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**FILIPINO POETHICS: READING THE PHILIPPINES
BEYOND THE OBJECT/SUBJECT DIVIDE**

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Abstract

Fritzie Mae A. de Mata

Filipino Poethics: Reading the Philippines Beyond the Object/Subject Divide

My dissertation posits the necessity of formulating a new way of reading literary texts and other cultural production beyond the frameworks of identity, nationalism, and nation-state. Philippine Studies and Asian American Studies have been traditionally understood through representations of ethnic and national identities. However, approaches to knowledge based on identity limit our understanding of experience because they erase the singularity of each individual's experiences. For instance, my work demonstrates how the Tagalog translation of Jose Rizal's Spanish novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, enables the production of a unified imagining of a Philippine nation and Filipino identity despite the Philippines' complex array of heterogeneous linguistic and cultural identifications. It also examines the intellectual history of Asian American literary studies and how approaches to it remain trapped in identity and identity representation. More importantly, the Philippines refers to Filipinos both in the archipelago and in the diaspora. Their "writings" escape the typical approach to literary studies because they communicate through *balikbayan* boxes (mini-containers filled with imported commodities). Consequently, my study on *balikbayan* boxes and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* develops a mode of reading that veers away from reading literature as representation, a form of identity representation and mediation. Through the act of reading, I conceptualize literary texts as accounts of individuals' lived experience, the choices they make and the motivations behind their

actions. This mode of reading links different lived experiences without flattening out their specificities. I call this mode of reading poethics and it proposes a different kind of politics that is not about identity, the nation, state, or the nation-state, but something that is in the domain of the possible and calls for a type of action oriented towards justice and not legalism.

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Introduction

Filipino Literature: an Essay in Poethics

Not the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger.¹
-Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

This research project started during my last undergraduate year at Berkeley. As a Filipina immigrant in the United States, I wanted to understand why I had to leave my family and friends. What explains the Filipino diaspora and the constant departures of Filipinos to work abroad? I have witnessed the painful separation of my own family and the continuous political and economic upheavals in the Philippines. I wanted to understand the problem and figure out what I can do. My desire to learn more about the Philippines and the global diaspora of Filipinos led me to become a research apprentice in Asian American literature.

As part of a research group working on how to theorize Asian American literature, I compiled and annotated all the Filipino American novels and autobiographies published before 1990. Through my work, I learned that Filipino American literature does not fit into the model of Asian American literature because of its histories of Spanish, Japanese, and American colonization. At the time, I was writing a paper on Wendy Brown's "Specters and Angels: Benjamin and Derrida" for a political theory course. I enjoyed Brown's work to such an extent that my graduate student instructor suggested I read her "Wounded Attachment" essay. I eventually bought and finished the entirety of Brown's *States of Injury*. Thinking through

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008) 224.

Brown's work made me realize that although the creation of the Asian American category, and thus of the establishment of Asian American Studies, is a political necessity, a form of strategic essentialism as Gayatri Spivak calls it, in order to give voice to the other and for the other to be heard, and that the formation of identity politics is a reaction to the unjust marginalization of minorities in the United States, Asian American identity politics further exacerbate divisiveness and essentialism based on a racialized identity. Indeed, I saw how this happened over and over again as I continued my research on Asian American literary studies.

At the level of Asian American Studies, it bothered me how much East Asian (Japanese and Chinese) American literature dominates not only the definition of Asian American Literature but the amount of scholars, scholarship, and texts in the entire field. Filipinos appeared to be marginalized within Asian American literary studies and Asian American Studies as a whole. Through my research, I eventually learned that none of the other individual ethnic groups under the category of Asian American fit perfectly into the Asian American literary model of "claiming America." I realized that we were competing with each other on who gets to be represented and how we were represented under the category of Asian American. Even worse, we were competing against each other because of our marginalization both in the American academy and society at large. To me, the Asian American category seemed divisive, and it could not represent the people it claimed to be representing.

In order for each individual ethnic group under the Asian American category to be represented, these groups always have to assert who they are through their

identity. This process always erases the heterogeneity of experiences within Asian America. This happened at the level of Filipino American literature as well. The Filipino American immigrant experience was always read through Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* because it easily fits into the paradigm of Asian American literature. But Bulosan's novel is not the same as my immigrant experience. I could not relate to Bulosan and how his work was being interpreted through the framework of the U.S. nation state. I saw myself as part of the larger Filipino diaspora, but Asian American literary studies did not address this issue for me at that time. I found Asian American literary studies too focused within the borders of the U.S. nation state. It was always concerned with what makes the text American.

In addition, through my research, I discovered more literary texts written by Filipino Americans and this discovery provoked more questions. How do we determine what counts as Filipino American literature and thus Asian American literature? Do those texts written in English published in the Philippines that talk about the U.S. colonial experience and imperialism count? How about those writings published in the Philippines during the period of American colonization, do we count those too? Do literary works in the Tagalog Filipino language qualify? How about the authors that moved in between the United States and the Philippines, do they meet the criteria to qualify as Asian American? More importantly, since the Filipino American immigrant experience is also part of the global Filipino diaspora, what is the relationship between Filipino American literature and the Filipino diaspora?

I saw the limitations of Asian American literary studies read through the frameworks of identity and the nation state. Most importantly, I realized that identity politics is an entrapment within the very oppressive power structures that strategic essentialism seeks to rupture and dismantle. In order to fight for justice and against our marginalization, we always have to assert ourselves and be recognized through the identity imposed upon us by the state.² Asian Americans always have to be constituted through their identity and nothing more beyond it. I was at an impasse. I wondered if identity is the ultimate mechanism on which we should base our politics. In other words, is identity representation the only terrain in which we can fight against injustice? Is there a way out of this trap? This is how I have come to my topic.

I started this introduction as if I was going to write my intellectual biography but I will not continue in this vein. What I am presenting in these pages is a dissertation and not a thesis. A thesis presupposes that a hypothesis is formulated and then examined in a dialectical way. A dissertation, as I use the term, is what one resorts to when one cannot formulate a hypothesis. A dissertation is an attempt to trace a path, and perhaps even provide a clearing, through existing scholarship, in order to make possible the formulation of future hypotheses. This approach may suggest that the dissertation will be a narrative, but I think it is too early to try to tie up everything I have done in a neat narrative. What I am presenting thus is more like

² Wendy Brown argues that the state's identity based rights and entitlements produce identity and thus identity politics. See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

a small series of vignettes in which I engage with various problems that may eventually lead to a clearing where hypotheses can be formulated. Call it “prolegomena to a clearing.”

The questions I have raised above led me to a successive investigation of different fields of knowledge in order to formulate a new way of reading Filipino literary and cultural production. Historically, Philippine Studies have arisen with the emergence of nationalism and Asian American Studies. My work examines these two strands of knowledge and what may be a way to move beyond the limitations of these two fields in order to develop a new methodological approach to Philippine Studies. This dissertation consists of two parts. The first two chapters look at the institutionalization of knowledge based on identity and how approaches to knowledge based on identity govern our understanding of experience. Frameworks based on identity representation and nationalism have a tendency to abstract and homogenize the heterogeneity of experiences. In other words, they erase the singularity of each individual’s experiences. The last two chapters theorize and propose a mode of reading that goes against the dominant modes of analyzing the Philippines and reading Asian American literature. Instead of taking the nation, national or class consciousness, or even identity representation as a point of departure, this mode of reading focuses on individuals who find themselves in concrete historical situations. This mode of reading veers away from reading literature as a form of representation and conceptualizes it as an individual’s lived experience. I propose a mode of reading that asks the following questions through literature: How do people read the

world and how do they read themselves in that world? How do people fight for their own humanity and the humanity of others?

The Philippines have been primarily studied in the context of nationalism and identity representation mostly through approaches based on, or invoking, Marxism. Due to the Philippines' long history of colonization, scholars mostly analyze the Philippines through the framework of nationalism. Benedict Anderson and his students heavily rely on Jose Rizal and a particular type of nationalism that gets attached to Rizal.³ Anderson's notion of nationalism is largely defined by a conception of the nation state that extends beyond its territorial boundaries.⁴ On the other hand, scholars such as Epifanio San Juan, Jr. focus on a more populist notion of anti-colonial nationalism against American imperialism.⁵ San Juan approaches Philippine history through inclusion and recuperation of the masses. His work romanticizes the masses as the agents of history and as the foundation of an anti-capitalist resistance.⁶ However, emphasis on nationalism often leads to a narrow conceptualization of the Philippines since it focuses on a specific segment of the Philippines—either the elite through Rizal or the “people” (of populism) through San

³ To get a sense of Anderson and his students' take on Philippine Studies, see Filomeno Aguilar Jr., ed., “Ilustrado,” *Philippine Studies Journal* 59:1 (2011) 1-139.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (New York: Verso, 1998) 58-74.

⁵ E. San Juan, Jr., *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishes, Inc., 2000) 1-15.

⁶ E. San Juan, Jr., “Trajectories of the Filipino Diaspora,” *Ethnic Studies Report* 18:2 (2000) 229-238.

Juan's approach. In Philippine Studies, these competing versions of Philippine nationalism often become an issue of representation between the elite and masses.⁷

By contrast, Neferti Tadiar's recent work successfully veers away from identity representation and nationalism. Tadiar's *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* interprets the Philippines as a narrative of material production in the context of globalization.⁸ However, Tadiar's Marxist approach focuses so much on production that her work oftentimes overlooks the very people involved in the process of production. For instance, Tadiar uses figuration as a way to access and recognize the social experience of the marginalized.⁹ Her concept of figuration focuses on recognizing not the marginalized but their productive activity. Her idea of the marginalized refers to what does not get recognized rather than who does not get recognized. Her notion of recognition is not a means of identity representation but instead recognizes the social labor process. Similarly, her notion of the subaltern does not refer to a person or a group of people but instead is focused on time, a category that does not get easily recognized as part of the production process of capital.¹⁰ Focusing on production enables Tadiar to avoid the problem of identity representation. Yet, by doing so, she also ends up neglecting the individuals who makes the production process possible.

⁷ For an analysis of Philippine historiography and the "Great Divide" between the elite and the masses in Philippine history, see Reynaldo Ileto, *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998); Caroline Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (Manila: Ateneo University Press, 2000) 94-132.

⁸ Neferti Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) 1-22.

⁹ Tadiar 17-18.

¹⁰ Tadiar 21.

Approaches to Asian American Studies remain largely about identity and identity representation. In the forty years of the existence of this field, the concept of identity has changed but what has remained constant is how identity representation has been used in institutionalizing and maintaining the field. Identity representation also becomes the means by which Asian American Studies becomes racially segregated within the academy. A recent formalist turn in Asian American literary studies challenges identity based approaches to Asian American literature.¹¹ For example, in “Racial Form,” Colleen Lye utilizes form to theorize an Asian American subject and get away from essentialist definitions of Asian American identity.¹² Scholars also look to form rather than relying on authorial descent to determine what counts as Asian American literature. Instead of understanding Asian American literature as a self-evident representation of Asian Americans, critics now turn to form in order to see how it problematizes identity representations of Asian Americans.¹³ However, the field remains interested in identity and only changed its approaches to identity away from essentialist and nationalist types of reading. The formalist turn in Asian American literary studies is actually not interested in doing away with identity representation. Other recent scholarship also argues that the racialization of Asian Americans produces a distinct Asian American literary form. They take race as a type of aesthetics in which they not only justify the legitimacy of

¹¹ For a collection of essays that touches upon the formalist turn in Asian American literary studies and the move away from understanding the Asian American category as a self-evident representation of Asian Americans, see Susie J. Pak and Elda E. Tsou, eds., *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14:2 (2011).

¹² Colleen Lye, “Racial Form,” *Representations* 110 (2008) 92-101.

¹³ See Colleen Lye, “Reading for Asian American Literature,” *Blackwell Companion to American Literary Studies* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 483-499.

Asian American literature in the U.S. academy, but also in which they anchor their notion of politics. The field remains trapped within issues of identity and identity representation.

This dissertation formulates a new mode of reading Filipino literary and cultural production beyond the typical approaches to Asian American Studies and Philippine Studies. I follow Tadiar's conceptualization of literature as a social fact.¹⁴ Similarly, I look at literature neither for its aesthetic qualities nor as a form of identity representation. However, contrary to Tadiar, my approach transcends the problem of identity representation through a mode of reading. It reads ethnic literature not as a representation, or as a type of identity representation and an imitation of reality, but as accounts of the lived experiences of individuals. It focuses on the individual's actions, the choices they make and the motivations behind their behavior. It also looks at the individual's relationship with others based on responsibility, or how they respond to each other's needs. In this way, texts reveal the experiences that fall out of the larger metaphysical categories of nation, class, and identity. Oftentimes experiences do not quite have a form yet and they cannot be easily labeled or represented. More importantly, individuals cope with everyday life without knowing the structures that objectify them and without recognizing themselves as subjects to these structures.

This mode of reading goes beyond representation because the act of reading allows the reader to establish an ethical relationship with the text. In the course of

¹⁴ Tadiar 16-18.

reading, the reader creates other possible actions beyond what is already inscribed in the text. It opens up the text and reads for freedom instead of reading how we are oppressed. If there are other possibilities, then choice and agency exist. Through this approach, the reader's participation through the act of reading erases not only the subject and object divide, an asymmetrical relationship between the reader and the text, but it also abolishes the distinction between fiction and reality. More importantly, if literary texts are taken as accounts of lived experience, then the literary is not confined to the written text. Thus, I take both literary texts and other types of cultural production as accounts of lived experience.

Since this mode of reading is not about identity, nation-state, or the nation, it is not confined to studying texts within national boundaries. As a result, Asian American literature is not tied to what makes a text recognizably American or Asian, and Asian American literary texts will no longer be racially segregated in the U.S. academy based on identity. In a similar vein, Filipino literary texts are not tied to a national language, an essentialist conception of Filipino identity, or the geographical boundaries of the Philippine nation. It opens up ethnic texts to be read beyond race, or only about race, because they are no longer about identity or merely about our racial oppression. Literature is no longer defined through identity (racial, national, etc.) but on how we read. Literary texts are constantly open and changing, they cannot be read in just one way, because interpretation changes from one reader to another as well as when they are read. There is no dominant way of reading a text since the historical relation between the text and the reader always makes the act of

reading specific. This approach constantly avoids veering towards the dominant, because it is always displaced through the act of reading. It does not gesture towards a model or a universal. In this instance, there is no absolute knowledge.

However, this mode of reading is not only about ethics focused on possibility, freedom, responsibility, and agency. It also consists of the formal aspects or the poetics of the text or cultural object. To be precise, poetics and ethics are entangled with each other, because they are both aspects of the act of reading. Thus, it becomes necessary to create a new term that I call poethics. It pertains to a politics that is not about the nation, state, or the nation-state, but something that is in the domain of the possible and calls for a type of action oriented towards justice and not legalism. Poethics proposes a politics that goes beyond identity politics and it is not confined to only Filipinos. It provides us with a methodological approach to get out of the aporia of identity and identity politics. However, it is important to emphasize that the form in poethics does not pertain to representation, since poethics reads against representation and does not exist at the level of representation.

Chapter **One**, “Institutionalizing Tagalog: Odulio’s Tagalog Translation of Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*,” investigates how the Tagalog translation of Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*, a work of fiction originally written in Spanish, turns the novel into a set of instructions to foster an exclusive type of Filipino identity largely based on nationalism, Jose Rizal, Tagalog, and Ilustrado (the Spanish term for “Enlightened” used by modernizers) identity. This chapter also uncovers the beginnings of the institutionalization of Philippine literature based on Tagalog identity. It examines

how the Tagalog translation of Rizal's novel enables the production of a unified imagining of a Philippine nation and Filipino identity despite the Philippines' complex array of heterogeneous linguistic and cultural identifications. As a result, language filters and narrows down the types of experiences we can access through identity.

My examination of the rise of the Tagalog language as the Philippines' national language not only challenges U.S. based Philippines Studies, which has largely been based on Benedict Anderson's scholarship on nationalism and Jose Rizal, but also questions the dominance of the Tagalog language and identity in the field of Philippine Studies.

Chapter **Two**, "The Institutionalization of Asian American Studies: Setting Boundaries of Inclusion and Exclusion in the U.S. Academy," looks at the intellectual history of Asian American literary studies in the past forty years and how the field has used identity to institutionalize itself in the academy. I argue that the institutionalization of Asian American Studies and its attempt to assimilate itself with the dominant organization of knowledge based on identity in the U.S. academy are the crucial problems of the field today. The field assimilates in several ways from gesturing towards a canon of Asian American literature in its inception to its recent turn to literary form or aesthetics. Both of these approaches are predicated upon identity representation. The field continues to segregate itself based on identity because it uses identity as a means to claim, mark, and delineate space for itself within the academy. Contrary to Wendy Brown's top down approach in

understanding identity production through the state, the Asian American Studies case demonstrates that identity politics is also an issue of space, particularly of segregation. The politics of representation implies a question of space.

Chapter **Three**, “Zeugmatic Formations: *Balikbayan* Boxes and the Filipino Diaspora,” looks at the practice of the Filipino diaspora of sending *balikbayan* boxes or mini containers filled with imported commodities. This chapter addresses the necessity of developing a new way of approaching Filipino literature and culture since the Philippines do not belong only to the Filipinos living in the archipelago but to all the Filipinos in the diaspora. The “writings” in the diaspora also escape the typical approach to literary studies because Filipinos in the diaspora communicate through *balikbayan* boxes and not just through texts.

Instead of being concerned with ontology or the definition of the Filipino diaspora, I am proposing a methodology of how we can better understand the workings of a cultural object with a focus on lived experience. To provide a deeper historical engagement without relying on a Marxist dialectic analysis since this methodology has a tendency to move towards the totalization of experiences, this chapter provides a zeugmatic account of the history of the Filipino diaspora through *balikbayan* boxes. I use zeugma, the ancient rhetorical trope that yokes heterogeneous entities together, in order to show the different kinds of histories from linguistic, economic, to lived experience that explain the practice of *balikbayan* boxes. These are all different histories that are not necessarily synthesized together but they sustain and even coexist with each other. Reading *balikbayan* boxes through zeugma

allows us to access a literary text not as a representation but as the materiality of an individual's lived experience. Contrary to approaching the Philippines through the frameworks of nationalism and nation-state, zeugma connects at least two disparate spaces and link individuals together with their distinct experiences, without flattening out their specificities. Zeugma provides us with a method of reading experience that is inclusive without erasing difference.

Chapter **Four**, "Beyond Representation: Reading Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*," takes one of the most canonical Asian American literary text and reads it beyond representation. *Dogeaters* has often been celebrated and criticized for its representation and misrepresentations of Filipinos and their postcolonial experience. Contrary to the novel's general scholarship, this chapter argues that the novel actually presents a critique of a world trapped in representation. Hagedorn deliberately works with representations to show that the characters in the novel have no agency. She presents an overly determined world in which freedom seems impossible. I, the reader, analyze the form of the novel from its narrative, character, to voice in order to understand it well so I can figure out a way of reading it that provides agency to the characters in the story. This ethical mode of reading reads the text in a way that opens it up for other possibilities. In addition, my participation with the text through the act of reading erases the distinction between fiction and reality. In this way, the text is no longer a form of representation and there is no longer a subject and object divide between the reader and the text. By considering poetics, or the formal aspects of the novel, and ethics that comes through the act of reading it, this chapter theorizes

a politics beyond identity, nation, state, and nation-state. I call this new mode of reading poethics, the entanglement of poetics and ethics, a new mode of reading literary texts based on freedom, responsibility, and agency.

What then is literature? My work posits that what makes a text literary are the following: the lived experience of individuals and how we read for their lived experiences. Literariness is not only a property of the text itself but also the act of reading, the relation between the text and the reader, and the historicity of that relation. My work does not argue for what makes literature distinct from other disciplines or what makes it unique as an object of analysis, because to do so is to continue to overlook the artificiality and fictions of the organization of knowledge, to attempt to justify its institutional existence based on differential value.

Chapter 1

Institutionalizing Tagalog: Odulio's Tagalog Translation of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*

Jose Rizal, a Chinese mestizo, comes from a prominent, wealthy, and educated family in the Tagalog province of Laguna. His family was a tenant of a considerable amount of land owned by Dominicans.¹⁵ Several of his family members held both important and minor government posts. His paternal grandfather had been a *governadorcillo* several times and some of his relatives consisted of lawyers and priests. He attended the Jesuit Ateneo, the Dominican University of Santo Tomas, and eventually went to Europe to continue his studies. While abroad, he became involved with the Propaganda Movement of the 1880s and early 1890s. The movement was composed of university educated young men from mostly the middle-class with various linguistic backgrounds.¹⁶ Most of them spoke the local vernaculars such as Tagalog, Ilocano, and Ilongo as their first language. They were *indios* (natives), *mestizos* (mixed race of *indio* either with Spanish or Chinese), and *criollos* (Spaniard born in the Philippines). They became known as *ilustrado* or enlightened in Spanish. However, these *ilustrados* used this term differently. They used it as a way to recognize a Philippine identity, since at this time, there was no recognition of the Filipino reality and experience especially from Spain.

¹⁵ John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Propaganda Movement 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) 33.

¹⁶ Vicente L. Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 18.

The ilustrados published writings advocating for reforms. Their activities were primarily based in Spain with ties to Manila and other surrounding areas.¹⁷ They aimed for political representation but not independence from Spain: “Their initial appeal was not for the abolition of colonial rule but for its reformation in ways that would expand the limits of citizenship and political representation. The first generation of nationalists thus initially sought not separation but recognition from the motherland.”¹⁸ They also wanted the assimilation of the Philippine colony as a province of Spain and the restoration of Filipino representation in the Spanish parliament.¹⁹ In addition, Vicente Rafael claims that since the ilustrados were not quite indio, Chinese, or Spanish, they wanted to be recognized as both “Filipinos” and “Spanish patriots.”²⁰ The ilustrados, whom Rafael calls the first generation of nationalists, desired political recognition from Spain based on identity representation. Their nationalism was predicated upon Spain’s recognition of them as a political entity based on their identity. It was a nationalism based on external recognition. However, the category Filipino at this historical moment only referred to Spaniards born in the Philippines. Therefore, the ilustrados demanded recognition based on an identity that was not quite yet fixed as “Filipino.” In this way, they both challenged and redefined the meanings of the category Filipino. Eventually, Rizal’s novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* would not only present but would also become the

¹⁷ Rafael 18.

