especially the Women Doing Philosophy network, for creating the spaces where I am intellectually at home.

Marami pong salamat at magandang hapon sa kanilang lahat!