¹⁸ Rafael 19.

¹⁹ Rafael 18.

²⁰ Rafael 18.

basis of a Filipino experience in which Filipino identity can be taken together as a whole and be recognized as Filipino.

Most importantly, the ilustrados wanted to free the state from the hold of the Catholic church. They were mostly anti-friar (the powerful religious orders) and even anti-clerical or anti-Catholic.²¹ As Rafael points out, the Spanish missionaries played a significant role in solidifying the Spanish empire in the Philippines.²² The state was able to consolidate its control of the Philippines because of the missionaries stationed in local parishes all over the colony.²³ In comparison to colonial officials who stayed briefly and were primarily isolated from the natives, the friars stayed longer and became part of the natives' every day life. As a result, the friars held enormous power over the colony that often exceeded the government of both the colony and the mother country.²⁴ The ilustrados further perceived the friars as their main enemy because they saw them as an impediment to modernity for disallowing the widespread dispersion of Castilian:

They had long blocked the teaching of Castilian to the masses in the interest of guarding their own authority. Their steadfast opposition to the widespread teaching of Castilian kept the colony from progressing. Cast as figures opposed to modernity, the Spanish clergy became the most significant target of ilustrado enmity. In their inordinate influence over the state and other local practices, the friars were seen to stand in the way of "enlightenment,"

²¹ John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Making of a Nation: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Filipino Nationalism* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) 23.

²² Rafael 22-23.

²³ Rafael 22-23.

²⁴ Rafael 22-23.

imagined to consist of extended contact and sustained exchanges with the rest of the “civilized” world. Thanks to the friars, colonial subjects were deprived of a common language with which to address one another and reach those at the top of colonial hierarchy.²⁵

The friars saw Castilian-speaking Filipino teachers as a threat to their influence and the Philippines did not have a sizeable population of Spanish speaking criollos to begin with.²⁶ Only about one percent of the entire population of the Philippines became fluent in Castilian after three centuries of Spanish rule.²⁷ For the ilustrados, it was through the massification of language that the friars’ authority can be challenged. In the passage above, modernity refers to a concept of progress through the dissemination of a common language. A common language not only propels but also becomes the index of progress and thus of enlightenment. In addition, “enlightenment” implies the ability to maintain contact and exchange with the rest of the “civilized” world. This notion of “enlightenment” then is not only the marker of being “civilized” through language, but it is also the means to belong and participate in the rest of the world.

The ilustrados wanted to connect with the world outside of the Philippines and to be part of the “enlightenment.” They perceived themselves as actors on the world stage and wanted to hold onto Castilian. For them, a universal language through

²⁵ Rafael 22.

²⁶ Rafael 21.

²⁷ Vicente points out that some friars such as the Jesuits supported Filipino education in Castilian. Many friars were actually not opposed to teaching Castilian but they had practical difficulties of teaching the language on a broad scale. See Vicente L. Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 197.

Castilian becomes the means by which they can get the acknowledgment they wanted from Spain and the rest of the “civilized” world. Their idea of “enlightenment” also means recognition on the world stage. This recognition at and entry to the world stage first begin with the unification of people through a common language. Therefore, a notion of nation building through language already existed among the ilustrados even before some of them would later seek political independence from Spain. Holding onto Castilian as the common language for the Philippines demonstrates their desire to be part of the Spanish nation. They were imagining a nation attached to Spain through Castilian, but at the same time, they also envisioned a separate nation based on an identity that was not quite “Filipino” or Spanish. They wanted to be recognized as part of Spain but also distinct from Spain. They were attempting to redefine the Filipino identity based on the Castilian language.

Not all ilustrados wanted reforms and several of them went back to the Philippines. Contrary to other ilustrados and nationalists, Rizal actually thought of the possibility of Philippine separation from Spain.²⁸ Since Spain was unwilling to listen and the Propaganda Movement pursued a battle abroad, Rizal believed that the struggle should be waged back in the Philippines. For Rizal, the primary audience for his works was not located overseas but in the Philippines. In fact, while Rizal resided in Hong Kong before returning to the Philippines, he started working on a Tagalog

²⁸ See Vicente L. Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 40, and O.D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation Volume II* (Diliman, Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2006) 235.

translation of his first novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, with the help of his brother, Paciano.²⁹ However, this Tagalog version was never published nor publicly released and was eventually lost. Rizal's *Noli*, originally written in Spanish, was published in Berlin in 1887. Although the church banned the *Noli* in the Philippines, its smuggling and circulation continued even after its second publication. His second novel, *El Filibusterismo*, was published in Ghent in 1889. According to John Schumacher, Rizal originally intended to write the *Noli* in French because it was the universal language of the educated Europe and he wanted to illustrate Philippine society to them.³⁰ However, in 1888, Rizal revealed to his friend, Ferdinand Blumentritt, that he wrote the *Noli* primarily for his fellow Filipinos: "I must wake from its slumber the spirit of my country... I must first propose to my countrymen an example with which they can struggle against their bad qualities, and afterwards, when they have reformed, many writers will rise up who can present my country to proud Europe."³¹ He sees literature as means of representation and wants it to represent the "spirit" of the Philippines to a European audience. For Rizal, there appears to be a "spirit" that has always been there and that intrinsically defines his country. Yet, he thinks that representation should only be made once the "bad qualities" have been "reformed." The country needs to be presentable first before its presentation to Europe. There is an underlying logic of censorship of what should be and what should not be represented. His thinking is also motivated by a concept of development since there

²⁹ Schumacher, *Propaganda Movement* 270.

³⁰ Schumacher, *Making of a Nation* 93.

³¹ Schumacher, *Making of a Nation* 93.

are conditions that need to be attained first and required changes to be met before the country is ready to be presented to a European audience.

Rizal was implicated in the uprisings led by the Katipunan because of his writings and association with its members. The Katipunan led the 1896 Philippine Revolution against Spain. Founded in July 1892, the Katipunan, a local movement, aimed at a separation from Spain through revolution.³² Rizal was arrested and eventually executed in December 30, 1896. In the beginning, Rizal approved of the Katipunan and its revolutionary goals, but he later wrote a manifesto while in prison at Fort Santiago that disapproved of the revolution. There remains a debate to this day on whether Rizal was actually a revolutionary or a mere reformist.³³ Although Rizal might not have supported the revolution lead by the Katipunan, the Katipuneros fighting for the revolution already regarded him as a national hero.³⁴

Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* relates the Filipino experience during Spanish colonial Philippines. The novel presents the ills of Spanish colonization of the Philippines. Most specifically, it criticizes the powerful influence of religious orders in governing the Philippines and shows the various abuses of friars such as child abuse, indulgence, sexual violence against women and altar boys, and monopoly over

³² O.D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation Volume II* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2006) 237.

³³ There is actually an entire debate on the Rizal's role in the 1896 Philippine Revolution against Spain and whether he was a reformist or a revolutionary. In the beginning, Rizal approved of the Katipunan and its revolutionary goals but he later wrote a manifesto while in prison at Fort Santiago that disapproved of the revolution, see O.D. Corpuz, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation Volume II* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2006) 237-239.

³⁴ For a discussion on how Rizal was already a national hero of the masses even before American imperialism installed him as a national hero, see Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998) 171.

vast haciendas. The *Noli* focuses on the story of Crisostomo Ibarra, a wealthy and highly educated mestizo, part Spanish (Basque) and part indio. He spends his childhood in a Jesuit school and partly grows up in Europe. After seven years abroad, Ibarra comes back to the Philippines to find information on his father's death. Due to an accident, his father gets involved with the death of an illiterate Spanish tax collector. Accused of subversion and heresy, his father loses all his friends and eventually dies alone in prison. Ibarra later discovers that Padre Damaso, a Franciscan friar, is behind his father's imprisonment. He also finds out that Padre Damaso ordered his father's body to be disinterred from the Catholic cemetery and thrown out in the river. According to Ibarra, his father has two enemies: the people and the priests. Yet, he forgives the people for their ignorance and respects the priests because religion educates society. Instead of avenging his father's death, Ibarra chooses to build a school in his hometown of San Diego similar to the ones he sees in Germany. He believes that education is the key to his country's progress. He trusts the colonial government instead of believing in an armed multitude for change.

Later on, Padre Damaso provokes Ibarra by insulting Ibarra's dead father and Ibarra ends up excommunicated for laying his hands on the friar. Due to Ibarra's connections and with the help of the governor general, his excommunication gets lifted. However, Padre Salvi, who lusts after Maria Clara, Ibarra's fiancé and childhood sweetheart, organizes an uprising and frames Ibarra as the mastermind. Ibarra ends up in jail and loses his friends and his love, Maria Clara. He learns that Maria Clara provided Padre Salvi with Ibarra's letter to her in order to frame him as a

subversive. Padre Salvi blackmails Maria Clara to give up Ibarra's letter in order to hide the fact that her real father is not Capitan Tiago but Padre Damaso. In the end, Ibarra escapes prison with the help of Elias, who initially advocates for a revolutionary struggle but later only wants reforms and not independence from Spain. In his death, Elias, bequeaths gold to Basilio, an orphan who suffered abuse from Padre Salvi. Elias tells Basilio to use the gold to study. Angered by his circumstances and finally realizing the hypocrisy of religion, Ibarra changes and vows to become a "verdadero filibustero" or true subversive, one who will fight for his country through violence. Maria Clara becomes a nun in the same convent where Padre Salvi preaches. The novel ends with an intimation of Maria Clara's sexual abuse in the convent. Rizal would later continue the trajectories of Ibarra and Basilio's characters in his second novel, *El Filibusterismo* or *The Subversive*. In the *Noli*, the enemy is not so much as Spain or the Spanish colonial government, but the priests as the primary enemy of the Philippines.

In 1887, Father Salvador Font, an Augustinian friar, from the *Comisión permanente de censura* in Manila, recommended the prohibition of the *Noli* in the Philippines. According to Font, Rizal's *Noli* directly attacked the church and state:

The religion of the state, [and] institutions and persons worthy of respect because of their official character, [but also] the book is full of foreign doctrines and teachings, and its overall effect is to inspire in the submissive and loyal sons of Spain in these distant islands a deep and burning hatred for the Mother-Country. For it sets above her foreign nations, especially

Germany, for which the author of *Noli me tangere* seems to have special predilection. His only objective is the independence of the country.³⁵

The friar perceives the novel as an inspiration for Philippine independence from Spain. Interestingly, the friar understands the *Noli* as something foreign and not local because the text consisted of “foreign doctrines and teachings.” For Font, foreign ideas and not local ones were instigating the hatred against Spain and the desire for independence. The fact that Germany seemed to exceed Spain through Rizal’s novel further aggravates Font. In his view, Rizal appears to favor Germany over Spain. Rizal was not only looking towards Germany as a model but was also getting his ideas in the novel from Germany. It is not clear whether Font believed this was true of *Noli* or whether he appealed to the fear of German (and Austrian) doctrines known as Krausismo in Spain.

Upon its publication, Rizal’s *Noli* remained unknown in Spain except among Filipinos. Even then, only a brief notice appeared on *España en Filipinas*, a Filipino newspaper in Madrid. The newspaper congratulated Rizal on his critical examination of the great social cancer:

The learned doctor D. Jose Rizal, has published in Berlin a Tagalog novel which entitles *Noli me tangere*. When we have had time to read it carefully, we will discuss it, giving our sincere opinion. Meanwhile, heartiest congratulations to the young Filipino, who thus gives luster to our national

³⁵ For more information on the quote and the reception of Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*, see John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Propaganda Movement 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) 94, 92-104.

literature by studying with critical and reflective judgment a great social cancer.³⁶

Although Rizal wrote the *Noli* in Spanish, the newspaper perceived the *Noli* as a “Tagalog novel.” Tagalog here refers to an ethnic identity instead of the Tagalog language, since the novel was written in Spanish. Rizal’s novel then becomes defined by his Tagalog ethnic identity. In fact, even the novel defines itself as a “novela tagala” or Tagalog novel in the original Berlin manuscript. Moreover, in this instance, from the Filipino newspaper’s perspective located in Madrid, the category of Filipino no longer refers to Spaniards born in the Philippines. In this case, “Filipino” refers to a “learned” Rizal, who wrote a Tagalog novel. Filipino identity develops into a more established category that relates to a highly educated Tagalog of mixed race descent and it becomes largely defined through an ilustrado identity.

Furthermore, even upon its publication, Filipinos in Madrid already perceived Rizal’s novel as a “national literature.” Despite the fact that the novel was published in Spanish and in Berlin, the newspaper still saw Rizal’s *Noli* as a type of national literature. In order to count as a national literature, the novel does not have to be published in the local language and it also does not have to be published within the Philippines. In this moment, national literature becomes predicated on the fact that a Filipino, ethnically defined as Tagalog, wrote the novel and that it critically examined the country. The writer’s ethnic identity and his subject define national literature.

³⁶ For more information on the quote, see John N. Schumacher, S.J., *The Propaganda Movement 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) 75.

Yet, this ethnic identity becomes largely predicated upon the characteristics of a highly educated and Spanish speaking ilustrado. This conceptualization of national literature not only comes from Madrid but also relies heavily on ilustrado identity.

Two years after Rizal's death, in a decree published in the newspaper *El Heraldo de la Revolucion*, Emilio Aguinaldo, the president of the first Philippine republican government after the revolution against Spain, declared December 30, 1898 as a "day of national mourning."³⁷ The decree also ordered for the Philippine flag to be flown at half-mast.³⁸ The state already appropriated Rizal in a particular way that ties Rizal to the revolution against Spain and the newly independent nation. At the same time, a pamphlet entitled *Mahalagang Kasulatan* (Highly Important Writings) was also circulating in various towns further memorializing Rizal's death. The pamphlet presents Rizal as a figure of Christ and salvation in its front page:

The Word named Jose Rizal, sent down by heaven to the land of Filipinas, in order to spend his whole life, from childhood, striving to spread throughout this vast Archipelago, the notion that righteousness must be fought for wholeheartedly.³⁹

It not only encourages a literal reading of Rizal as a "Word" or text, but also understands him as "the Word" or a figure of authority. The Biblical language likens

³⁷ Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998) 75.

³⁸ Ileto 261.

³⁹ I am using this quote from Ileto's translation from Tagalog. I could have translated it myself but it would have been the same thing. I am borrowing this quote and rereading it differently from how Ileto interprets it. Ileto primarily reads this quote in making a claim of Rizal as a Christ figure. For more information, see, Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998) 75.

him to the Savior. At this juncture, Rizal as a person and his writings were understood as one and not separate from each other. His life and his persona also need to be seen as living texts. The pamphlet serves as an instruction on how to read and understand Rizal.

In 1911, Francisco Laksamana, a Katipunan veteran, demonstrates the importance of Rizal to Filipinos, especially after the revolution against Spain. According to Laksamana, Rizal's death and his martyrdom inspired other Filipinos to willingly sacrifice their lives during the revolution: "Thus, in 1896, when Rizal willingly met his death (*magpakamatay*), when his teachings and example became widely known and rooted in the Filipino soul, it became the people's turn to go willingly to their deaths." "Filipino soul" or Filipino identity becomes rooted in Rizal's teachings or from his writings. Through his life and his writings, Rizal serves as an example of what it means to be a Filipino, one that willingly met his death for the nation. Rizal embodies a Filipino identity defined by anti-colonial nationalism against Spain. At this moment, Filipinos held onto Rizal because he served as the paragon of Filipino nationalism and Filipino identity. They perceived his life and writings as types of instruction on how to be a Filipino and how to practice nationalism. The fact that Rizal and his writings were "widely known" suggests their extensive local circulation and popularity and that they became the common denominator among the "vast Archipelago." Rizal and his works provided coherence to the meaning of Filipino identity and thus the Philippine nation. They not only enabled the formation of but also rendered a reading of a distinct Filipino experience.

Interestingly, at this historical juncture, Rizal's critique of the friars falls out of the picture. In the next decades, Rizal's critique of the church in *Noli Me Tangere* would recede in the background and the *Noli* would merely be read as a text against the Spanish, Spanish language, American imperialism, American English, and so forth. Hailing Rizal's death equates him with heroes, who have to die in order that their "glory" or reputation enlighten the world.

Contextualizing Odulio's⁴⁰ Tagalog Translation

At least eighteen different Filipino translations of Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* exist today. In 1906, Pascual Poblete translated and published both Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* in Tagalog for the first time. In 1923, Patricio Mariano's Tagalog translation of the *Noli* was published. By the 1940s, Mariano's Tagalog had become unreadable to the general public because spoken and written Tagalog has changed. In April 1947, Maria Odulio de Guzman's Tagalog translation of the *Noli* was first published.⁴¹ At the same time of its publication, the National Language Institute or *Ang Surian ng Wikang Pambansa* endorsed Odulio's translation. The 5th edition, which I use for this study, was published in March 1950. It has been printed ninety times since then and February 2010 marked its 90th printing.

⁴⁰ Odulio's Tagalog translation of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* is actually translated by three people: Domingo de Guzman, Francisco Laskama, and Maria Odulio de Guzman. However, Maria Odulio de Guzman appears as the main translator and scholars in the Philippines often refer to this text as the Odulio translation.

⁴¹ The cover of Odulio's translation says "Tinagalog" or translated into Tagalog. Tagalog as the national language would not be called Pilipino until 1959 and would be later renamed to Filipino in accordance with the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines. The renaming to Filipino was intended to promote a national language that was not solely based on Tagalog but was also reflective and inclusive of other Philippine languages. The 1987 Philippine Constitution also declared Filipino and English as the official languages of the Philippines. See 1987 Philippine Constitution Art. XIV, Sec. 6-9.

Since its publication, Odulio's translation has been the most widely read Tagalog translation of the *Noli* in the Philippines, especially in high school. For the most part, Odulio's translation is the first introduction of Filipino students to Rizal and his works and the only time they will be required to read Rizal unless they continue on to college.⁴² Interestingly, Odulio actually has two Tagalog translations of the *Noli*, one expurgated (1948) for high school students, and an unexpurgated version (1960) for college students. Yet, it is the expurgated Tagalog version published in 1947 that becomes the most widely read translation in the Philippines.

In the late 1940s, according to Ramon Guillermo, there was actually massive literature in Filipino but not suitable for younger audiences. What then accounts for the popularity of Odulio's expurgated translation? How does Odulio interpret Rizal's *Noli*? What type of history gets unraveled through Odulio's translation? Odulio's translation reveals the history of the beginnings of the institutionalization of the Tagalog language. It started as part of the Philippine nation building during the Commonwealth period right before the Philippine's formal independence from the United States. Odulio's Tagalog translation of the *Noli* relates the history of the pedagogical movement in Philippine language and literature. The Odulio translation of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* functions as a means for building a national identity based on the Tagalog language and literature.

⁴² This comes from a conversation with Ramon "Bomen" Guillermo, one of the leading Philippine Studies scholars in the Philippines. I want to thank Bomen for all his support and guidance on this project, especially when I was doing archival work in the Philippines. I am also indebted to my brother, Jake de Mata, for the countless phone conversations on Rizal and in helping me with difficult Tagalog words.

In November 13, 1936, the passing of the Commonwealth Act No. 184 created the National Language Institute or *Ang Surian ng Wikang Pambansa*. The institute was made up of a president and six members that represented each one of the principal linguistic groups in the Philippines. The goal of the institute was to study various Philippine dialects and make a recommendation on which one would be the foundation of the national language: “To choose the native tongue which is to be used as the basis for the evolution and adoption of the Philippine National Language. In proceeding to such election, the Institute shall give preference to the tongue that is the most developed as regards structure, mechanism, and literature and is accepted and used by the greatest number of Filipinos.” There is a necessity to develop and establish a national language and a single dialect will be the starting point in creating one. In this case, the “most developed” language pertains to the popular one with the most utility. Most importantly, a language’s level of development is measured by its literature. The institute was also in-charge of studying and determining the Philippine phonetics and orthography and in preparing a dictionary and grammar of the national language. The national language would then be used and taught in all the public and private schools in the Philippines based on the dictionary and grammar determined by the institute.

Commonwealth president Manuel L. Quezon pushed for the creation of the National Language Institute. With the onset of Philippine independence from American colonization, he perceived national autonomy as a threat to national

solidarity. According to Quezon, there is a necessity to turn to a common language as the new basis of national solidarity:

In the past, when the Philippines was under foreign rule without assurance of soon becoming an independent nation, the very presence of that foreign rule was strong enough to weld our people together and to maintain our national solidarity. But since the inauguration of the Commonwealth, this unifying force has been weakening and will disappear altogether once we are independent. It is, therefore, advisable to strengthen the true ties of national solidarity, and in my opinion a common language based on one of the native dialects used by all our people is one of these bonds.⁴³

For Quezon, national solidarity comes from two things: the very presence of foreign rule and a common language. He believes that the preservation of national independence depends on a common language because it will hold a newly independent country together.

A year later, on December 30, 1937, as recommended by the National Institute, Manuel L. Quezon proclaimed Executive Order No. 134 that designated Tagalog, one of the native languages in the Philippines, as the basis for the national language for the Filipino people:

Whereas, this conclusion represents not only the conviction of the members of the Institute but also the opinion of Filipino scholars and patriots of divergent origin and varied education and tendencies who are unanimously in favor of

⁴³ Manuel L. Quezon, Creation of an Institute of National Language, Message to the First National Assembly, 27 October 1936, Manila, Philippines.

the selection of Tagalog as the basis of the national language as it has been found to be used and accepted by the greatest number of Filipinos not to mention the categorical views expressed by local newspapers, publications, and individual writers.

In here, Tagalog appears to be a representation of the “greatest number” or majority of Filipinos. Although the move towards Tagalog as the national language seems to represent the majority of Filipinos, Filipinos in this instance consist of scholars, patriots, local newspapers, publications, and individual writers. These are all various modes and outlets of communication, the very technologies of language dispersion. The 1939 census actually confirmed that Tagalog was the language spoken by the greatest number of Filipinos with 4,068,565 people followed by Cebuano with 3,620,685 people and then Ilokano with 2,353,318 people.⁴⁴ However, if one looks at the groupings of dialects into language groups, the number of Bisaya speakers surpasses Tagalog speakers with 6,491,699 over 4,068,565.⁴⁵ On the other hand, among the native dialects, Tagalog remained to be superior from other major languages from the point of view of literary production.⁴⁶ Yet, using the “greatest number of Filipinos” as the guideline in choosing a national language poses several problems. Does one measure “the greatest number” in terms of the groupings of the dialects into language groups or merely the amount of speakers per language? What becomes more troublesome is the fact that oftentimes linguistic differences exist

⁴⁴ Ernest J. Frei, *The Historical Development of the Philippine National Language* (Manila: Manila Bureau of Printing, 1959) 87.

⁴⁵ Frei 87.

⁴⁶ Frei 87.

within each Philippine language. Tagalog in Manila slightly differs from Tagalog in the outlying provinces. However, the emphasis on literary production shows the importance of literature in creating national solidarity.

Despite the push for Tagalog as the National Language, at this moment, English remained as the primary language of instruction in public schools: “the adoption of Tagalog as the basis of the national language of the Philippines... shall not be understood as in any way affecting the requirement that the instruction in the public schools shall be primarily conducted in the English language” (Executive Order No. 134). Moreover, not only is it in the constitution for English to remain as the basis of primary instruction but the study of another colonial language, Spanish, continues during this time period:

The fact that we are going to have our national language does not mean that we are to abandon in our schools the study or the use of the Spanish language, much less English which, under, our Constitution, is the basis of primary instruction. Spanish will preserve for us Latin culture and will be our point of contact with our former metropolis as well as with Latin America; English, the great language of democracy will bind us forever to the people of the United States and place within our reach the wealth of knowledge treasured in this language. (Manuel L. Quezon, Speech)

Interestingly, Quezon views culture and language as two separate entities. Spanish acts as a way to preserve Latin culture, while English operates as the means to access knowledge. The turn to a national language is not a means to cut off the Philippines

from its former colonizers at all. On the contrary, language here becomes the very means to associate with and continue relationships with former colonizers. Quezon paradoxically views English, the symbol of democracy, as the “forever” binder of Filipinos with Americans. Why would a country such as the Philippines on the brink of independence after hundred of years of colonization from Spain and the United States aspire to be “bind[ed]” forever with the United States?

Quezon further explains the importance of a national language. For Quezon, a common language becomes an index of world power:

In the Orient the one nation which has made the greatest progress and which has won a high place in the family of nations, is the only nation that has one common language—Japan. And every other nation which has attained the highest state of culture, solidarity, and power, both on the American continent and in Europe, and even in Africa, is a nation that possesses a common national language. (Manuel L. Quezon, Speech)

Quezon views a common language as a means not only to attain world power status but as a means to be recognized among “the family of nations.” A common language operates as the vehicle to progress. But this notion of progress becomes measured through a nation’s recognition as part of the “family of nations.” In this instance, a common language becomes the means for representation on the world stage. In addition, Quezon turns to Japan, a country that was never formally colonized, as a model for developing a common national language. Interestingly, Quezon looks to Japan as a premier example, especially since this moment in history marks Japan’s

ascension as an imperialist power in Asia. Quezon realizes the necessity of establishing a common national language based on a local language instead of relying on the colonizers' foreign languages. The Philippines cannot anchor itself on the colonizers' foreign languages because colonizers eventually leave the Philippines behind.

However, Quezon seems to be filled with contradictions. He actually begins his speech highlighting the importance of a national language based on a native tongue:

With the establishment of the American regime, English became the official language of our country; but despite the fact that English has been taught in all our public schools for more than a generation, it has not become the language of our people. Today there is not one language that is spoken and understood by all the Filipinos, nor even by a majority of them, which simply proves that while the teaching of a foreign language may be imposed upon a people, it can never replace the native tongue as a medium of national expression among the common masses. This is because, as Rizal asserted, the national thought takes its roots in a common language of other peoples, but we cannot truly possess a national language except through the adoption, development and use of one of our own. (Manuel L. Quezon, Speech)

By no means a coincidence, this proclamation of Tagalog as the national language was radiocasted on Rizal Day during the 41st anniversary of Rizal's death. In this moment, Quezon appropriates Rizal as a means to build a common language. Was

the turn to a common language a means for decolonization in this instance, especially since English still remained as the official instruction in schools? Is nationalism always about decolonization? This move was a state imposed popularization of a said common language necessary for building a nation-state. At this moment, this move to popularize Tagalog and to establish it as the foundation of a national language was not a decolonizing move at all. Quezon's concern was to build a nation through a common language. Also, if English only became the Philippine's common language, then Quezon would probably have advocated for English to become the national language. Quezon only relies on the native tongue and appropriates Rizal because there seems to be a problem on why English was not becoming the language of the people or why English was not spreading fast enough.

One of the arguments for pushing Tagalog as the national language during the commonwealth was its affordability in comparison to teaching English:

English cannot serve in the capacity of a common language because it does not reach the entire population, there being neither funds nor enough teachers for the diffusion of English; the English language, furthermore, is unable to compete with the vernacular in which Filipinos think and live outside of schools and office hours.⁴⁷

The problem with English was that it was unable to completely saturate the Philippines. The English language failed in creating a linguistically unified Philippines and thus in homogenizing the Philippines through language. Yet, the

⁴⁷ Frei 72.

government during the Commonwealth also did not want to let go of English. By the 1940s, Tagalog, as the national language, was implemented as a subject to be taught regularly in high school.⁴⁸ However, the establishment of Tagalog as the national language during this period did not change the status of English in the Philippines and English remained as the primary medium of instruction in schools even after independence from the United States.⁴⁹ Tagalog as the national language would not be called Pilipino until 1959⁵⁰ and would be later renamed to Filipino in accordance with the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.⁵¹ The Filipino language today pertains to a Tagalog based national language.⁵²

The turn to Tagalog during the Commonwealth as the national language was not a process of or means for decolonization through language but as a means for nation-state building through language. Decolonization through language and nation-state building through language refer to two different things. A close examination of the development of the Tagalog language as the national language during the Commonwealth period does not even qualify it as a type of nationalism not even as a state sanctioned nationalism.

⁴⁸ Salvador Celedonio, Circular No. 26, s. 1940 (Manila: Bureau of Education, 1940).

⁴⁹ See Isabel Pefianco Martin, "Diffusion and directions: English language policy in the Philippines," *English in Southeast Asia: Features, policy and language in use*, eds. Ee-Ling Low and Azirah Hashim (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012) 191.

⁵⁰ In August 13, 1959, the department of education declared that the National Language would now be referred to as Pilipino. At the same time, the department of education established *Linggo ng Wika* or National Language Week in all school levels as a means to promote national unity.

⁵¹ The renaming to Filipino was intended to promote a national language that was not solely based on Tagalog but was also reflective and inclusive of other Philippine languages. The 1987 Philippine Constitution also declared Filipino and English as the official language of the Philippines.

⁵² Although, there have been some movement, especially at the University of the Philippines Diliman, to diversify Filipino by adding vocabulary from other languages. For instance, the Filipino translation for hegemony comes from the Visayan word *gahum*.

The Odulio Translation: Moving Towards a Tagalog Based Philippine Literature

Maria Odulio de Guzman's Tagalog translation of *Noli Me Tangere* was first published in April 1947. Around the same time of the *Surian*'s (National Language Institute or *Ang Surian ng Wikang Pambansa*) endorsement of Odulio's Tagalog translation, the *Surian* recovered and published literary works in Tagalog such as *Urbana at Feliza* (1939), *Florante at Laura* (1939) *Ibong Adarna* (1940), and *Nena at Neneng* (1940).⁵³ Often times, these newly republished editions consisted of new titles and introductions. For instance, the new complete title of the *Surian*'s edition of *Florante at Laura*, *Ang masinop na pag-aaral sa ibá't ibáng pag-kakapalimbág ng Florante at Laura* or *The proper way to study the different editions of Florante and Laura* indicates that this new edition was supposed to instruct students on how to properly read the text. Another instance was the addition of Encarnacion Alzona's introduction in Fr. Modesto de Castro's *Urbana at Feliza* that highlights the narrative as a handbook for proper behavior and conduct for Filipinos:

Ang mga Pilipino ay hindi na nangangailangan ng isang Emily Post upang magturo sa kanila ng ukol sa pakikipagkawpwa-tao, sapagkat mayroon na tayong isang Padre de Castro na nag-iwan sa atin ng mga ganitong aral na dapat ugaliin ng mga Pilipino hindi lamang sa mga nakaraang araw kundi sa ngayon man at sa hinaharap.⁵⁴

⁵³ See Angelito G. Flores, *Mga Lathala ng Surian* or *List of Surian's Publications*, Appendix E, *Ang Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (1937-1977)*, MA thesis (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1977) 154-160.

⁵⁴ Soledad S. Reyes, "Urbana at Felisa," *Philippine Studies* 47.1 (1999): 4-5.

Filipinos do not need an Emily Post to teach them how to be a proper fellow human being to others because we already have Father de Castro that left us with such teachings that we Filipinos should practice not only in the past but also today and in the future.⁵⁵

de Castro, a secular priest, wrote *Urbana at Feliza* in Tagalog and published it in 1864, several decades before Rizal's *Noli* was published in Berlin. Resil Mojares argues that *Urbana at Feliza* is one of the three Philippine proto-novels published before 1900 for its literary realism.⁵⁶ Yet, Alzona's introduction merely emphasizes the didactic qualities of *Urbana at Feliza* glossing over its literary merits or its religious nature. The other two Tagalog proto-novels according to Mojares are Jesuit Antonio de Borja's *Barlaan at Josaphat* (1712) and Franciscan Miguel Lucio y Bustamante's *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* (1885). Interestingly, these two other works do not appear in the list of the *Surian*'s publication in the 1940s. The *Surian* appears to have criteria on which Tagalog literature should be recovered and republished.

The *Surian*'s endorsement of Odulio's translation similarly echoes that of the newly recuperated Tagalog literature:

Ang ginawa ninyong pagpapaikli sa mga malalawig at maililigoy na paghahanay ng mga pananalita't pangyayari sa NOLI, at ng pagpapagaan ng

⁵⁵ All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁶ Mojares further argues that three proto-novels are actually more localized realization of the novel form compared to later Philippine novels such as Rizal's novels that draw more heavily on Western models of the novel. See Resil B. Mojares, "Barlaan, Urbana at Basio: Three Philippine Proto-Novels," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 4.1 (1976): 46-54.

mga salitang ginamit, ay siyang lalong ikinapatampok ng inyong pagsalin at ipinaging karapat-dapat at angkop na angkop upang gamitin, ituro't pag-aralan sa mataas na paaralan o "high school". Hindi lamang makatutulong ang ganito sa madaling pag-unawa ng Wikang Pambansa, lalunglalo na ng mga hindi Tagalog, kundi magiging magaan din naman sa patuturo ng mga guro.

...

Ang "Apendiseng" ito'y hindi lamang isang mahalagang pantulong sa pag-aaral ng wikang Tagalog, kundi mahalagang panuto sa mga manunulat, mga palaaral ng kasaysayan ng ating bayan at mga mananaliksik ng mga natatagong kayamanan ng panitikang Pilipino.⁵⁷

Your abridgement of the difficult wordings and order of events in the *Noli* and how you made it easier through the words you used are the most important aspects of your translation, which makes it the most appropriate translation to be read and taught in high schools. Not only will this translation help non-Tagalogs to easily understand the National Language, but this translation will also make it easier for teachers to teach the *Noli*.

...

⁵⁷ For the *Surian*'s endorsement letter to the translators, see Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) ix-x.

This appendix is not only important in the study of the Tagalog language but it is also an important instruction for writers, Philippine historians, and researchers of the hidden treasures of Philippine literature.

The *Surian* approves Odulio's translation for three main reasons: instructiveness, utility, and accessibility. It is utilitarian because it can be easily taught and read. Her translation can be easily utilized by and accessible to a variety of people from students, teachers, writers, and to academics. Most importantly, the translation primarily operates as a means to teach the Tagalog language, especially for those who are non-Tagalogs. The Tagalog language then becomes a way to assimilate non-Tagalogs to the nation. Odulio's translation can easily be diffused because of its accessible and instructive qualities. What is at work here is the massification of the Tagalog language through literature as a movement towards the homogenization of the heterogeneity of Philippine native languages.

For the *Surian*, this translation holds value because of its appendix and not the literary style of the novel, which does not even get mentioned. A close examination of the translation's appendix indicates that this works more as a school textbook than a literary text. Odulio's appendix consists of the chapter on "Elias and Salome" that was taken out of the Berlin edition, glossary of Tagalog words or vocabulary with definitions arranged according to each corresponding chapter, notes on words and phrases used in the text (which is actually quite similar to the original Berlin manuscript), brief summary of the novel, Rizal's biography, Tagalog translation of Rizal's "Mi ultimo adios." The glossary consists of an exhaustive list of "*malalim*"

or difficult Tagalog words that are helpful in establishing a Tagalog vocabulary. Odulio's translation then operates as a way to propagate and develop the Tagalog language. In fact, in the bibliography of the translation, the translators consulted the *Bararila ng Wikang Pambansa* or the *Grammar of the National Language* published by the *Surian*.

For the *Surian*, Odulio's translation functions primarily as a "panuto," which means instruction or direction. The translation operates as an instruction in understanding the Tagalog language and what Filipino literature might be like. Clearly, at this point Philippine literature was still "hidden" and something to be discovered and eventually created. According to the *Surian*, this translation works as an important "panuto" or instruction for writers who will eventually write more Filipino literature, for the historians who study the Philippines, and for the researchers who will research more on Filipino literature. Odulio's translation of Rizal's *Noli* becomes the foundational text in starting and conceptualizing Filipino literature and the Philippine nation through Tagalog. In this instance, Rizal's *Noli* through an abridged and Tagalog translation was being appropriated as a foundation for Tagalog literature despite it being originally written in Spanish. Philippine literature was based on Tagalog and its beginnings were not grounded on aesthetics or formal literary qualities but on its instructiveness, utility, and accessibility.

Tarrosa Subido, poet and critic, also invokes Rizal's novels as the basis of Philippine literature together with *Urbana at Feliza*, and *Florante at Laura*:

Apart from the translation's usefulness as a school text, it ought to be interesting to any Filipino who has long wondered how the one universally accepted novel of his country would have read in his own National Language; how more effectively, if at all, the Tagalog version could have mirrored the national sentiments of Rizal's time (the common argument being that the national character can be revealed only through the National language and never through any borrowed tongue); how together with "Urbana and Felisa," "Florante at Laura," and other Tagalog works, a "Noli" and a "Filibusterismo" written originally in Tagalog might have started a Tagalog tradition in literature, just as in America it was the American product rather than the English parent-stock that marked the real beginnings of American literature.⁵⁸

According to Subido, only Tagalog properly captures the "national sentiments" and "national character" during Rizal's time. He understands language as a direct reflection of a nation and argues that national identity cannot be based on a foreign language. For Subido, Rizal can only be more effective if translated and read in the national language since Rizal in Spanish cannot be the source of a national identity. Again, what is at work here is the creation of a national identity based on literature and a local language. Interestingly, Subido looks to the tradition of American literature as a model for the creation of a Tagalog literary tradition. The term "parent-stock" is reminiscent of identity and race. Subido's endorsement of Odulio's

⁵⁸ See T. Tarrosa Subido, "Book Review," Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) xi.

translation also indicates the attempt to begin a “tradition” of Philippine literature in Tagalog. If Tagalog, as I have discussed earlier, functions as a “panuto” or instruction for what Philippine literature might be, then it pertains to a literature based on Tagalog and thus national identity. There appears to be a gesture towards creating a canon of Philippine literature. What counts as Philippine literature is literature written in Tagalog, which reflects the nation and thus represents national identity. Since national identity cannot be based on foreign literature, then literature written in a foreign language cannot count as Philippine literature.

The translators’ opening letter in the translation further demonstrates how Philippine national identity becomes constructed through the Tagalog language. Yet, in comparison to the *Surian*’s endorsement letter, the translators’ letter, which explains their translation, exhibits a type of nationalism that was absent in the *Surian*’s letter or in Quezon’s speech on the national language. The translators’ letter displays a type of nationalism that highlights love of country:

Ang aming layon sa paglalathala ng aklat na ito ay mailagay sa abot ng isip ng mga nag-aaral sa high school at gayundin sa kalahatang kabataan ang isang salin sa Wikang Pambansa ng tanyag na *Noli Me Tangere* ni Dr. Jose Rizal, na ayon kay Retana, ay tinatawag ng marami nating kalahi na Bagong Ebanghelyo ng Bayang Pilipino.

Ang Mga Tala ukol sa mga salita at pararilang mahirap unawain at may kinalaman sa kasaysayan ng Bayang Pilipino—bilang isang bahagi ng

apedice—ay siyang pinakatampok ng mga Tulong sa Pag-aaral ng aklat na ito. Nagbibigay ng lubos na kabuuan sa pagkaunawa sa nobela. Ang Talasalitaan (*glosario*) na isa rin sa mga bahagi ng *apedice* ay binubuo ng mga salita at parirala na ang kahulugan ay kailangang malaman sa pagbasa ng aklat. Tungkol naman sa ayos ng talasalitaang ito, ang mabuti'y gawing kaba-kabanata, at sa pagbigay ng kahulugan sa bawat salita at parirala, ang kinuha lamang ay ang ibig sabihin ng mga ito sa pagkakagamit sa aklat at di isinama ang iba pang kahulugang natatala sa talatinigan, matangi na lamang ang pagdaragdag ng mga singkahulugang dapat mabatid sa pag-aaral ng wika. Sa ganitong paraan, ang talasalitaang ito ay inaasahang makatugon ng tiyakan sa pag-aalinlangan o pangangailangan ng mga mambabasa, lalung-lao na ng mga mag-aaral.

Sa pagsasatagalog, na *tuwirang ginawa mula sa orihinal na kastila ng nobela*, ay sinikap, di lamang upang maingatang buo ang katas o katamisan ng mga pagkukuro, diwa at mithiin ng may-mga akda, kundi rin naman upang huwag malihis sa agos at magandang hanay ng pagkakasulat. Ito ang pamaraang naging tuntunin sa pagpapaikli sa mga mahabang pangungusap at paliwanag na nilalaman ng aklat.

Gaya ng lubhang tumpak na ipinapahayag ng Pangulong Roxas, sa pagpaparangal sa kaarawan ni Dr. Rizal—ika-19 ng Hunyo, 1946—*ang*

bayang pilipino ay dapat mag-aral nang buong katamanan at dumulang ng ikatututo sa mga batisang binabalungan ng mga turo at aral ni Dr. Rizal upang ito'y magamit sa paglutas ng mga suliranining pambayang nadarama sa araw-araw. Sa paraang ito, ang mga nag-aaral ay magkakaroon sa Noli Me Tangere ng isang walang pagkatuyong batis ng mga isipan, adhikain at mga aral ng kagitingan, mararangal na ugali at mabubuting gawa, at ang mga guro naman sa paaralan, ng isang aklat-babasahing magagamit nila sa paghahasil sa isip at puso ng kanilang mga tinuturuan ng pag-ibig sa bayan, at sa gayo's mapag-ibayo ang sigla ng pagtuturo ng isang dalisay at maapoy na pagka-makabansa.

Inaasahan naming ang saling ito ay magiging mahalaga rin at pakikinabangan ng mga pilipinong ibig makabasa ng Noli ni Dr. Rizal sa Wikang Pambansa, o ng mga nagnanasang matuto sa sari-sarili ng Tagalog.

Kung sa pagsasagawang ito ng layong nasabi sa unahan ay nakapagdulot kami ng kaunting tulong sa Bayan at Wika, ang ganito'y sapat na gantimpalang aming ikasisiyang-loob.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For the translator's letter, "Ilang Paliwanag" or "A Few Explanations," in Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) vii-viii.

Our goal in writing this book is to be able to put in the minds of high school students and all the youth a translation of Dr. Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* in the National Language, which according to Retana is being hailed by many of our fellow Filipinos as the New Gospel of the Philippine Nation.

The notes on the difficult words and phrases to understand has something to do with the history of the Filipino Nation—as part of the appendix—is the main thing in the study guide. It provides a thorough completeness to completely understand the novel. The glossary is also part of the appendix and is made up of the necessary words and phrases whose meanings are needed in reading the novel. In terms of the order of the vocabulary, it is better to include it in each chapter, and in giving meaning in each word and phrase, we only defined them according to their use in the text and did not include its other definitions in the dictionary, except for when adding additional meanings with similar meaning necessary for students to understand. In this way, this glossary is intended to provide a proper response to the readers' anxieties or needs, especially the students.

In the process of faithfully translating the novel from the original Spanish into Tagalog, we aimed to not only preserve the main ideas or the sweetness of the point of views/beliefs, essence and the goals of the author, and not to get away

from the beautiful flow and arrangement of the writing. This has been the guideline in abridging the long sentences and explanations within the text.

Similar to President Roxas' forthright proclamation in honoring Dr. Rizal's birthday—June 19, 1946—the Filipino nation should study with complete attention and play in the fountain of Dr. Rizal's teachings and lessons in order to use them in solving national problems that we encounter everyday. In this way, through the *Noli Me Tangere*, the students will have a fountain or source that will never dry out of ideas, goals, and lessons about honorable character/conduct, and good work and the teachers in the school will have a text they can use in ingraining/spreading in the hearts and minds of their students love for the country, and therefore to greatly increase the joy/enthusiasm in teaching something with nationalistic purity and ardor/zeal.

We are hoping that this translation will also be important and will be useful for those Filipinos who would like to read Dr. Rizal's *Noli* in the National Language, or for those who wishes to learn Tagalog by themselves.

If through this translation we are able to make a small contribution to the Nation and Language, this is enough of a reward to make us happy.

A gospel refers to a set of beliefs or principles. Calling Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* as the “New Gospel of the Philippine Nation” suggests that Rizal's novel functions as an

authoritative pedagogical text. By submitting to this classification, Odulio's translation aims to establish their translation as an authoritative pedagogical text of the Philippine nation through Tagalog. The letter emphasizes the Tagalog language with its focus on difficult words and phrases. In fact, even the letter's concept of history pertains to language. History becomes defined through the "Mga Tala" or "Notes" on tough phrases and words as well as through the translation's glossary. According to the letter, challenging Tagalog words belong to the "kasaysayan ng Bayang Pilipino" or "the history of the Filipino Nation." On one level, the letter seems to argue that one learns the history of the Filipino Nation through the study of language and its vocabulary. On another level, the translation understands the novel as a history of the Tagalog language. The translation itself establishes a history of the Filipino Nation by further developing the Tagalog language through the novel. The Odulio translation is constructing a history of the Tagalog language through Rizal's novel.

In addition, the translation takes Rizal as a manual for everyday life, especially in solving "mga suliraning pambayan" or "national problems." Yet, the term "pambayan" or "for the country" comes from the word "bayan," which refers to both the country and town in Tagalog. The translation takes Rizal as an instruction for solving everyday life problems both at the level of the nation and at the smaller scale of township. The Odulio translation intends to teach Rizal as a source of nationalism, which they define as love of and for the country. According to the letter, loving one's country pertains to dealing with everyday problems both at the national

and town level. It also involves having honorable conduct and performing good work. This type of nationalism relates to instilling civic virtue and responsibility at the individual level. This nationalism as love of and for the country then promotes good Filipino citizenship. Rizal's text becomes a tool for teaching nationalism based on citizenship. The closing of the letter states its desire for the translation to help the nation and language. At this moment, the nation and language become one. The development of the nation depends on the development of language because it is through language in which nationalism can be inculcated at the individual level. The creation of a nation begins with turning Filipinos into good citizens through language development. Here, nationalism refers to something that can be taught and instilled through language. Nationalism becomes based on the Tagalog language. The development of the Philippine nation rests on the propagation of language and nationalism through the use of literature. At this moment, the Oduilio translation becomes the link between nationalism and Philippine nation building. Language through literature connects nationalism and nation building together. Nationalism here no longer refers to anti-colonial nationalism but a type of nationalism that becomes aligned with Philippine nation building through language.

Against the Grain of Anderson's "The First Filipino" and "Hard to Imagine"

In *Spectre of Comparisons*, Benedict Anderson discusses the pitfalls of reading Rizal in translation. He argues that Filipino translations of Rizal's novels either into English or any local language ultimately fail:

Hence the eerie situation which obliges Filipinos to read the works of the most revered hero of the nation in translation—into local vernaculars, and into American. Hence also a politics of translation. Translations of *Noli Me Tangere* into most of the major languages in the Philippines were bound to fail, not merely because of the absurdity of the many Spanish characters “speaking” in Tagalog, Cebuano, or Ilocano, but because the enemigo readers automatically disappear, and the satirical descriptions of mestizos and indios speaking bad Spanish, and Spanish colonials slipping into bad Tagalog, become untranslatable. The most important American translation, done by the alcoholic anti-American diplomat Leon Maria Guerrero in the 1960s—still the prescribed text for high schools and universities—is no less fatally flawed by systematic bowdlerization in the name of official nationalism.⁶⁰

Anderson’s fixation on what becomes “untranslatable” in Rizal’s work into English or Filipino indicates his desire for a faithful Rizal translation. He points out that the linguistic hybridity in Rizal’s original novels disappears through its translation in either English or Filipino. Thus, he argues that official nationalism results in the bowdlerization of Rizal’s novels. In this instance, Anderson defines “official nationalism” or state sponsored nationalism as the “prescribed texts” for high school and college. Anderson conflates “official nationalism” and the required readings in school curriculums together. For him, all these books necessarily espouse “official nationalism” merely because they are mandated by the state. The translation itself

⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso Books, 2002) 233.

also has no autonomy from the state and an interpretation of a text can never be severed from the dictates of the government. Anderson perceives the state and the required readings as completely inseparable from each other.

Anderson's conceptualization of official nationalism in the Philippines needs to be more historicized. His account fails to address that Filipinos actually first encounter Rizal in high school Filipino subject classes as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter. Contrary to Anderson's claim that the Guerrero translation in American English is the prescribed text in high schools, majority of Filipinos in the Philippines actually read Rizal in the Tagalog translation as part of their Filipino language and literature classes in high school. The most widely read Tagalog translation probably until the late 1990s is the Odulio translation. Filipino high school students read the *Noli* in their third or junior year of high school and the *Fili* during their fourth or senior year of high school. For the most part, Odulio's translation becomes the first introduction of Filipino students to Rizal and his works and the only time students will be required to read Rizal unless they continue on to college.⁶¹ In addition, the history that I have related so far in this chapter demonstrates the complexities and difference between nation building and nationalism. Odulio's interpretation so far shows that it consists of a nationalism that was even absent in the *Surian* and in Quezon during the Commonwealth period. This point brings up an important question: is it official nationalism merely because one reads a book with nationalist sentiments through an approved textbook by the state, when the state that sponsored it

⁶¹ This comes from a conversation with Bomen Gullermo, who I owe a great deal with this chapter.

at a specific moment in history is only concerned about nation building but not necessarily nationalism?⁶²

Benedict Anderson further argues that American imperialism has rendered Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* unrecognizable to Filipino readers. The crux of Anderson's main argument hinges upon the proliferation of American English language as the scapegoat for Filipinos' inability to recognize Rizal:

At this point we have to turn to American imperialism and its consequences. From the point of view of this essay at least, the most important of these consequences were the substitution of American for Spanish as the lingua franca of the archipelago, and fundamental reshaping of Filipinos' conception of themselves. I will be trying to argue, from here on, that these transformations literally made Rizal's Filipinas virtually unimaginable.⁶³

For Anderson, American imperialism through the English language changed how Filipinos understand themselves. What would make Rizal's Filipinas imaginable then is if all Filipinos are able to read and understand Spanish. The "substitution of American for Spanish" as a lingua franca does not quite make sense since these two languages are almost incomparable substitutions for each other. English was more than a lingua franca in the Philippines. In addition, the majority of Filipinos during

⁶² Indeed, it is not until the passage of the Rizal Law in 1956, ten years after the Philippines gained independence from the United States, that official nationalism becomes evident through the coming together of nation building and anti-colonial nationalism. The Rizal Law required the study of Rizal's life and works in all public and private schools in the Philippines. It also mandated that the unexpurgated versions of Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* to be read at the collegiate level. This legislation was a state sanctioned nation-building project with a particular aim for cultural decolonization.

⁶³ Anderson 254.

the Spanish colonial period were not educated in Spanish nor educated at all. The majority of Filipinos at the time of the publication of the *Noli* were unable to read it in the original Spanish. Thus, it is not so much because of Rizal's translation to English or other Filipino languages, or the American imperialism through the English language, that made Rizal's Filipinas "hard to imagine," it is because Rizal's novel has been originally written in Spanish that made it impossible for many Filipinos to even have the opportunity to imagine Rizal's Filipinas (or more precisely, Anderson's Rizal's Filipinas) in the first place. Therefore, the underlying logic in Anderson's argument needs to be challenged. Anderson has an impossible and unfair expectation of contemporary Filipinos. Despite his incisive analysis of American imperialism, Anderson seems to overlook the complexity of Philippine colonial histories and the privilege that comes with being able to know Spanish and even English for Filipinos then and now.

In the end, Anderson notes that nationalism's drive for purity makes Rizal's novel untranslatable: "Nationalism in our dreams of purities, and finds it hard to linger cariñosamente over the oxymoron 'pure mix.' Maybe this is, in the end, the reason why the *creole-mestizo* world of Rizal's novels became, so soon, so hard to imagine—and impossible to translate."⁶⁴ The "creole-mestizo" or the hybrid world present in Rizal's works disappears in nationalism's desire for purity. In here, Anderson's "creole-mestizo" pertains to race more than language. Yet, for Anderson, this non-"pure mix" world of Rizal can only be accessible through the Spanish

⁶⁴ Anderson 259.

language. Thus, for Anderson, Rizal can be best read in Spanish. Paradoxically, in some ways, Anderson himself dreams of linguistic purity. He dreams of Spanish speaking Filipinos that can fully understand Rizal's hybrid world and thus imagine Rizal within the proper linguistic context. For Anderson, there exists a proper way to read Rizal's works and it is through Spanish.

Reading Odulio's Tagalog Interpretation

This section explores how Odulio's translation interprets Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* rather than focusing on its fidelity to the original or what remains untranslatable in Tagalog. In the original's chapter entitled "En casa del filosofo" or "In the Philosopher's House," Ibarra visits Tasio to seek advice in building a school in San Diego. He happens to catch Tasio writing Tagalog in hieroglyphics. Ibarra asks why Tasio writes in something that cannot be read or understood. Tasio then explains to Ibarra that he writes not for the current generation but for the later one:

—Porque no escribo para esta generacion, escribo para otras edades. Si esta me pudiese leer, quemaria mis libros, el trabajo de toda mi vida; en cambio, la generacion, que descifre estos caracteres sera una generacion instruida, me comprendera y dira" ¡"No todos dormian en la noche de nuestros abuelos!" El misterio o estos curiosos caracteres salvaran mi obra de la ignorancia de los hombres, come el misterio y los estranos ritos han salvado a muchas verdades de las destructoras clases sacerdotales.

—Y ¿en que idioma escribe V.? pregunto Ibarra despues una pausa.

—En el nuestro tagalo⁶⁵

—Because I am not writing for this generation, but I am writing for other ages. If they can read me, they will burn my books, the work of all my life; the next generation, that can decipher these characters will be an educated generation, that can understand me and say, “Not all were sleeping in the night of our ancestors!” The curious and mysterious characters of my work will save my work from the ignorance of men, like the mysteries and strange rites have saved many truths from the destructive priestly class.

—And. In what language are you writing? Asked Ibarra after a brief pause.

—In our tagalog.

According to Tasio, the current generation who can read him will only burn his books. At this time, the people who can read Tasio form a select group of Filipinos educated in Spanish. The ones who can read Tasio now are not educated since they cannot understand the truth of his works. They are the ignorant men “sleeping in the night.” Tasio declares that only the educated generation of the future will be able to understand the truth and he defines “educated” based on their capacity to decipher the reality of their condition. Tasio’s Tagalog inscription in hieroglyphics suggests that the future lies in the Tagalog hidden in hieroglyphics. The value hidden in hieroglyphics cannot be understood right now but eventually the ones who will finally

⁶⁵ I am using the original Spanish, the 1887 Berlin Edition, republished by the Philippine’s National Historical Institute, see Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (Manila: Insituto Nacional de Historia, 1978) 135.

be able to read them are the educated ones and they will know the truth of the past. If the hieroglyphics operate as the carrier for truth, then Tagalog embodies the truth. Yet, this moment does not pertain to nationalism or nation building. Tagalog in this instance is about access to knowledge. It is an instrument to educate, a means to lead people out of the night (“la noche”) or darkness.

If the people who can read Tasio refers to a privileged few educated in Spanish during this time period, then Tasio associates Spanish with being in the dark and thus being uneducated. Tasio correlates Spanish with not being able to understand the truth. Most importantly with the addition of the last sentence, “El misterio o estos curiosos caracteres salvaran mi obra de la ignorancia de los hombres, come el misterio y los estranos ritos han salvado a muchas verdades de las destructoras clases sacerdotales,” one finds that what even makes Spanish more problematic for Tasio is its connection with the priests. Tasio sees the “clases sacerdotales” or priestly class as the enemy because they destroy “verdades” or truth. By destroying the truth, the priests merely preserve the “ignorance of men.” Education in Spanish colonial Philippines was done primarily through religious orders or the “priestly class.” Tasio is presenting a critique of education during the Spanish colonial Philippines. According to him, the current generation, who can read and who learned Spanish from the priests, are not actually educated, since if they can read Tasio’s books, they will only burn them like the priests destroy the truth. The fact that they slept through the night suggests that either they were blinded through their education from the priests that they would rather burn the truth or pretend not to

notice it. The priests and their students are the enemies of truth. Their education is not a true form of knowledge because it only ignores the truth.

This passage is followed by Tasio's discussion on how Tagalog becomes easier to translate in hieroglyphics than in the Latin alphabet: "Si no fuera por la dificultad del dibujo, que exige tiempo y pacencia, casi le diria que sirven mejor que alfabeto latino. El antiguo egipcio tenia nuestras vocales..." (If it is not for the difficulty of drawing that needs time and patience, I could say that they serve better than the Latin alphabet. The ancient Egyptian have our vowels...). Tasio posits that ancient Egyptian is more useful than Latin alphabets because they have Tagalog vowels. As a result, Tasio is able to express Tagalog in ancient Egyptian much better than in languages using the Latin alphabet. Tasio's move towards ancient Egyptian illustrates his desire to break away from both Latin and Spanish, the language of the priestly class. In Spanish, "vocal" both refers to a vowel or something that relates to a voice or sound. Read another way, Tagalog is better expressed in ancient Egyptian because ancient Egyptian "have our voices." Unlike Spanish, ancient Egyptian gives Tagalog a voice. In the future, when the educated generation finally reads what becomes hidden in Tasio's hieroglyphics, they will discover "nuestra vocal" (our voice) or "nuestra tagalo" (our Tagalog).

Tasio's response to Ibarra on why he writes Tagalog in hieroglyphics presents the strongest argument for reading the *Noli* in Tagalog. His response demonstrates the importance of "nuestro tagalo" or "our tagalog" in understanding the truth of the past. The inclusion of "nuestro" suggests that Tagalog as something that we all

already possess and that it should be for everyone to have. Similarly, if Tagalog stands for truth and knowledge, then truth and knowledge should be available to all. Tasio then presents a case for the radical ownership of language and thus of knowledge and education—it should be accessible to everyone. For Tasio, Spanish, during the colonial period, is similar to education, it was never “our[s]” and was in fact denied to many Filipinos. On the other hand, Tagalog refers to something that is already “ours.” If one follows Tasio’s line of thought, then Rizal’s *Noli* in Tagalog is “ours.” It belongs to everyone and not owned by a select few.

Yet, Tasio’s beautiful argument for “our tagalog” becomes problematic, since not everyone in the Philippines speaks Tagalog in the first place. To easily accept Tasio’s heartfelt argument for “our tagalog” also means to refuse to consider the existence of other languages in the Philippines. Tasio’s “our tagalog” becomes a misnomer that flattens out the heterogeneity of languages in the Philippines. Rizal’s *Noli* primarily relates a fictional town called San Diego located in the Tagalog region. The novel presents a Tagalog centric world. Almost all the locations in the novel revolve around the Tagalog region and primarily around the Manila area. The inclusivity of “our” then only becomes possible through the erasure of difference. Perhaps, the question then should not be about in which language should this novel be read, but how do we read for an “our” that is both radically inclusive, and yet, at the same time, does not erase difference.

On the other hand, Odulio’s Tagalog interpretation of this scene only focuses on the importance of the Tagalog language:

“Aba! Nariyan ba kayo?” ang itinanong ng matanda na tumitinging may pagkakataka kay Ibarra.

“Ipagpaumanhin ninyo ako,” ang sagot nito, “nakita kong kayo’y abalang-abala—”

“Totoo nga po, may kaunti akong sinusulat, nguni’t di lubhang kailangan, at ibig kong magpahinga. May maipaglilingkod ba ako sa inyo?”

“Mayroon po at marami.” ang tugon ni Ibarra na sinabayan ng lapit; “nguni’t—”

At tinapunan niya ng tingin ang aklat na nasa hapag.

“Ano!” ang nasabi niyang namamangha. “Naghahanap ba kayo ng kahulugan ng jeroglifico? At bakit?”

“Upang huwag mabasa ngayon ang aking sinusulat,” ang sinagot ng matanda.

Napatitig si Ibarra sa kausap habang naiisip niyang baka ang matandang ito’y isa ng baliw.

“At bakit po kayo sumusulat kung di ninyo ibig na ito’y mabasa ng madla?” ang tanong niya pagkatapos.

“Sapagka’t hindi po ako sumusulat para sa kasalukuyang salin ng lahi, kundi para sa mga kasunod. Kung mababasa po ngayon ang mga sinulat ko ay susunugin nila ang aking mga aklat. Sa kabilang dako, and salin ng lahing makapagbibigay katuturan sa mga titik na ito ay isang saling bihasa na siyang

makakaunawa sa akin at magsasabing, *'Di lahat ay natutulog sa gabi ng ating mga ninuno!'*”

“At sa ano pong wika kayo sumusulat?” ang tanong ni Ibarra makasandali.

“Sa wika po natin, sa tagalog.”

“Kung di po lamang sa kahirapan ng paglalarawan na nagkakailangan ng panahon at tiyaga ay masasabi ko sa inyong halos mabuti pa iyan kaysa abakadang *latino* na ating ginagamit ngayon.—Nguni’t kayo’y naabala ko sa mga bagay na ito, ano ba ang inyong sadya sa akin?”⁶⁶

“Oh! You are there?” asked the old man looking at Ibarra with bewilderment.

“Pardon me,” Ibarra’s reply, “I saw that you are very busy—”

“Yes, I am, I am doing some writing, but it is not that necessary, and I want to rest. Is there something I can do for you?”

“Yes you have and there are many things you can do for me.” Replied Ibarra while at the same time coming closer; “but—”

And he looked at the books on the table.

“What!” he said with astonishment. “Are you looking for the meanings of hieroglyphics? And Why?”

⁶⁶ Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) 110-111.

“So that my writings cannot be read right now,” answered the old man

Ibarra ended up staring at the one he is speaking to while thinking at the same time that this old man might be crazy.

“And why are you writing if you do not want all the people/the public to read it?” is his response after.

“Because I am not writing for the current generation, but for the next one. If my writings can be read now, they will burn all my books. In the future, the generation who will give meaning to these letters are those educated generation that will understand me and will say, “Not everyone was sleeping during the night of our ancestors!”

“And in what language were you writing?” asking Ibarra shortly.

“In our language, in tagalog.”

“If only not for the difficulty of drawing that requires time and patience, I can say that this is so much better than the Latin alphabet that we are using now.—But I am bothering you with all these things, what is your purpose in seeing me?”

In her translation, Odulio removes Tasio’s important criticism of the priestly class as the destroyer of truth and the main obstacle towards a true form of education: “El misterio o estos curiosos caracteres salvaran mi obra de la ignorancia de los hombres, come el misterio y los estranos ritos han salvado a muchas verdades de las destructoras clases sacerdotales” (The curious and mysterious characters of my work will save my work from the ignorance of men, like the mysteries and strange rites

have saved many truths from the destructive priestly class). This omission turns Odulio's translation into a mere argument for the importance of Tagalog in education. Tasio writes Tagalog in hieroglyphics because he writes not for the current generation but for the next one and the only people who will understand his writings are the educated class of the future. In this case, contrary to the original, educated refers to those who can read and understand Tagalog. Since Tagalog operates as the marker of being educated, the future then resides in the Tagalog language. In other words, education should be in Tagalog and not in Spanish, because Spanish, as Tasio claims, is not a true form of education and the current educated class, who speaks and understands Spanish at this time, will only destroy his writings. Odulio's interpretation presents an argument for education in the Tagalog language. In her translation, Tasio's critique focuses exclusively on the Spanish language and not on the church and its role in colonial education.

For the Odulio translation, contrary to Rizal's original, Tagalog is not a means of representation through language, but it is actually a way to preserve the Filipino racial lineage. In the translation, Tasio's critique of Spanish as a language that is never "ours" falls out of the picture. It only focuses on the inadequacy of the Spanish language in translating Tagalog and merely includes Tasio's comment that hieroglyphics are better than Latin when translating Tagalog. The word "vocal," vowel, or voice in the Spanish original, disappears in the translation. Consequently, Tasio's argument that hieroglyphics are better than the Latin alphabet because it has our voice in Tagalog also disappears. Odulio's translation uses the term "salin ng lahi"

to translate the Spanish “generacion” in Tagalog. This term literally translates to “translation of race” in English. In Tagalog, “lahi” denotes race and “salin” means translation. In Odulio’s interpretation, the concept of translation becomes embedded within the concept of race. Her notion of “generacion” then refers to a racial lineage, or more precisely, the Filipino racial lineage. In this instance, the Tagalog language and Filipino race comes together through translation. Therefore, when Tasio writes Tagalog into hieroglyphics in order to hide his ideas, what becomes preserved is not merely the Tagalog language but also the Filipino race. The continuity of the Filipino race rests upon the safeguarding of the Tagalog language. Odulio’s interpretation is concerned with the preservation of the Filipino race through the Tagalog translation. Filipinoness then is predicated on the Tagalog language.

Odulio’s translation not only abridges the original but also adds Tagalog words that were absent in the original. In the passage above, Odulio inserts the Tagalog polite forms of “po” and “opo” as well as the plural forms of you and yours such as “kayo,” “inyo,” and “ninyo” to indicate politeness. In Tagalog, one uses the plural forms of you and yours when speaking to a single individual to demonstrate respect. Tasio employs polite terms in his conversation with Ibarra because of their social difference. Due to his money and education, Ibarra belongs to a higher social rank than Tasio. On the other hand, Ibarra also utilizes polite words to address Tasio as a sign of respect because of Tasio’s older status in age. The additions of these polite levels function as a way to instill proper behavior to students. They also teach students the proper organization of society and thus enforce social hierarchy. On

another level, these practices of politeness localize the original Spanish with native customs through the Tagalog language. In fact, Odulio's translation incorporates the older and archaic Tagalog name "Binundok" instead of "Binondo," which the original Spanish uses, in reference to the locale in the opening of the novel.⁶⁷ The insertions of these Tagalog words are part of a cultural education through the Tagalog language. These are methods of teaching students Philippine history and culture. Odulio's Tagalog translation functions as a way to uphold local customs, social practices, and hierarchy through the Tagalog language.

Each chapter in the Odulio translation ends with "Mga Tulong sa Pag-aaral" or "Study Guides." These study guides consist of several questions per chapter. The questions range from true or false, multiple choice, fill in the blanks, and short answer questions. The questions test students on their mastery of the plot and characters and ask comparative questions between the novel and the present conditions in Philippine society. Most importantly, many questions ask students ethical or moral judgment type of questions. For instance, the very first question in the study guide for "En casa del filosofo" or "In the Philosopher's House" asks students on proper manners: "Paano ang ginawa ni Ibarra upang huwag maabala si pilosopo Tasyo sa kanyang gawain? Bakit matatawag nating kabutihang asal ang ganitong ginawa?"⁶⁸ Or "What

⁶⁷ In the same chapter and on the chapter on "Doña Consolacion," another way in which Odulio's translation localizes the original Spanish is by translating the original's "ella" and "la Musa" into "Paraluman" or muse in Tagalog. Paraluman actually refers to the popular Filipina actress in the 1940s well known for her beauty. Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) 111, 174.

⁶⁸ Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere: Nobelang Tagalog*, trans. Maria Odulio De Guzman, Domingo de Guzman, and Francisco Laksamana (Manila: National Bookstore, 1950) 117.

did Ibarra do to avoid disturbing Tasyo while working? Why would this be called good manners?” These questions clearly reinforce the additions of the polite forms in Odulio’s translation and frame Rizal’s novel to be read as a model for good behavior. They train students how to act properly or in a certain way based on a situation. The Odulio translation appropriates Rizal’s novel as a training manual for proper manners; it operates as a means for managing students and turning them into good Filipino citizens.

If the Tagalog language becomes the means to preserve the continuity of the Filipino race, then it is also through Tagalog in which one learns how to become a proper Filipino. Through the Tagalog language, Odulio’s interpretation of Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* turns the novel into a set of instructions on how to be Filipino. The Tagalog language functions as a manual that helps in establishing Filipino identity. This study demonstrates how language through literature has been used to concretize a particular type of Filipino identity largely based on Rizal, ilustrados, Spanish, Tagalog, and nationalism.

Chapter 2

The Institutionalization of Asian American Studies:

Setting Boundaries of Inclusion and Exclusion in the U.S. Academy

By examining concepts of community, identity, experience, modes of address, and marginalization at different foundational moments in Asian American Studies, this chapter interrogates the changing intellectual landscape of Asian American Studies during the past forty years. It will examine the following questions: What was Asian American Studies then and now? How have its goals and systems of valorization changed over the years? What are the key issues in the field? What does the case of Asian American Studies reveal about the institutionalization of knowledge in the university? Recent scholarship focuses on the crisis of representation in Asian American Studies, the incapacity of Asian American as a category to represent its demographic. Another problem lies with taking representations of Asian Americans as self-evident.

The inception of *Amerasia Journal* in 1971 marks one of the foundational moments in Asian American Studies. The word “community” permeates the journal’s first issue.⁶⁹ The brief editorial preface alone mentions “community” four times. In the journal’s foundational issue, the concept of community operates at several levels. First, the object of its study is the community and actually not an

⁶⁹ “Message to Our Readers,” *Amerasia Journal* 1:1 (1971).

individual Asian American body.⁷⁰ Community here refers to a group of Asians or groups of Asians in America within a delineated geographical space such as Chinatown and Japantown. One of the articles in the journal relates the crisis in New York's Chinatown in the early 70s and another article reports on the adverse effects of San Francisco's redevelopment projects in Japantown. Second, according to the journal's mission, not only is the community its intended audience but its study is meant to promote the community's advancement: "Unless we or our goals are relevant to their needs, concerns, and aspirations, we're simply shouting loud and listening to the echoes of our own voices in a closed room."⁷¹ The prevalence of first person plural pronouns such as "we" and "our" shows that the journal sees itself as part of the community it serves. The word "relevance" implies the journal's close relationship with the community. Thus, the value and existence of the journal depends on the community. There is no journal without the community. What is interesting is that the journal's mission does not seem to be interested in representing Asian Americans or the Asian American experience. At this point, the journal only appears to be interested in starting a dialogue within its community, rather than be in conversation with the U.S. nation at large.

The very first article in the journal, Rocky Chin's "New York Chinatown Today: Community in Crisis," not only adheres to the goals of the journal but also

⁷⁰ This is not an objection but a confirmation of the correctness of the journal's approach in its inception. I want to highlight this fact in order to provide contrast with how Asian American Studies would later focus on individual bodies and stray away from its community.

⁷¹ Ibid.

further illustrates the meaning of community.⁷² The article serves as a report on Chinatown by going all over the different facets of its community. It presents a study of the area explaining the causes of the current crisis such as the problem with housing conditions and the lack of affordable housing due to excessive immigration. The article touches upon how the opening of a new subway stop or widening a street would impact the neighborhood. It discusses political events in China as well as the conflicts between different political groups in the community. Various statistics fill the article such as census data and an overview of Chinatown's economy, including a breakdown of its employment records according to various age groups. It even has a section on commercial spaces and on the state of education and health services. The article evaluates Chinatown in order to figure out the resources needed to address its current problems. In the end, the article calls for everyone in the community to work together. However, this approach does not include experience because it does not focus on individuals and their relationship with others or how they deal with and react to these issues at hand. Furthermore, the article's cluttered form and content remain distinct from a peer reviewed scholarly article and do not conform to scholarly writing. The article reads like a historical account, a census data, a sociological study, a city planning report, a newspaper article, and an investigative news article that attempts to be an objective account of Chinatown without leaning into any of the political groups. One even finds difficulty in pinpointing or following the article's

⁷² Rocky Chin, "New York Chinatown Today: Community in Crisis," *Amerasia Journal* 1:1 (1971): 1-24.

main argument. The article focuses on the community and its problems instead of trying to fit into academic standards with a methodology of study.

Experience is another word that was mobilized during this foundational moment of Asian American Studies. The concept of experience refers to the living conditions of Asians living in America from their mundane experiences as migrants to their experiences of racism:

At one time, we were perceived as a “heathen race” to be dealt with forcibly and with little concern for our basic human rights, while at other times, as a successful minority that should be emulated by others. At the same time, there was once a period when our ancestors considered themselves sojourners with a definite concern to return to their homelands, while others perceived themselves as legal members of this society and sought to establish a meaningful life here. Our purpose in initiating this journal resulted from these seemingly contradictory perceptions and self-images during various phases in the Asian-American experience.⁷³

More specifically, experience refers to the changing racialization of Asians in America. The journal is interested in history and using more “accurate” historical accounts in order to debunk racist “contradictory perceptions and self-images.” Therefore, Asians in America’s racial experience serves as history.

The journal’s editorial preface uses both the terms Asians in America and Asian Americans, though not interchangeably. Asians in America refers to a

⁷³ “Message to Our Readers,” *Amerasia Journal* 1:1 (1971).

geographical location while Asian American pertains to a process of becoming Asian American:

As a minority in America (between .1 per cent and .2 per cent), we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of thinking we have “made it” when our brothers have not. We cannot afford to fight among ourselves or exploit each other for the sake of personal advancement and self-aggrandizement. Instead, we must discover how we can, through whatever skills or resources we have been given, work towards bettering the condition of all Asians in America.

Because we know of no “right” approach or strategy, we must also become more tolerant of individual ideological differences and the wide range of means now and in the future which will be used towards obtaining the goals we have in common—freedom from racism, poverty and oppression, the right to determine our own destinies, and the establishment of ethnic pride and consciousness as Asian Americans.⁷⁴

Asian American pertains to a state of being and a sense of belonging to America.

Asian American refers to a type of consciousness. It is a process of self-determination and attaining “ethnic pride and consciousness” as Asian Americans.

One becomes Asian American and one is not born Asian American. Becoming Asian American is a goal and not a given. Most importantly, the pervasiveness of the first person plural “we” suggests that the Asian American nomenclature stands for a politicized collective identity. The mode of address in this passage overwhelmingly

⁷⁴ Chin 22.

focuses on the community. It is in conversation with the community. In addition, here minority is a quantitative value as opposed to qualitative. Minority refers to the small number of Asians in relation to the entire U.S. population and not within academia.

Twenty-five years later, *Amerasia Journal*'s focus starts to shift away from the community and more towards academia. Concepts of community and identity start to change. Despite the fact that this commemorative issue, "Linkages and Boundaries: Twenty-Five Years of Asian American Studies," presents a retrospective account of the founding edition, the first person singular "I" emerges that was not prevalent in the journal's founding issue. The commemorative issue's "Message To Our Readers" comes from a first person singular point of view.⁷⁵ Various editors from the past to the present relate their own individual perspectives of the journal. The introductory article, Don Nakanishi's "Linkages and Boundaries: Twenty-Five Years of Asian American Studies," also comes from a first person singular perspective compared to the first person plural perspective of the founding journal's preface.⁷⁶ This shift in the mode of address indicates the changing focus of Asian American Studies from collective to personal experience.

Asian American Studies relates to the study of identity: "Asian American Studies was a good historical narrative as well as a rigorous attempt at theory building. It was a piece that explored 'who am I' from the perspective of psychology as much

⁷⁵ "From the Amerasia Journal Editors: 1971-1995," *Journal* 21:3 (1995/1996): vii-xvi.

⁷⁶ Don T. Nakanishi, "Linkages and Boundaries: Twenty-Five Years of Asian American Studies," *Amerasia Journal* 21:3 (1995/1996): xvii-xxv.

as ‘who are we’ from the vantage points of sociology or anthropology.”⁷⁷ It is about the personal “I” but also its relationship with the collective “who we are” identity. Asian American Studies is about both the singular and collective identity. Yet, it is a historical narrative heavily predicated upon identity that privileges the “I” first before the collective “we.” It starts with a personal experience that then gets connected to the experiences of other Asian Americans: “We unashamedly wanted and needed to personalize the field: to draw linkages between our individual lives and the panorama of an Asian American experience that was never taught to us in our K-12 schooling.”⁷⁸ Asian American Studies aspires to present an all-encompassing picture of the Asian American experience. However, the formal education system omits this experience. The concept of experience then becomes attached to education. As a result, the focus of Asian American Studies shifts to academia. The field at this moment aims to contribute to the advancement of Asian Americans through academia: “the field of Asian American Studies would become important contributors to the betterment and advancement of Asian Americans.”⁷⁹ Research and education become the means by which Asian Americans can advance in the U.S. nation at large.

Asian American Studies, at this point, now sees itself as an academic field and not just as a part of the community it studies. Nakanishi’s article celebrates the growth of the field because of the increasing number of academic publications on Asian Americans and the establishment of UCLA’s Center of Asian American

⁷⁷ Nakanishi xxi.

⁷⁸ Nakanishi xxvi.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Studies. Although the article mentions its founding mission and there seems to be some residual meaning of community, its relationship to the community has changed. The journal describes its connection to the community as consisting of “beneficial relationships”—which sounds akin to partnerships rather than actually being part of the community.⁸⁰ The commemorative issue now consists of several articles labeled as “community studies” articles. The journal compartmentalizes its contents differently with separate and distinct sections on community studies, historical and literary studies, book reviews, bibliography, and creative work. One sees this growing division and changing relationship between the journal and community. The form of the journal starts to conform to other scholarly journals.

The journal’s new goals instead focuses its attention to furthering the field and being in conversation with the U.S. nation:

I hope we will make a commitment to duplicate what we have been able to unearth, document, and create in terms of our two most developed ethnic specific areas—Japanese American and Chinese American Studies—for all the other groups in the Asian Pacific American population during the next twenty-five years... to contribute to the larger endeavor of addressing some of our nation’s most persistent and imperious issues, especially those of race and poverty.⁸¹

Although the nation and national have been mentioned in the founding journal, in here “our” together with “nation” suggests that the journal now sees itself as part of

⁸⁰ Nakanishi xxiv.

⁸¹ Nakanishi xxv.

the U.S. nation. The journal shows investment in the U.S. nation at large and no longer within its community. The word “duplicate” gestures to a pattern or methodology to be followed with Japanese and Chinese American Studies as models. Asian American Studies at this point becomes an umbrella category with the branching out of Asian American Studies into more ethnically specific groups such as Japanese American Studies or Chinese American Studies. There exists an unevenness within the field among different ethnic subgroups. The “Pacific” also gets acknowledged and will be absorbed by Asian American Studies. Yet, despite the addition of the “Pacific” population, the name remains Asian American Studies. There seems to be a growing disjuncture between “studies” and the “population” it claims to represent.

In 1998, Twenty-six years later, the Association of Asian American Studies started the Journal of Asian American Studies or *JAAS* as a response to academic and publishing market demands. There was a need for a publication outlet especially with the surge of new scholars and scholarship. The foundational issue of *JAAS* is largely concerned about its status in the U.S. academy. *JAAS* operates as the representation and product of the past: “The founding of the *Journal of Asian American Studies* (*JAAS*, pronounced “jazz”) is a testament to the power of the original vision of Asian American studies and represents a fruition of decades of struggle for a more inclusive and equitable present and future.”⁸² *JAAS* serves as an index of Asian American Studies’ achievement because it is the culmination of decades of struggle. What is

⁸² John M. Liu and Gary Y. Okihiro, “Introduction,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1.1 (1998): 1-3.

powerful about the original vision of Asian American Studies is that it enabled the existence of Asian American Studies in the U.S. academy. Asian Americans are finally represented in the U.S. academy. The concept of power then refers to representation. Yet, the editors' "Introduction" serves as an empty allusion to the original vision of Asian American Studies since the journal does not quite fully explain the original vision of Asian American Studies. At this moment, the founding vision of Asian American Studies' concept of community gets left out. The journal instead mobilizes notions of equality and inclusiveness that pertain to gaining equal access and foothold in academia.

JAAS' primary concern is academic recognition. *JAAS* primarily serves as an academic space for Asian Americanists in order to share their ideas and to mitigate their marginalization within the U.S. academy: "We oftentimes confronted a profound marginalization of our specialization both within traditional disciplines and ethnic studies programs. Rare were the occasions when our institutions and colleagues valued Asian American studies as legitimate or distinctive field of academic inquiry."⁸³ Marginalization here refers to the peripheral position of Asian American Studies within the U.S. academy specifically within the academic hierarchy. It pertains to the academy's failure to recognize Asian American Studies as a legitimate or valuable field. Interestingly, the concept of "marginalization" replaces "minority," which was mobilized during the beginnings of Asian American Studies. Although the first person plural mode of address appears again, it no longer concerns the "we"

⁸³ Liu and Okihiro 1-3.

and “us” of the Asian American community rather the “We” here concerns only Asian American academics. The journal’s intended audience consists of Asian Americanists and other academics within the field. The journal acts as a platform to instigate dialogue among Asian American scholars and not necessarily with academics outside the field. Compared to the founding issue of *Amerasia Journal*, *JAAS* now derives its value not from the community but from being recognized as a legitimate field in the academy. Thus, what becomes valuable to Asian American Studies now is its reception in the U.S. academy instead of its relevance to the community. As a result, Asian American Studies not only separates itself from the community but also isolates itself inside the academy. Asian American Studies scholars are primarily concerned with their own field and its legitimation in the academy. They focus internally and are not necessarily in conversation with anyone beyond their field.

The mission of the journal becomes purely academic. *JAAS* aims to further develop the field: “seeks to define Asian American studies as a distinct, interdisciplinary scholarly pursuit and to integrate Asian American perspectives into the various disciplines that contribute to the development of the field.”⁸⁴ Asian American Studies focuses on the representations of Asian American “perspectives” or points of view in the academy. Asian American Studies is an identity-based point of view. It is through these identity-based “perspectives” that Asian American Studies will make itself “distinct.” Its goal is to “integrate” or assimilate itself within the

⁸⁴ Liu and Okihiro 3.

academy through the further development of the field. Thus, Asian American Studies is “distinct” in so far as it is a field and department of its own; and it is integrated only in the sense that it becomes part of the dominant organization of knowledge as a separate field in the academy. The words “perspectives” and “integrate” further suggest that Asian American Studies at this point responds to the liberal multicultural demands of the U.S. academy. Consequently, the Asian American experience becomes relegated into “perspectives” that cater to the liberal multiculturalism of the academy.

Forty years after the beginnings of Asian American Studies, the field veers away from its original vision and instead continues to focus on its status in the academy. The field appears to be in the process of reinventing itself by moving away from the concepts of community, identity, and experience. In the recent issue of *JAAS* on Asian American epistemologies, Susie J. Pak and Elda Tsou’s “Introduction” argues that Asian American Studies has always been tethered to an Asian American “body” and that the problem with Asian American Studies is that it takes representations of Asian Americans as self-evident.⁸⁵ In order to get away from identity-based and essentializing approaches to Asian American Studies, the authors ask: “How might Asian American history be constructed without an Asian American body? How might a literature called ‘Asian American’ be reterritorialized without the content-drive tether of ‘Asian America’?”⁸⁶ Asian America operates as the

⁸⁵ Susie J. Pak and Elda E. Tsou, “Introduction,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14.2 (2011): 171-191.

⁸⁶ Pak and Tsou 171.

subject and referent of Asian American Studies. At this moment, Asian America now replaces the concept of community and politicized Asian American identity.

Consequently, Asian American identity has now been depoliticized and abstracted into a conceptual entity. In order to open up the field, the article attempts to sever Asian American Studies from Asian America by emptying out “Asian American” of “Asian America”—the people that Asian American Studies was supposed to serve in its founding. The article appears to be purely interested in form rather than content and pushes for a formalist turn in Asian American Studies, especially in literary criticism. Experience at this point becomes relegated into form. The mode of address has changed from the first person “we” and “I” to the now generic “body” devoid of any historical specificity.

Although Pak and Tsou’s “Introduction” presents an incisive critique and analysis of the role of representation in Asian American Studies, their work overlooks the fact that Asian American Studies was not always interested in “bodies” and representations, particularly at the moment of its founding. In the first issue of *Amerasia Journal* as shown in this chapter earlier, Asian American Studies was not yet in conversation outside of its community and thus was not interested in issues of representations. Therefore, this article illustrates an incomplete analysis of the “epistemologies of the field of Asian American studies,” especially since their entire argument is predicated upon its critique of representation.⁸⁷ I argue that it is precisely the institutionalization of Asian American Studies and its attempt to assimilate itself

⁸⁷ Pak and Tsou 171.

in the dominant organization of knowledge in the U.S. academy that are the key problems of the field today. If one carefully looks at the intellectual history of Asian American Studies in the past forty years, it is not until Asian American Studies becomes institutionalized in the American academy that the Asian American “body” becomes its subject of knowledge. An analysis of the concept of community during the founding moment of *Amerasia Journal* in the early 70s proves that the Asian American body as defined in the article has not always been the subject of knowledge.

Identity Representation and the Gesture Towards an Asian American Literary Canon

The concept of identity in Asian American Studies has evolved within the last forty years from personal, collective, transnational, and even to diasporic identities. However, in order to approach the topic of identity in a concrete and specific manner, I will interrogate how identity representation has been used in the institutionalization of Asian American Studies and thus examine how the field remains trapped within the pitfalls of an identity based field. Once Asian American Studies consolidated itself and became part of the academy, the very identity that it used to establish itself has become the means in which it becomes racially segregated within the U.S. academy.

Asian American Studies used identity as a means of representation. In 1974, Frank Chin, et al.’s *Aiiieeeee!* was foundational in starting the Asian American literary field by recovering works by Asian Americans from the past. The editors deliberately selected writers such as Carlos Bulosan, John Okada, and Louis Chu as

the “voice” of “authentic” Asian Americans in order to counter representations of Asian Americans in radio, movies, and television:

Our anthology is exclusively Asian American. That means Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese Americans, American born and raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television... from the pushes of white American culture that picture the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry... screamed “aiieeeee!” ... It is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice.⁸⁸

The authors wanted to be represented not by white America but by Asian Americans with “birth of sensibility” or Asians born and raised in the U.S. who got their understanding of Asia and Asian Americans from the media.⁸⁹ Ironically, the authors use stereotypes as a means to counter stereotypes. In addition, the use of “exclusively” indicates how the editors’ strategy to counter their misrepresentation was to create an exclusive notion of who counts as Asian American and what is Asian American literature. Consequently, *Aiiieeeee!* gestures towards a canon since they have a criteria on what counts and does not count as Asian American literature based on identity. Literature is used to counter mainstream media and it becomes the “voice” or the authentic representation of Asian Americans. Literature, or more specifically representation through literature, becomes the solution to racial stereotypes.

⁸⁸ Frank Chin, et al., eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington: Howard Univ. Press, 1974) xi-xii.

⁸⁹ Chin xiii.

The editors also assert a history that has been unknown by rediscovering literary works by Asian Americans. They aim to create a draft of Asian American literary history. They argue that their labor history created Asian American literature: “The truth is we wrote. We made art. And we made out very well tilling gold, making California green, biting out the granite of the Sierra Nevada for a railroad right of way. The proof of that are the works by these Asian American writers and thinkers who occupied these room before us.”⁹⁰ The previous passage suggests that the editor’s goal was to claim a space based on their labor and identity. Their use of the word “occupied” suggests that there is a sense of ownership and entitlement in claiming this space because of their labor history in California. Asian American literature acts as a historical proof of their existence and labor. Literature then becomes a proxy to history. In fact, literature and history are almost taken as one of the same because literature records their labor and represents it.

Similarly, in 1982, Elaine Kim’s *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* argues for the necessity of using literature as history because of the absence of Asian American history. In fact, Kim reads Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* as a “testimony” and “social documentation.”⁹¹ For Kim, Bulosan gives voice to the oppressed and marginalized migrant farm workers. She interprets Bulosan’s novel as a direct representation of the plight of Filipino migrant workers. Similar to *Aiiiiiii!*, Kim’s work also gestures towards

⁹⁰ Frank Chin, et al., eds., *AIIEEEEE! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (New York: Mentor Press, 1991) xxx.

⁹¹ Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982) 43-57.

canonization. According to her, Asian American literature should elucidate the history of Asian Americans and they should also be “creative writings” in English. Kim’s work enumerates particular requirements on what should count as Asian American literature based on identity:

What I have attempted in this book is to trace the topography and rich textures of the Asian American experience as it is expressed in Asian American literature from the late 19th century to the present day. Although I have used my understanding of Asian American social history to interpret literature, I have focused on the evolution of Asian American consciousness and self-image as expressed in the literature. For the purposes of this study, I have defined Asian American literature as published creative writings in English by Americans of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino descent.⁹²

She establishes several key principles on what counts as Asian American literature and how to read Asian American literary texts. They are first and foremost American before they are Chinese, Japanese, or Filipino. Second, the writing needs to be in English. Asian American literature is American English centric. There is a strong emphasis on being American first through language. In this instance, what makes one American is one’s adherence to the English language. Furthermore, for Kim, Asian American literature needs to be a direct representation of experience, which she defines as the “evolution of Asian American consciousness” and “self-image.” Thus, experience is based on identity, since experience pertains to the consciousness of

⁹² Kim xi.

one's self. In the founding of Asian American literary studies, in order to assert itself within the U.S. academy, Asian American literary studies gestured towards canonization by establishing a criteria on what counts as Asian American literature.

By 1993, Sau-ling Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature from Necessity to Extravagance* argues that Asian American literature differs from "mainstream" American literature because Asian American literature is "claiming America."⁹³ She also points out that Asian American literature operates as a type of political, textual, and professional coalition:

Just as the Asian American ethnic group is a political coalition, Asian American literature may be thought of as an emergent and evolving textual coalition, whose interests it is the business of a professional coalition of Asian American critics to promote. Apart from being an intellectual challenge, criticism is also praxis. Unlike those whose subject matter has been canonized and protected by an established power. Asian American critics have to establish their professional domain; through doing so, and through disseminating the products of their efforts, they play a role in building their community.⁹⁴

Wong understands political, textual, and professional coalition as one and the same. For her, the business of professionalization defines politics, and literature primarily serves the business of professionalization. What is political is the professionalization

⁹³ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993) 1-17.

⁹⁴ Wong 9.

of Asian American Studies within the U.S. academy. She advocates for a political praxis and coalition that pertain to a business process. Interestingly, at this point of professionalization and institutionalization of the field, the community becomes treated as consumers and literary critics as producers. According to Wong, Asian American critics bear the responsibility to supply Asian American “products” to their community. Asian American Studies is or should be about the professionalization and establishment of its domain or its own territory in the academy. The goal then of Asian American literary studies is to delineate a territory that is ethnically defined as Asian American. Identity becomes the means to claim and mark a territory. She wants Asian American literary studies to become established similarly to how other subjects have been canonized. To contest “established power” in academia, Asian American Studies also needs to create a canon for itself. In fact, in 1996, Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* argues that the very heterogeneity of Asian Americans makes Asian American literary canons anti-canonical.⁹⁵ At this point, Asian American Studies gestures towards canonization and thus works with the dominant organization of knowledge in the academy in order to establish itself.

Canon implies a body of work that is deliberately chosen as the authority within a particular community of readers. It answers to a set of criteria and requirements and how these criteria and requirements become justified. Canons become a means of inclusion and exclusion.⁹⁶ By gesturing towards canonization,

⁹⁵ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 37-59.

⁹⁶ English language literary canon started in the 1970s when Stanford started the world cultures requirement. Culture wars started then and the Shakespeare course was dropped. Asian American

Asian American Studies is not only joining the dominant organization of knowledge in the U.S. academy but most importantly it segregates itself based on identity as the differential value. Since canons are only chosen for a particular community of readers, Asian American literature only gets to circulate among Asian Americans or within an identity-based determined space. Asian American Studies is allowed to establish itself as a field in the U.S. academy but becomes segregated at the same time with the very identity that it used to institutionalize itself. This institutionalization results to an equality based on difference. Literary criticism by Frank Chin, Elaine Kim, Sau-ling Wong, and Lisa Lowe gestures towards an Asian American literary canon that only excludes other Asian Americans and creates a hierarchy within the field. As a result, competition among ethnic groups based on identity representation ensues. The field becomes beleaguered with questions such as who gets represented and who does not get represented.⁹⁷ As a result, our attention becomes deflected away from the fact that what only gets protected by gesturing towards a canon is not only the homogenization of the heterogeneity within Asian American literature but also a standard, white, and homogenized American literature. What then gets preserved through the ghettoization of knowledge based on identity in the U.S. academy through canonization is the preservation of the hegemonic white American literature in English. Through the institutionalization of Asian American

literary studies competed at the level of canon and not at the level of classics. However, there is no canon of Asian American literature, it only gestures towards canonization. Canonization has its roots in neoliberalization during Reagan and Thatcher. In comparison, a classic is a matter of practice sedimented over time.

⁹⁷ For an account of the crisis of representation in Asian American Studies, see Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

Studies, Asian Americans are allowed to circulate within the academy but only through tolerable levels of circulation. They are allowed to establish themselves only to the point that they do not disturb the status quo in the American academy.

By 2009, Mark Chiang's *Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies* argues that Asian American Studies operates as a means by which Asian Americans become Asian American subjects. For Chiang, Asian American Studies becomes the means by which cultural capital can be produced and turned into political capital by producing Asian American subjects:

The purpose of Asian American studies, in other words, is to transform Asian ethnic students into Asian American subjects, who will, one hopes, become part of the Asian American body politic or "community." How does this happen? Asian American culture does not serve to conform student's ethnic or cultural identity. Rather, it is the culture through which (through various processes) they "become Asian American," just as the acquisition of the cultural capital of canonical literature is part of the process by which one becomes "American" or "Western" or "white," depending on one's point of view.⁹⁸

Chiang uses the term "subject" instead of identity. He defines "subject" as a process of becoming an Asian American, more specifically the transformation from Asian to Asian American through cultural capital. Chiang wants to use Asian American studies as a means to create a bigger Asian American body politic. He wants to

⁹⁸ Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (New York: NYU Press, 2009) 40.

translate cultural capital into a political one in order to increase the political representation of Asian Americans. Interestingly, similar to Kim, there is this strange process of assimilationist logic at work here. Chiang seems to suggest that Asians need to go through a process of Americanization to become Asian Americans through Asian American Studies. For Kim, one becomes Americanized through the English language; hence, Asian American literature needs to be a creative work in English. For Chiang, one becomes American through the institutionalization of an identity-based field in the university. Institutionalization becomes a process of legitimization in order to be read or recognized as part of American mainstream society. Chiang's work is not only about how one becomes an Asian American subject but also how one becomes an American subject in this transformation from Asian to Asian American.

In addition, community here almost disappears. The preferred term for community is "body politic," which means that community now has a different meaning from the founding of Asian American Studies forty years ago. Community here refers to a political entity that sounds akin to an Asian American voting block. The Asian American subject is a political subject. Identity here refers to a political identity. Most importantly, Chiang argues that similarly to how canons produce "American," "Western," and "white" subjects, Asian American cultural capital should also produce Asian American subjects. Chiang uses the logic of how whiteness becomes consolidated and protected in the academy as a solution to Asian American's marginalized position within the U.S. academy. Thinking through

Chiang's logic then suggests that Asian American literature becomes the means by which Asian Americans become racialized as Asian Americans in the same manner canonical literature produces whiteness. Literature then becomes the means by which one transforms from ethnic to racial. The notion of canon sneaks back in Chiang's works. His work assumes that Asian American Studies' community of readers or students should only be of Asian descent or ethnically Asian. The canon also sneaks back in his logic of comparison by equating cultural capital to canon in his work:

"Asian American literature obviously cannot constitute the same kind of capital as the canon..."⁹⁹ If canon equates to capital for Chiang, then he wants that same capital to work in favor of Asian American Studies. At this point, Asian American Studies still gestures towards canonization and competes at the level of canonization or through the dominant organization of knowledge in the academy by wanting its own separate field.

In fact, Chiang argues for the necessity of Asian American Studies as a separate field in the academy as an alternative to the dominant cultural capital and also as a means to change the dominant cultural capital in the U.S. academy:

The establishment of separate minority studies programs and departments means, among other things, that they now constitute a distinct field in the academy, with their own forms of academic capital. Without the institutionalization of minority studies and its alternative capital, there would be little possibility of a critique of the canon arising from within the institution

⁹⁹ Chiang 41.

in the first place... We may agree with Guillory that changing the syllabus does not change the institutional structures that reproduce inequality in the distribution of capital, but changing the forms of capital that circulate in the university may in fact have some effect on the reproduction of social structures, although what this might be remains to be established.¹⁰⁰

Chiang's approach tries to assimilate with the dominant organization of knowledge within the academy. Paradoxically, the institutionalization of Asian American Studies as a strategy to counter dominant forms of culture in the academy is by functioning exactly how the dominant organization of knowledge works, specifically through the creation of a separate field for minority studies. Again, Asian American Studies wants to compete not only at the level of canon but also at the field level. For Chiang, this involves the production of academic capital predicated on identity and the segregation of programs and departments based on identity. Chiang's work fails to address how alternative capital circulates within an academy that ghettoizes knowledge through canons and fields. At this moment, identity representation remains present and is in fact being utilized to secure the status of Asian American Studies in the academy. Furthermore, Mark Chiang argues that the most important accomplishment of the Asian American movement is the creation of the Asian American category and the institutionalization of a field based on that category:

It is precisely because the coherence of the category, its existence as a social fact, derives not from its realizations in an Asian American "community" or

¹⁰⁰ Chiang 42.

collectivity but from its accumulated value as a sociopolitical category. The main achievement of the Asian American movement was to create the Asian American category and to turn it into a field... The Asian American field comprises all of those who seek to represent Asian American, including politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals...”¹⁰¹

The Asian American category becomes more important than community or collectivity. The value of the Asian American category comes from its sociopolitical category. The community again completely falls out of the picture. In here, for Chiang, the field does not merely pertain to an academic field but he borrows the term from Bourdieu. In Chiang’s work, the field whether it pertains to an academic field or a larger field outside of academia is all about identity representation.

The Formalist Turn in Asian American Literary Studies

The recent formalist turn in Asian American literary criticism challenges identity based approaches to Asian American literature.¹⁰² This section examines the recent trend in Asian American literary criticism’s turn to form as the new mode of interpreting Asian American literary texts. Through looking at key critics’ notion of form and the other concepts they mobilize in relation to it such as race, history, subject, and aesthetics. I argue that the turn to form also marks one of the ways in which Asian American literary studies try to assimilate itself within the dominant organization of knowledge in the U.S. academy today. Though more theoretically

¹⁰¹ Chiang 54.

¹⁰² For an account of the formalist turn in Asian American literary studies, see Susie J. Pak and Elda E. Tsou, “Introduction,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14.2 (2011): 171-191. Also, see, Colleen Lye, “Racial Form,” *Representations* 104 (Fall 2008): 92-101.

sophisticated and critical of essentialist and nationalist approaches to ethnic literature, these critical writings still bear similar approaches to foundational Asian American literary criticism. They still see literature as type of historical representation that provides access to a history that has been neglected and overlooked. However, instead of understanding Asian American literature as a self-evident representation of Asian Americans, Asian American literary criticism now asks how might the literary form problematize our understanding of identity representation. Asian American literary studies continue to remain trapped within identity and identity representation despite their attempts to do away with it. Although the critics I analyzed here have significant differences and even disagreements with each other, they all theorize form as a type of aesthetics grounded in a Marxist understanding of history. For them, historical circumstance, more precisely the history of Asian Americans' racialization, gives shape to an Asian American literary form. It is through race as aesthetics in which they not only justify the legitimacy of Asian American literature within the U.S. academy but also in which they anchor their notions of politics.

In *Asian America: Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry*, Dorothy Wang explores the relationship between racial subjectivity and form in Asian American poetry. In her perspective, poetry cannot be understood without the author because the poet is a product of history and his or her subjectivity is also a historical construct. For Wang, it becomes necessary to read the poet's writings to understand his or her subjectivity:

Like all poets, the Asian American poet is a product of history, ideology, and prior discourses, and the constructions of his subjectivity become explored and (re)articulated in the poetic text through language and form. Even when he claims to be free of the effects, pernicious or not, of being racially marked person in the United States, his subjectivity and poetry have not escaped this context.¹⁰³

Wang argues that both the poet and the poetry he or she writes are always already determined by his or her historical circumstances, which she primarily understands through the context of racism. She defines history as a history of racism or subjectification of Asian Americans. Wang further discusses that race remains present in the text written by poets of color despite the literal absence of race or the poet's claim that he or she is not writing about race. Following Wang's line of thought, the poet then has no agency because racialization is inescapable. She seems to suggest that race always already determines language and form. A poet of color then has no agency when it comes to racialization, since they are already victims of it. For Wang, form equates to the Asian American subjectivity informed by racism because poetry is constantly inscribed within the Asian American poet's subjectivity. Asian American poetry, in Wang's definition, always derives from racial subjectivity. The poet, like the text and the form, is never free from the effects of racism.

In addition, Dorothy Wang's idea of form is tied to language through the process of racialization. She focuses on language and Asian Americans' relationship

¹⁰³ Dorothy Wang, *Asian America: Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013) 53-54.

to it, specifically how they have been culturally and linguistically unassimilable and how this condition then produces literary forms unique to Asian Americans:

Asian American's unique form of racial interpellation—inextricably linked to the view of them as culturally and linguistically unassimilable—Asian American writing offers a particularly “limiting case,” for thinking not only about the relationship between a poet's interpellation (including racialization) in American society and her relationship to the English language...¹⁰⁴

She perceives Asian American's racial interpellation as a form that is inextricably connected to how they are viewed by American society at large as culturally and linguistically unassimilable. She analyzes literature at the level of representation because she examines how Asian Americans are viewed or how they are seen. She argues that racial interpellation has a form and that racism against Asian Americans produces a form unique to them. Wang further defines form as a historical product, in a Marxist sense via Raymond Williams. She posits that form is produced by the social and historical forces on the poet's language and subjectivity: “...writing by Asian Americans formally manifests the effects of social and historical forces on the poet's subjectivity and language, not only in what is consciously and explicitly stated but also in what is unstated or said obliquely and –crucially—in how something is said (for example syntax, tone, word choice.)”¹⁰⁵ Form then pertains to both the indirect and direct representation of Asian Americans' history of racial oppression. Wang's turn to form partly comes from her desire to advocate for Asian American

¹⁰⁴ Wang 24.

¹⁰⁵ Wang 45.

literature to be considered as American literature. According to her, Asian American literature still needs to gain full legitimacy in English departments. However, in order to do so, she relies on race in her formulation of form and she instrumentally reads Asian American literature to look for race in the text. Furthermore, for her, an author's identity is one that validates a text as an Asian American literature. She sees literary texts both as a direct and indirect representation of the poet or author.

Christopher Lee's theorization of form is closely linked to identity, specifically through his theorization of the idealized critical subject. In *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature*, Lee explores the significance and staying power of identity in reading Asian American literature through the idealized critical subject. Although Lee understands the pitfalls of identity politics and appears to be sympathetic to its criticism, he also sees identity as necessary and even points to its utopian dimension. He still takes Asian American literature as a type of identity representation and even affirms the need of identity in reading Asian American literature.

Lee reads literature through aesthetics and understands that representation belongs to its realm. His notion of the idealized critical subject refers to an aesthetic figure that appears as a representation in fiction: "the idealized critical subject as an aesthetic figure whose conditions of articulation are intricately related to the representational protocols and procedures of fiction..."¹⁰⁶ The idealized critical

¹⁰⁶ Christopher Lee, *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2012) 13.

subject further relates to aesthetics because it pertains to claims on identity, subjectivity, and politics made for the marginalized:

In order to undertake a sustained examination of identity's conflicted forms, this study pivots around a discursive figure that I call the idealized critical subject, which operates across a range of literary and critical texts concerned with identity. In the following discussion, I treat the idealized critical subject as a composite figure that embodies a set of claims about identity, subjectivity, and oppositional social/political movements. It justifies these movements' claim to offer a thorough critique of modernity from the perspective of those who have been marginalized and victimized. The idealized critical subject is characterized precisely by its ability to integrate the production of critical knowledge with an effective political praxis.¹⁰⁷

His notion of the idealized critical subject not only focuses on the oppression of the marginalized but also uses it as a starting point for oppositional politics. Through the idealized critical subject, Lee attempts to bridge the gap between the activist roots of Asian American Studies with its now more theoretical status in the U.S. academy. On the one hand, he seems to address the criticisms of Asian American literary studies as deviating away from activism. On the other hand, he appeals to an aesthetic concept as a response to the criticism of Asian American literature's lack of aesthetic qualities and theorization that holds texts together as Asian American. He combines together praxis and theory under the umbrella of aesthetics in his concept of

¹⁰⁷ Lee 9.

the idealized critical subject. The idealized critical subject displays an identity that can be found in both primary and secondary texts and even beyond the walls of academia. For Lee, the idealized critical subject functions as a placeholder that can be occupied by many different subjects: “The idealized critical subject is enormously useful, even indispensable, for conceiving and articulating a politically committed knowledge project because it functions as a flexible trope, a position that gets occupied by a range of subjects including fictional characters, writers, artists, activists, students, critics, and intellectuals.”¹⁰⁸ He uses the idealized critical subject as a catchall and capacious concept in an attempt to include everyone since Asian America had grown disparate.

Furthermore, for Lee, the critical Asian American subject provides access to histories of domination that have been omitted: “the critical Asian American subject is distinguished by its ability to reveal suppressed or neglected histories and experiences of domination, knowledge that in turn becomes the basis for political contestation.”¹⁰⁹ Lee’s notion of subject here refers to subjectivity or to one’s process of domination. His concept of history then includes a history of marginalization and oppression. Yet, he does not attribute this history of domination only to race. He conflates history and experiences of domination together and turns them into knowledge as the basis for politics. The politicization of the critical Asian American subject depends on his or her knowledge of oppression from the past.

¹⁰⁸ Lee 11.

¹⁰⁹ Lee 11.

Lee's notion of form relates to the politics of recognition, specifically the recognition of the subject's marginalization. According to Lee, form gives us access in understanding the changing movement of the idealized critical subject because it depicts the oppressive conditions of the subject:

This study pursues a reading practice that is attentive to form's vicissitudes as a means of tracking the unstable status of the idealized critical subject. If this subject is defined by its ability to engage critically with realities of oppression, articulations of this subject must continually account for its cognitive relationship to the external world; a consideration of form reveals with more precision exactly how this engagement takes place. Form thus reveals the operations of the subject as well as how it is rooted in social particulars. By stressing the cognitive implications of form, we can draw a distinction between reading practices attentive of form and formalism as an ideological stance on literary value that eschews the importance of history and/or politics.¹¹⁰

Form functions as a link in understanding the reality of the subject. Lee then takes form as a type of mediation between reality and the subject. Most importantly, Lee differentiates between form and formalism and advocates for the cognitive implications of form. To him, the subject has the ability to not only be conscious of his or her social realities but to also engage with them. In this way, form reveals both the operations and "social particulars" of the subject and precisely why form,

¹¹⁰ Lee 15.

according to Lee, becomes more grounded in history and politics than formalism. Through form's cognitive implications, form is not only able to represent but also to recognize the subject's condition. Form then relates to a mode of reading that pays careful attention to history and politics or to the text's context and referents. In this instance, he defines politics and history as the subject's reality of oppression and how the subject deals with this predicament. On the other hand, he defines formalism as an ideological stance cut off from history and politics. Formalism's literary value does not depend on history and politics, while form's literary value comes from these two. Therefore, form's literary value is predicated upon the subject's history of oppression and his or her engagement with it. Lee derives his theorization of form and thus aesthetics from the subject's oppression or victimization.

Lee also mobilizes his notion of semblance in relation to identity to further show the importance of identity. For Lee, identity is powerful because it provides access to knowledge:

Seeking to account for the "fantasmic" power of identity, this book has deployed the notion of semblance to track the tour-de-force moments when identity gets attached to subjects and facilitates the production and representation of knowledge in the form of literature... I want to suggest that a similar tension—between the pressures of a racialized society and a political imagination that seeks to overcome these limitations—permeates Asian American identity, which draws on its semblance character to imagine emancipatory politics. One of the main goals of this book has been to theorize

how literary texts reveal and stage this process by articulating various aspects of the idealized critical subject, itself constituted through semblance, as a means to integrate knowledge with praxis.¹¹¹

Semblance refers to the process by which identity gets attached to a subject and enables the representation of knowledge through literature. Semblance leads to the representation of knowledge in literature. For Lee, literature acts as a representation of a particular type of knowledge pertaining to identity. In other words, it is through identity that knowledge becomes possible because knowledge is presented to us through identity. Lee sees the production of knowledge as dependent on identity. Most importantly, for Lee, it is through the semblance or aesthetics, as the representation of identity, that knowledge and politics are able to come together. It is through semblance that Asian American identity imagines emancipatory politics or enables itself to imagine freedom. Oddly, for Lee, it is Asian American identity and not the subject itself that draws on its semblance character for freedom to become possible. In Lee's formulation, instead of the subject, identity performs the act of imagining emancipatory politics. The subject then does not seem to have any agency only the semblance does. Lee locates agency through the semblance of identity or identity representation and not in actual people. Lee's work does not deviate from the founding Asian American literary criticism because his work concerns identity representation. But his work offers a theorization of identity as a type of aesthetics, a

¹¹¹ Lee 151.

semblance of identity, in order to bring theory and practice into one and thus suture the divide between theory and practice and aesthetics and politics.

On the other hand, Elda Tsou bases her analysis of Asian American literary texts not in aesthetics or form but in figurative activity. In *Unquiet Tropes: Form, Race, and Asian American Literature*, Elda Tsou rereads canonical Asian American texts away from identity through figuration. She argues that Asian American texts are not always about identity or Asian America:

The broad sweep of these reading practices tends to obscure how individual literary texts may hint at a different set of concerns or even unsettle their identity to Asian America all together. For example, the narrative of *Blu's Hanging* seems to confirm the charges of Filipino stereotyping, but a closer look at the novel's figurative activity reveals instead a trenchant critique of those same stereotypes. Referential reading practices have yet another troubling effect. In expecting that Asian American literature is necessarily "about" Asian America—in assuming, that is, that racial signs correspond reliably to racial meanings—do we not reproduce the very racial logic we contest elsewhere? If we cannot make room for Asian American literature to mean other than Asian America, do we not acquiesce to the further marginalization of this literature by restricting its scope and reducing its complexity?¹¹²

¹¹² Elda Tsou, *Unquiet Tropes: Form, Race, and Asian American Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015) 2-3.

Tsou rightly criticizes referential approaches to Asian American literature. She defines this approach as reading Asian American literary texts as directly corresponding to an Asian American identity or Asian America. This type of reading practice, according to her, is not only reductive but also obfuscates the fact that these texts may not actually pertain to an Asian American identity. She argues that Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* read figuratively actually challenges rather than condones stereotypes of Filipinos.¹¹³ She incisively points out that referential reading remains problematic because it assumes "racial signs correspond reliably with racial meanings." Thus, if we read Asian American literary texts as merely about Asian American identity and its representation, then we not only end up following the logic of racialization, but we also become complicit with our own marginalization. Asian American literary texts do not only mean one thing. In fact, Tsou takes figuration as the potential of literary texts for "aberration" and "multiple or unexpected trajectories."¹¹⁴ To read through figuration and ground Asian American literary texts through figurative language, as Tsou does, is to understand that meanings are unstable and can mean different things. In order to challenge racialization, we have to understand signification as erratic and changing. In this way, reading through figuration can open up a space in which Asian American literary texts are not always about racial signification but something else. They might in fact be challenging

¹¹³ This novel has been a source of controversy within the Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS) to the point of almost dissolving the organization. The AAAS awarded the book with a literary prize and later revoked it. Many critics have accused the text for perpetuating stereotypes of Filipinos and for misrepresenting Filipinos. For more discussion on the controversy, see, Elda Tsou, *Unquiet Tropes: Form, Race, and Asian American Literature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁴ Tsou 6.

racialization as Tsou demonstrates in her literary readings. Figuration as a mode of reading enables us to interpret Asian American literary texts beyond identity and identity representation.

Tsou further challenges reading Asian American literature through identity by severing the relationship between the author and the text. To get away from reading Asian American literature through authorial descent, which has been the typical approach to ethnic literary texts, Tsou focuses on figurative language or rhetorical tropes:

That these classical rhetorical tropes resurface in Asian American literature suggests that such linguistic patterns do not belong to any single author or individual; they are part of a linguistic inheritance dwarfing any individual's claim to own or originate it. These rhetorical structures may very well be unintended; they are, in this sense, part of the unanticipated and compelling effects of figuration that illuminate the power of the literary text to exceed its historical usage.¹¹⁵

Tsou posits that since tropes have been used beyond Asian American literary works, they are not owned by anyone. She adds that tropes are linguistic inheritance that is not unique to Asian America or to any individual. Through figuration, Tsou connects two different temporalities: tropes in the past with classical rhetoric and tropes in the present with contemporary Asian American literature. In making this connection, Tsou is able to reinterpret the significance of rhetorical tropes beyond their classical

¹¹⁵ Tsou 13.

context and use them in understanding how race works today. In a similar vein, tropes read through figuration, take Asian American literary texts away from their original historical context and give rise to new and other possible meanings. In this way, Asian American literary texts can exceed their historical use and do not always have to be tied to a racial identity. They are not limited in scope to be just about or for Asian Americans, or to be meaningful only for a certain population. Literary texts do not have to be segregated based on racial identity. However, Tsou's approach does not mean that it has no ties to Asian America. She argues that these rhetorical tropes are anchored in Asian American history in order to provide specificity on how these tropes work: "Far from being timeless or transcendental, though, these tropes figure a specific set of problematics firmly rooted in Asian American history, and because these precipitating historical conditions are *figured*—transformed into figurative language—they are, in the end, indirect and unverifiable."¹¹⁶ Tsou perceives Asian American history as figured and not directly represented in Asian American literary texts. Her work provides a significant breakthrough in Asian American literary studies because it illustrates the potential of figurative reading through tropes in interpreting ethnic literary texts beyond identity and identity representation. This is precisely the power of figural reading that her work suggests.

Conclusion

Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics

¹¹⁶ Tsou 6.

which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.¹¹⁷
-Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Recent Asian American literary criticism has been attempting to assimilate with the dominant organization of knowledge in the academy through aesthetics. One of the major problems with the current trend of Asian American literary criticism's turn to form is that they do not see reading at the level of representation as a problem.¹¹⁸ They see problems with reading through identity representation, which is only one aspect of reading at the level of representation. They also see aesthetics as problematic to the extent that the academy does not think Asian American literature meets certain aesthetic criteria to count as literature. Yet, despite their criticism of aesthetics and how it has been used to exclude certain literary texts written by authors of color, many of them overlook the fact that representation belongs to the realm of aesthetics. In addition, most recent criticism does not seem to problematize canons but instead takes canons as a norm in organizing knowledge.¹¹⁹ Critics try to

¹¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2007).

¹¹⁸ In here, I agree with Neferti Tadiar's criticism that reading literature as a type of identity representation falls into the trap of multicultural liberalism. Citing Dipesh Chakrabarty, Tadiar argues, "As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, 'Minority histories, one may say, in part express the struggle for inclusion and representation that are characteristic of liberal and representative democracies.' To the extent that they aim to be adequate to an independently existing historical, sociocultural reality, accounts of Filipino culture and social life participate in the hegemony of realist and historicist representation that continues to prevail over academic knowledge production." However, contrary to Tadiar, my work differentiates from her approach in that I do not focus on literature as a social fact and as a part of the social labour process to circumvent the problem of identity and representation. For more, see Neferti Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) 16-18.

¹¹⁹ So far, only Colleen Lye has been critical of taking Asian American literature as a canon. For more, see, Colleen Lye, "Reading for Asian American Literature," *Blackwell Companion to American Literary Studies*, eds. Robert Levine and Caroline Levandar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

legitimize Asian American literary texts and themselves as scholars in the academy by looking at form and saying yes we have form and we fit. They constantly have to seek something distinct about Asian American literature by finding something intrinsic in form such as race. In doing so, they continually have to rely on identity representation since racialization always seem to cohere through identity. But by always looking for a distinct quality to differentiate itself, to make itself count, Asian American literary criticism only fight at the level of representation, and thus in the realm of aesthetics. For this reason, Asian American literary criticism cannot escape essentialism even if it claims to be doing the contrary. Hence, Asian American literary criticism is in a state of aporia.

Asian American literary criticism remains trapped in identity and identity representation for two main reasons: it understands literature as means for representation and reads texts at the level of representation. Their conceptualization of the relationship between history and literature is couched upon a productivist notion of history. By thinking that history produces literary forms, they then perceive literature as a type of representation of history. Literary texts are somehow either direct or indirect representations of history. They are trying to anchor their readings to some sort of historical truth to justify its validity within the academy as materially grounded. In addition, Asian American literary criticism mostly think of history as the historical context of the text's production: how it is produced, by whom, how is it circulated, what conditions produced the text and its writings. They also neglect the historical relation between the reader and the text and thus tend to ossify the text in

the past. If we, Asian American literary critics, sincerely desire to get out of reading Asian American literature through mimetic and sociological approaches, then we have to get out of reading literary texts through representation. This means we should avoid analyzing the text at face value or at its literal representation, interpreting it on the basis of stereotypes or how it troubles representation, and most importantly, we should try not to look at literature for historical truths. We need to avoid looking at texts as merely about our historical past or our racialized subjectivity, but look at the singularity of the text in order to avoid instrumentalized readings that foreclose other possibilities.

Asian American literary criticism reifies race by instrumentally looking at literary texts for racial form, or how literature is a representation of a racialized historical past. Recent Asian American literary criticism appears to always read for how race works in literature or how we are racially oppressed to the point that they use race as a type of aesthetic to justify their existence and acceptance in the U.S. academy. I am not saying racism does not exist or that we are over it at all, simply that we have to learn how to read beyond our oppression, especially in the current political climate. It is crucial to discuss racism in a way that we also avoid reifying race.¹²⁰ It also becomes more important on how literature gives us access to experiences beyond living in the racialized world and how it opens up other possibilities for us. We are rather foreclosing other experiences that fall outside the

¹²⁰ In this instance, I find Paul Gilroy's distinction between race and racism helpful in that if we use race, we reify it or naturalize racial hierarchies because our usage makes it real when it is not. Focusing on race perpetuates its existence, concretizes it. On the other hand, racism focuses on acts of racism and therefore sees race as a byproduct of racism. For more, see Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

codified category of race. We cannot rely on race as a crutch for our existence in the academy. The gesture towards a racial form is a type of self-tokenization based on race, on our own very oppression, in the U.S. academy. We are now using racialization as something unique to Asian Americans in order to hold on to our claim to space in the academy.

To some extent, the state of Asian American literary studies brings to mind Benjamin's closing in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—that aesthetics have become the means for the continuous destruction of people, it is the height of self-alienation. Asian American literary criticism's turn to form takes aesthetics to mean as the representation of its racialized history and victimization. Asian American literary studies' turn to form has transformed its own racialization and oppression into aesthetics in order to justify its institutionalization in the U.S. academy. Yet, these criticisms have responded by politicizing aesthetics on the ground of race that only results in our own further racialization in the academy. Contrary to Benjamin, the answer lies perhaps not in communism politicizing art but perhaps to a reading beyond politics, aesthetics, and identity.

Chapter 3

Zeugmatic Formations: *Balikbayan* Boxes and the Filipino Diaspora

This chapter examines the practice of sending *balikbayan* boxes within the Filipino diaspora. The term *balikbayan* refers to Filipinos worldwide who occasionally return to visit the motherland. Aside from monetary remittances, Filipinos all over the world either ship or carry with them on their flights standardized *balikbayan* boxes or mini-containers filled with imported goods back to the Philippines. In the United States alone, according to Forex Cargo, one of the leading *balikbayan* box services, they deliver at least 300,000 *balikbayan* boxes each year to the Philippines. Today, the Philippine government offers incentives for Filipinos around the world to send these mini-containers to their families and friends left behind because it highly benefits from its industry. In 1989, the *balikbayan* box business contributed 4.2 billion pesos (or \$190 million) to the Philippine economy.¹²¹ Out of the 4.2 billion pesos, 3.3 billion pesos went directly to Filipino families in the form of basic commodities, 155 million pesos went to the Philippine government through custom duties and taxes on the mini-containers that were shipped, and the remainder went to the businesses involved in shipping. These numbers most likely have increased today because of the continuous out-migration of Filipinos and the

¹²¹ Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc, eds., *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 257-258.

recent decrease in the luggage weight limit, or stricter baggage allowances, in international flights.¹²²

This section relates several distinct histories in order to provide us with a complex understanding of *balikbayan* boxes. My first approach situates these mini-containers in relation to the Marcos regime and the history of Filipino labor migration. Though not completely unrelated to these histories, I then interrogate the connection between the homogeneous nature of these mini-containers and globalization through the standardization of the shipping industry. I also contextualize *balikbayan* boxes through a phenomenological analysis of the terms *pasalubong* or Filipino gift exchange and *balikbayan* to reveal the other types of linkages created from below through *balikbayan* boxes. I have two goals in mind. In the first part, I want to show how a phenomenological approach can undo the determinations of globalized capital, Philippine nation-state, and identity to reveal what they mask—that *balikbayan* boxes are about social relations and Filipinos carving out a space for themselves not necessarily for their individual selves but to maintain their connections with others. The practice of sending *balikbayan* boxes pertains to the materialization of social relationships. In the second part, to further continue undoing these bigger structures that appear to overdetermine people's lives, I will look at the figurations of *balikbayan* boxes within Filipino American literature. A figural reading of *balikbayan* boxes through rhetorical tropes reveals the other histories, the lived

¹²² Today, one is allowed to check-in two luggages with a weight of no more than fifty pounds each, which was not always the case. Filipinos now buy smaller *balikbayan* boxes to adapt to these changes. Philippine Airlines is notorious for their strictness that they often weigh passengers' carry-on luggage right at the gate right before they board the planes. However, this luggage restriction only applies to economy plane tickets as more expensive ones often have more generous baggage allowances.

experiences of individuals, the choices they make and the motivations behind their actions. Thus, I take literary texts not as types of mediation or imitations of reality but as accounts of lived experience.

Most scholarship on *balikbayan* boxes analyzes them through the framework of identity and the nation state. Vicente Rafael sees *balikbayan* boxes as representations of immigrant success and the promise of immigration:

Such boxes are the material evidence of immigrant success as much as they are symbolic of the promise of immigration itself. Thus do they constitute the materialization of a desire realizeable only outside the nation, yet recognizable only within its borders. As such, the *balikbayan* box is a kind of social hieroglyph indexing a Filipino-American immigrant social formation predicated on the improvisation and subsequent standardization of the hybrid type: a subject at once neocolonial and national.¹²³

Rafael understands *balikbayan* boxes as tied to Filipino American immigrant identity because they are indicative of the subjection or domination of Filipinos both within the borders of the Philippines and the American Empire. Filipinos are both Philippine national and U.S neocolonial subjects. He looks at *balikbayan* boxes through the lenses of the nation, transnational, and postcolonial studies. In a similar vein, Jade Albuero locates the significance of *balikbayan* boxes in relation to first generation Filipino American identities. According to her, *balikbayan* boxes reveal Filipino Americans' experience of dislocation or their entrapment between two different

¹²³ Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 260.

places, the Philippines and the United States. In her analysis, she literally places Filipino American identities inside *balikbayan* boxes and uses the *balikbayan* box as a metaphor for Filipino American's liminal identity both in the Philippines and in the United States: "I situate the identities of *balikbayans* within the boxes they carry. In reading the boxes as a location of *balikbayan* identity, I emphasize the liminal status of first-generation Filipino Americans both in the native and adopted countries."¹²⁴ Similar to Rafael, Albuero perceives the box as a type of or index of restriction, oppression, and unfreedom. Although Clement Camposano examines *balikbayan* boxes outside the United States and beyond U.S. and Philippine relations, he also relates that act of sending *balikbayan* boxes to identity, specifically to the production of Filipino women's gendered identities:

The sending of goods by Filipino migrant women in Hong Kong to their families in the Philippines is a gendered process that "maps" these migrant women back into the emotional economy of the household. I argue that the practice is a performance of intimacy, a way for migrant women to bridge the Hong Kong and Philippine segments of their diasporic and fragmented lives, which enables them to sustain coherent narratives of the self. The kind of intimacy being performed, however, is unconventional and "diasporic" as it is

¹²⁴ Jade Albuero, "Boxed In or Out? *Balikbayan* Boxes as Metaphors for Filipino American (Dis)Location," *Ethnologies* 27.2 (2005) 139.

defined by both engagement with and estrangement from the domestic spaces of home.¹²⁵

Balikbayan boxes tie these women to their roles as domestic workers abroad and back home because these mini-containers become the means in which their gendered identities as mothers and domestic helpers get maintained.¹²⁶ In other words, it is through *balikbayan* boxes that Filipino migrant women's gendered subjectification happens. On the other hand, it is also a way in which Filipino women narrativize themselves in order to preserve a sense of who they are. Camposano sees *balikbayan* boxes as representations of Filipino women's identities albeit a bifurcated one. Even though these scholars do discuss *balikbayan* boxes as part of a gift giving exchange, their works focus more on the construction of identity that happens in relation to *balikbayan* boxes, or how these boxes constitute gendered, national, and postcolonial identities. They all understand *balikbayan* boxes as representations of Filipino or Filipino American identities. They also pay more attention to individual identities instead of the social relationships that occur through the act of sending *balikbayan* boxes.

I. Histories

Marcos and the *Balikbayan* Program

In 1973, a year after the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, dictator and then president, started the *balikbayan* program to

¹²⁵ Clement C. Camposano, "Balikbayan Boxes and the Performance of Intimacy by Filipino Migrant Women in Hong Kong," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 21.1 (2012) 83.

¹²⁶ Deidre McKay emphasizes the same point in her study on *balikbayan* boxes in Singapore, see Deidre McKay, "Everyday Places—Philippine Place-making and the Translocal Quotidian," Paper (Cultural Studies Association of Australia, Murdoch University, 2004) 19.

attract Filipinos primarily in the United States to come back as tourists in order to generate foreign exchange and income for the Philippines. The program offered various incentives such as cheaper plane tickets, tax breaks, and discount rates in stores. In its inception, the program was meant to clean up the image of Martial Law and show that the Philippines was not in complete disorder.¹²⁷ *Balibbayans* were provided with identification cards that eased the process of recognizing them and dispensing their benefits. The government implemented the *balibbayan* program with certain rules and regulations such as the legal definitions of what counts as a *balibbayan*. These restrictions have been adjusted throughout the years and *balibbayan* benefits have expanded today. It is important to note that it was also during this time that Marcos institutionalized the Philippines as a labor exporting state in order to alleviate the growing national deficit. The *balibbayan* program was part of Marcos' strategy to respond to its growing debt to the IMF and World Bank.

Filipino Labor Migration

The Philippines' historically specific colonial and neocolonial relationship with the United States partly explains its transformation as a contemporary source of migrant labor. From the 1920s to 1930s, Filipino migration to the United States, largely male migrant workers in the West Coast, marks a foundational historical moment of Filipino out migration.¹²⁸ Migration during this period was predicated upon the American empire's economic demand for cheap and racialized labor. The

¹²⁷ Cristina Szanton Blanc, "A Filipino Extension of the National Imaginary and of State Boundaries," *Philippine Sociological Review* 44.¼(1996) 181.

¹²⁸ For a historical account of Filipino Migration in the West Coast, see Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 restricted Asian migration in the U.S. and in order to supply its labor needs the U.S. started importing Filipinos. At this time, Filipinos were considered as U.S. nationals and not citizens. This categorical loophole allowed the United States to source their labor needs from the Philippines because Filipinos can legally enter American borders. This was one of the largest waves of Filipino out migration.¹²⁹ Scholars such as Robyn Rodriguez claim that the Philippines' long history as a source of migrant labor for the United States is formative of the current diaspora of Filipinos as global workers and the transformation of the Philippines as a labor brokering state: "the neo-colonial socio-economic conditions and institutional rationality of the colonial labor system made make labor export necessary and practicable as an economic intervention in the Philippines by 1974."¹³⁰ The formation of Filipinos as global seafarers and nurses also has its roots in the American Empire.¹³¹

After World War II and the end of American formal colonization of the Philippines in 1945, U.S. neocolonial relations with the Philippines began and unfair economic relations were established only benefitting the United States. Several of the agreements such as the Parity Amendment opened up the Philippines' natural

¹²⁹ There is a longer history of Filipino diaspora and there was a moment of Filipino migration in the diaspora that was not propelled by the economic compulsions of the current globalization. In "The Revolution and the Diaspora in Austral-Asia," Reynaldo Ileto points out that the Philippines already have a diaspora even before this concept became a buzzword of globalization. According to him, there were already hundreds of Filipinos who settled and worked as pearl divers and seamen in the northern parts of Australia after 1872. For more, see Reynaldo Ileto, *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 1999) 119, 126.

¹³⁰ Robyn Rodriguez, *The Labor Brokering State: The Philippine State and the Globalization of Philippine Citizen-Workers*, Dissertation (University of California Berkeley, 2005) 10.

¹³¹ For extensive discussion regarding these issues, see Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Steve McKay's forthcoming book on Filipino Seafarers.

resources and public utilities to the American government, businesses, and citizens. The United States maintained major economic privileges in the Philippines but the Philippines no longer had the benefit of access to American markets. In the 1970s, this neocolonial relationship put the Philippines into further debt to the IMF and World Bank while the country was under the United States backed Marcos dictatorship.¹³² The IMF and World Bank restructured Philippine economy by changing its policies from import substitution to export production and devaluing the Philippine peso. This restructuring destroyed the Philippine economy and only propelled the Philippine government to borrow more money. It also compelled many Filipinos to move abroad because of increased unemployment. Filipino migration increased during this period and expanded beyond the United States.¹³³ Through the passage of the presidential decree, the 1974 Philippine Labor Code, Marcos institutionalized labor export and mandated workers' remittance to bolster the economy to address the growing national debt and deficit.¹³⁴ Marcos eventually required workers to send their remittances through the Philippine banking system and workers' failure to do so resulted in punishment.¹³⁵

¹³² For more on this topic, see Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, eds., *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1987) 263-267.

¹³³ Blanc 187.

¹³⁴ Rodriguez 10.

¹³⁵ Rodriguez 8.

However, the transformation of the Philippine state as an exporter of human labor can also be attributed to globalization and the creation of flexible labor.¹³⁶ For instance, the oil boom in the Middle East in the 1970s and the rapid transformation of East Asian countries (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea) into export-oriented production sites resulted in the heavy reliance on imported cheaper and contractual workers from the Philippines.¹³⁷ In addition, due to the feminization of labor in these export-processing zones, the economic development of these NICs (Newly Industrialized Countries) also depended on the labor of Filipina OCWs working primarily as domestic workers. Filipino labor export is profitable for the Philippine state because migrant workers remit millions of dollars home every year and these remittances bolster peso-dollar exchange rates.¹³⁸ Today, ten per cent of the Philippine population is located in 104 different countries. One out of two Filipino has a family member working abroad.¹³⁹ The Philippines ranks as second to Mexico as the leading labor exporter.¹⁴⁰ Middle East, Asia (particularly East Asia), and Europe are the top three regional destinations for Overseas Contract Workers¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ I just wanted to provide a broad historical overview that explains Filipino outmigration. I know that there are many more factors that contribute to this trend and each geographical location of Filipino migration has its own historical specificity.

¹³⁷ Rodriguez 6.

¹³⁸ Rodriguez 2.

¹³⁹ These facts were taken from Steve McKay's presentation on "Born to Sail? Filipino Seafarers and Racial Formation in a Global Labor Niche," Santa Cruz, CA, 3/1/10.

¹⁴⁰ Caroline Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation: Filipino Writings from the Margins 1981 to 2004* (Quezon City: Ateneo University Press, 2004) 227.

¹⁴¹ Roland Tolentino made an important point in distinguishing the use between Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) and Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Similar to Tolentino, I prefer the use of OCWs because this term emphasizes the nature of overseas work as contractual in response to capital's need for flexible labor. The move to change Contract to Filipino was also nationalizing move by the Philippine state. For more, see Roland Tolentino, "Diaspora as Historical/Political Trope in Philippine Literature" (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2016) 1.

(OCW).¹⁴² A large majority of Filipinos outside the Philippines also reside in the United States.

***Balibbayan* Box**

Although the *balibbayan* program was a Marcos state sponsored program, the beginnings of the *balibbayan* box was an expedition from below by Filipino migrants in the United States and was tied to the tradition of *pasalubong*, or Filipino gift giving. The creation of the *balibbayan* box was meant to take advantage of and to push the limitations of airline regulations, specifically on how much checked baggage Filipinos can take with them on the plane. In the 1970s, Filipino immigrants in the United States utilized discarded boxes of electronics, computer equipment, Pampers, and canned goods in order to bring *pasalubong* or gifts to their families and friends when returning back to the Philippines.¹⁴³ *Balibbayan* boxes maximize on the allowed weight and size limit of checked baggage on planes. They are cheaper, lighter, and more spacious than suitcases enabling Filipinos to pack and bring more quantities of *pasalubong* back home. *Balibbayan* boxes also have their roots in the Filipino tradition of *pasalubong*. Filipinos bring back items from their travel destination to give as gifts to those who were not physically with them while they were away. A *pasalubong* can either be food or non-perishable item that is meant to impart a part of their experience while travelling. For instance, they would bring back a local delicacy of another location back home to share with family or friends.

¹⁴² Rodriguez 6.

¹⁴³ For more on history of how *balibbayan* boxes came about, see Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 260.

Through this practice, travelers bring back a piece of their destination, a materiality of their experience. The experience of their travels is embedded in these objects because they are associated with one's travel destination and journey. There are several connections being made through the act of *pasalubong*: between the home location and travel destination, the social ties between the one who left and the ones left behind, and those who did not get to travel and the place visited by the traveller. The act of giving brings together two different places apart from each other, social relations between people, and place with people. There is also a notion of time from being away from one's dwelling or the duration of travel, hence, a *pasalubong* is supposed to fill in or atone for the person's absence while traveling, a way of also saying that the traveler thought of the one left behind while being away.

Since most studies on *balikbayan* boxes primarily focus on their aspect as a gift,¹⁴⁴ I want to also contextualize these mini-containers in relation to the containerization of the shipping industry to highlight its dimension as a commodity and its connections to the globalization of capital, since a *balikbayan* box functions both as a gift and a commodity. The standardization of *balikbayan* boxes and the global shipping industry results from the economization of space to increase the efficiency of capital's mobility. The standardization of *balikbayan* boxes started from airline baggage regulations.¹⁴⁵ By the 1980s, Filipino entrepreneurs in the U.S.

¹⁴⁴ See Jade Alburo, *Box Populi: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Filipino American Balikbayan Box*, Master's thesis (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2002) and Deirdre McKay, "Everyday Places—Philippine Place-making and the Translocal Quotidian," Paper (Cultural Studies Association of Australia, Murdoch University, 2004).

¹⁴⁵ Jade Alburo, *Box Populi: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Filipino American Balikbayan Box*, Master's thesis (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2002) 103.

manufactured standardized cardboard boxes with the name “*balikbayan* box” printed on the sides. They were first made for air transport and then later adapted for sea transport. The homogeneous nature of *balikbayan* boxes allows them to easily pile up and fit perfectly in standardized shipping containers without wasting space. They function as miniature shipping containers only in a form of cardboard instead of metal. Cargo companies make it almost effortless and inexpensive to ship these mini-containers door to door. The cargo company picks up the mini-container from the sender and delivers it to the recipient in 21 days to a month. Sending these mini-containers costs about \$70 to \$80 each depending on the delivery location in the Philippines and on its area of origin. In contrast to transporting *balikbayan* boxes through air, shipping allows one to pack any amount of goods without weight restrictions as long as they fit in the space provided within the container. Shipping *balikbayan* boxes is a cost-effective way of using space and sending imported goods to the Philippines.

Similar to the trend of *balikbayan* boxes, containerization also concerns moving goods efficiently at minimum costs. The standardization of the shipping industry through containerization came out of the need to reduce the total cost of moving freight by decreasing the transportation time of commodities. To minimize transportation time, containers needed to be homogeneous and interchangeable so that freights can be quickly transferred between any ships, trains, ports, and trucks all over

the world.¹⁴⁶ For instance, any truck, train, or port in Japan is able to smoothly move a container from the U.S. Containerization also reduces the time spent on loading and unloading of goods because there is no longer a need to manually carry and transfer goods from each mode of transportation to the next. Most of the work done at container ports is highly mechanical, automated, and computerized. A crane moves 30 to 40 containers an hour from ship to dock and simultaneously empties and fills a ship at once.¹⁴⁷ As a result, the volume of goods and containers being circulated increases and the transportation cost decreases. Transport time can now be easily calculated because of the routinization in the movement of goods. Also, the homogenization of containers and *balikbayan* boxes obscures the heterogeneity of goods inside them. Standardization creates a frictionless movement for capital; capital homogenizes both time and space in the drive for efficiency and maximization: “containerization links peripheries to centers in novel fashion, making it possible for industries formerly rooted to the center to become restless and nomadic in their search for cheaper labor. Factories become mobile, ship-like, as ships become increasingly indistinguishable from trucks, trains, and seaways lose their difference with highways.”¹⁴⁸ In this instance, the ocean becomes a mere extension

¹⁴⁶ See Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006) 149.

¹⁴⁷ Levinson 5.

¹⁴⁸ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Rotterdam: Richter Verlag, 1995) 49.

of the highway, a transportation surface for terrestrial production. It has become homogenized without a distinct role from a highway.¹⁴⁹

Balikbayan boxes move with the frictionless movement of capital through the shipping industry, and labor and death become hidden beneath this seemingly effortless flow of capital. Similar to shipping containers, *balikbayan* boxes are also “the very coffin of remote labor-power, bearing the hidden evidence of exploitation.”¹⁵⁰ Everyday about five or six corpses of Filipino OCWs return in coffins back to the Philippines without much attention from the government to the media.¹⁵¹ Two kinds of boxes arrive in the Philippines from the Filipino diaspora: *balikbayan* boxes filled with imported commodities and coffins of Filipino OCWs.

The *balikbayan* box is a microcosm of the containerization of the shipping industry and containerization enabled the business of *balikbayan* boxes to flourish. The trend of *balikbayan* boxes and containerization are part of the globalization process. Globalization exacerbates the trend of sending *balikbayan* boxes because of the intensification of global economic inequality that results in the continuous out-migration of Filipinos all over the world. Many Filipinos today send *balikbayan* boxes to connect with family and friends instead of going back home in person since it is cheaper for commodities to circulate than actual bodies even though Filipino bodies have also been hypercommodified in the process of globalization. The nature of contractual work also limits the opportunities of Filipino OCWs to come back to

¹⁴⁹ For more on how capitalism annihilates the unique identity of the ocean for value production, see Philip Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 188.

¹⁵⁰ Sekula 137.

¹⁵¹ E. San Juan Jr., “Trajectories of the Filipino Diaspora,” *Ethnic Studies Report* 18.2 (2000) 233.

the Philippines. *Balikbayan* boxes operate as material connections that sustain the Filipino labor diaspora. These mini-containers have become a generic manner of shrinking the distance between the Philippines and the Filipino migrant's location abroad.

Balikbayan

Balik in Tagalog means to return, to come back to the space or location one came from. The term has an aspect of both space and movement. While, *bayan* refers to town, country, the nation state, it also pertains to one's relations with others, or social ties. It also points to the center of governance, where economic and social activities mainly take place, the location of the market, plaza, and the municipal building. For the Marcos regime and the Philippine state, *bayan* relates to the Philippine nation state in order to interpellate Filipinos back to the state. This is a territorial definition that carries with it notions of Filipino race and state imposed official nationalism.¹⁵² However, *bayan* and thus *balikbayan* have many more meanings beyond its dominant articulation by the Philippine state. It is important to examine the longer history of the word *bayan* in order to understand its nuance and to disassociate it from the state's usage and loosen up the state's control of its subjects.

¹⁵² In fact, the Philippine state interpellates Filipino Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) by calling them as "*mga bagong bayani*," or the new heroes of the nation, because of their sacrifices and significant economic contribution through remittances that keep the national economy afloat. Former Philippine president, Corazon Aquino, Marcos' successor, started this discourse on Filipino OCWs through the speech she delivered in Hong Kong in front of Filipino OCWs in 1988. This heroicizing discourse continues to this day.

A *balikbayan* is a person who goes back to the location of where he or she comes from and to the social relationships that person left behind.¹⁵³ I would further argue that the term *balikbayan* pertains to the process or act of coming back to a place and social relations since the term can also be used as a verb in Tagalog. It is common for Filipinos when meeting another Filipino for the first time to ask where they come from and if they know so and so. In this respect, Damon Woods rightly considers the long history of the word *bayan*.¹⁵⁴ In examining Tagalog documents and by understanding Tagalog society in relation to Southeast Asia, Woods found that individuals identify themselves in two ways: by location and through relationships: “In terms of relationships, horizontal and existential are what are expressed—based on contemporary realities and not ancestry. Three types of relationships tend to be used to express relationships: familial, age, and shared experience.”¹⁵⁵ *Bayan* refers to both a location and social connections or ties with others, who come from the same place and therefore have similar experiences from living in the same area. According to Woods, the most common way to identify oneself was to use the prefix *ca* such as *cababayan* to indicate shared experience.¹⁵⁶ The prefix itself is relational and not individual since it links one to another based on shared experience and imparts meanings of companionship and likeness. Wood’s findings suggest that the term

¹⁵³ Vicente Rafael makes a similar claim that a *balikbayan* is not about loyalty to the nation-state but he still focuses on the individual experience than on a shared one: “As a *balikbayan*, one’s relationship to the Philippines is construed in terms of one’s sentimental attachment to one’s hometown and extended family rather than one’s loyalty to the nation-state.” See, Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 206.

¹⁵⁴ Many thanks to Joi Barrios and Lily Ann Villaraza for pointing me to Damon Wood’s work.

¹⁵⁵ Damon L. Woods, “From Wilderness to Nation: the Evolution of Bayan,” (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2005) 11.

¹⁵⁶ Woods 11.

bayan during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries does not necessarily pertain to race, nation, or origin especially since these are concepts that will not be introduced to the Philippines until much later.

It was not until the 19th century that *bayan* was used to express Western or Spanish political concepts of *nacion* and *patria*.¹⁵⁷ At the outset of Spanish colonization, Woods argues that in order for the Spaniards to understand their new colony, they imposed their Western notion of social organization in calling the unit of Tagalog society as *barangay*: “The desire to imagine Tagalog society in a form recognizable and familiar to Western minds has perpetuated the myth of *barangay* in political terms and by extension, in terms of identity.”¹⁵⁸ The term *barangay*, similar to *bayan*, are geographical (and identity) markers that are imposed by the government, starting from the Spanish empire to the present. Woods further argues that *bayan* actually bears more influence than *barangay* in the organization of Tagalog society. It is important to understand the concept of *bayan* as an experience grounded on social ties that do not necessarily pertain to the nation. Because to do so, is to remain tethered to the Philippine nation state’s interpellation and to the Western imposition of the concepts of race and *patria*, which did not come to materialize until later on.

Although Vicente Rafael rightly points out the significant difference between a *balikbayan* and an Overseas Contract Worker, *balikbayan* refer to permanent Filipino immigrants in North America, while OCW pertain to Filipinos who work

¹⁵⁷ Woods 18. Vicente Rafael makes the same claim that *bayan* did not come to mean nation until at least the 19th century, see Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 206.

¹⁵⁸ Woods 5.

abroad contractually, this also creates an unnecessary binary between the two categories. Filipinos in the United States were once migrant workers as well and how do the hundreds of thousands of undocumented Filipinos in the United States fit into this category. In addition, since I am focusing my analysis on the act of sending boxes that are called *balikbayan* box and these boxes are primarily used in the Filipino diaspora regardless if one resides in the United States or not, my claims remain valid. I also want to anchor the trend of *balikbayan* boxes not in the category of *balikbayan* per say, but in the shared experiences and the social relations of the term *balikbayan*. More than the identities of Filipinos as either *balikbayan* or OCW, I want to focus on the act of sending *balikbayan* boxes and the shared experiences that underlie this practice. To an extent, the use of this distinction though important also plays into classist perception of the difference between a Filipino U.S. immigrant and an OCW. This distinction also starts to lose its validity as many Filipinos outside the diaspora in the United States have started to settle and have families in other countries.

II. Histories Too: Figurations of *Balikbayan* Boxes

More than the narrative or the story, this section focuses on the figuration of *balikbayan* boxes in Filipino American literature. I examine the act of sending and receiving *balikbayan* boxes and the construction of meaning behind this process. Why do people send *balikbayan* boxes? What kinds of meaning do they endow the boxes with? How are relations maintained through the exchange of *balikbayan* boxes? What does reading literary texts through figuration offer that other

approaches to analyzing *balikbayan* boxes cannot provide us with? In other words, what can reading through figuration add to our current understandings of *balikbayan* boxes?

A.

In Mia Alvar's short story, "A Contract Overseas," Andoy, one of the main characters, is a figuration of a *balikbayan* box because it is through his performance that connections among family members are maintained. Each time he comes back to the Philippines from Saudi Arabia and visits his friends' families, he brings with him a *tampipi* or a native Filipino suitcase to distribute cassette tapes, photographs, and cards from his friends abroad to their families back home. Interestingly, it is not the container itself that he uses that functions as a figuration, but it is Andoy: "'Your *carabao*,' he called himself: our water buffalo, our beast of burden. His skin was not quite *carabao*-dark, but close. And rather than a plow or produce cart, he'd brought a woven straw box full of envelopes from men he knew in Saudi."¹⁵⁹ In this instance, Andoy becomes disassociated from a *carabao*, a suffering heroic animal and a necessary instrument in plowing rice to produce food. Unlike the *carabao*, Andoy is not characterized as a mere worker needed to put food on the table, but as a connector of relations that links separated families together.

The creation of meaning (or the significance behind the practice of sending objects) happens through Andoy's performance as he visits his friends' families. His actions as a son, brother, husband, and father to those left behind by his friends

¹⁵⁹ Mia Alvar, *In the Country* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015) 238.

working in Saudi Arabia become more significant than the material items he delivers to them:

Andoy wanted to make his deliveries first thing in the morning. By the time I woke up, he'd already come back from the bank, dressed in his denim and white shoes. He beckoned me to help. At the kitchen table, he went down a list of names and riyal contributions, converting them on a calculator into pesos, which I doled into envelopes. We matched cassette tapes, photographs, and cards to the amounts and put them in a straw *tampipi* box. Then we took the jeepney: from Antipolo to Santa Rosa; from Marikina to Laguna; from tin shantytowns to houses with clay roofs and living room pianos in neighborhoods so tony I could hardly believe the people there relied, as we did, on a son or brother overseas. Aging mothers squinted hard at Andoy, as if they could blur their own sons into being. Wives and girlfriends perked up in his presence. Children gaped at the stranger they were told to kiss because "he knows your father," and I even recognized myself, in teens who surfaced from their textbooks long enough to crack a joke and count the money. Like all the *carabao* I'd met, my brother said and ate more than he wanted, fed them Saudi trivia they'd likely heard before. I saw what an essential trade was taking place. My brother's health and cheerfulness told them their own boys were well. And he would bring their rosy performances of family life back to friends in Jeddah. Walking through each *barangay* with him, into the swarm of children shouting *Carabao!*; seeing people through each screen door

rise, when he appeared, in hope and recognition; I finally understood the purpose of the Saudi suit. I'd always thought it heavy for Manila, not to mention a billboard for thieves. But men so silent and invisible overseas must have loved this guarantee of *being seen* at home.¹⁶⁰

He is not a replacement of these men but rather he symbolizes them. In ancient Greece, there were seafarers who left home to set up colonies and it took them a long time to come back so there was a problem of fraud.¹⁶¹ The people left behind were not sure of the fishermen's identity when they finally returned. To address this issue, they baked a vase, broke it in half, kept one part, and gave the other to the departing fisherman. If the fisherman comes back and his piece of the vase fits the one left behind, then the vase is called a *symbolon*. Thus, a symbol is about bringing two things that were once one together but separated. Symbols are conventional because they are a contract between a community of interpreters and it is necessary to have a community of interpreters for symbols to work. There is actually no resemblance between the symbol and what is being represented but it depends on convention. Andoy, by performing to look and act like the other workers when he comes back home, becomes a symbol of them. It is through his performance that he brings separated families back together albeit temporarily. However, more than performing likeness, Andoy as a symbol depends on how the family members interpret his actions. In other words, Andoy as a symbol only works if his friend's family buys

¹⁶⁰ Alvar 254-255.

¹⁶¹ I am getting the history and definition of symbol from Wlad Godzich, "Genette, Metonymy, Synechdoche," 19 April 2016, UCSC, Santa Cruz, CA, Lecture.

into his performance as their son, brother, and husband. Since Andoy's friends act the same way when they come back home and return the favor by visiting Andoy's family, all the workers function as a symbol of each other. Consequently, Andoy also works as a synecdoche, part of the whole, because he belongs to a network of workers. The practice of sending objects creates a network of symbols.

Andoy needs to act as a perfect symbol by wearing a Saudi suit to connect his friends in Saudi Arabia to their families back home. Contrary to a literal reading of the passage's ending, the Saudi suit is not a means for representation against their marginalization abroad. The suit is a necessary accessory of Andoy's performance to fit in as his role as the brother, son, or husband that left to work abroad. This is how he can match the family member's memory of their loved one, and how he can fulfill his duties as their makeshift family member. Since they are not blood related and do not actually have any resemblance at all, he needs to look similar to his friends to be recognizable to their family members. Andoy is not their real family. But it is through his performance with the suit, of acting to look and be like the other workers, which makes them all connected. Andoy is performing an identity by wearing the Saudi suit. However, to be precise, this is an instance of identification instead of identity. He is not building up a wall around himself and this identity is not imposed on him by the state. He is identifying himself with his friends in order to share a part of himself with them and their families. He chooses to wear the suit and even risks robbery because his relations with others are more important to him than the money he carries with him. He does not see himself as a mere source of money and

consequently not as a worker, a producer of labor and capital. More than as a marker of identity as a worker in the Middle East, the act of wearing the Saudi suit is a means to help others.

Andoy wears the suit as a response to the need of separated family members to connect with each other. He imparts comfort to his friends' families to look the same as his friends. Their likeness is not about interchangeability or commodification, or even ease of exchange, but their similarities respond to the need of their family member's desire to see them. There is a necessity for them to be visible and to stand out for their family in order to fulfill the void of missing a loved one. In addition to Andoy's performance of his image through the Saudi suit, it is also his other actions that bring families together. The phrase "[m]y brother sat and ate more than he wanted" suggests that Andoy displays his healthy appetite to show his respect to the families.¹⁶² He tries to act like their son, brother, or father by sharing a meal with them. He also goes against his individual desires; he eats more than he wants to address a need beyond his own sustenance. He is responding to his responsibility to his friends and his friend's responsibility to their family members in front of him. Andoy's friends also visit his family when they come home from abroad. As a result, it is not only his friends' obligations to their families that he fulfills but also his responsibility to his own family. This process becomes a concatenation of responsibility but a shared one and everyone becomes a family member without being blood related. The basis of family membership is redefined

¹⁶² Alvar 255.

beyond blood and legal relations because familial belonging becomes based on responding to a need to connect to others.

The maintenance of “familial” relations here depends on reading. Family members and even neighbors are interpreting Andoy’s actions. In the same way, Andoy also reads the reactions of family members to relay information back to his friends. The line, “I saw an essential trade was going on,” suggests that what is being traded are performances more than personal narratives.¹⁶³ The content of stories become inconsequential and it is how the story is told that matters. Hence, Andoy feeds them Saudi trivia that they already know and without any plot. They are exchanging information on how each family member is doing through their movements. They do not say the words directly to express how they are doing but they are instead putting a show on how they should be doing. Family members act like they are doing well in front of Andoy. In return, Andoy also acts as cheerful as he can. But how does it work on the other side? To the workers abroad, Andoy does not need to dress up because his friends know how he looks like. But he still performs in front of the others as he attempts to mimic their families’ behaviors; “he would bring their rosy performances of family life back to his friends in Jeddah.” Andoy also carries something back abroad with him, news of his friend’s family members, but he acts out what he sees from his meetings with their families. Similarly, it is his manner of storytelling that matters more than the story he tells his friends of their families’ well being. Family life is being performed through Andoy.

¹⁶³ Alvar 255.

In this instance, visible signification based on live performance becomes more important to fulfill the absence of a family member. Words or images that merely express their predicament through the cards, cassette tapes, and photographs, do not quite suffice. There needs to be a live person in flesh to comfort them and to alleviate their sorrow for the loss of their brothers, sons, or fathers.

However, Andoy's performance only temporarily brings separated families together and it also through a façade. The exchange of performance between Andoy, his friends, and their families, is not for truth but for the assurance of the well being of their family member. They read each other's performances but not in search of a particular truth but how they should appear and what they should relay through their actions. They make decisions based on the necessity of the situation. Even though they know it is all an act, they still they perform to save each other from worrying. Symbol, in this instance, is not about truth or used to avoid fraudulence, but symbol here actually depends on performing a "truth." They are creating fictions of themselves through their movements. But this does not necessarily mean it is not real, because their actions are very much part of their lived experience.

Most importantly, meaning is created not through representation but through performance. They are not telling stories but they are acting to relay information. Social ties are maintained because of performativity instead of representation. They are interpreting performances and not representations. Andoy is not a representation of their son, brother, or husband, but a figuration of them, a symbol. What is the value of not reading in representation in this case? Why do they not read in

representation? Well, if they are concerned with representation, then they cannot buy into Andoy as a symbol of their son, father, or brother, since they do not look alike. If they did not read through figuration, they will not be comforted by Andoy's presence, the comfort that a live person brings. Andoy is not a direct reflection of their family member; he is not their real family member. Representation here means truth and direct reflection. Andoy as trope suggests that meanings are not quite fixed, so the family members can believe that their son, brother, or husband is doing well, instead of learning the truth that he might be suffering abroad or is not doing well. And Andoy dressed in a Saudi suit means that he is only a mere worker. In addition, children in the passage were asked to kiss him not because he is their father, or a representation of the real father, but because Andoy "knows his father."¹⁶⁴ He is associated with their father; he is a trope, a metonymy in this instance. It is only through his association with the other workers through the Suit that their memory works. Otherwise, they would not feel comforted by Andoy's actions and therefore would not feel connected to their family member. It is only reading through figurations that relations are maintained and how distance gets traversed. They have to understand the world through figurations and not through representations in order to deal with the separation of their family members. This is how the person who leaves to work abroad and the ones left behind survives.

So far, I have shown that Andoy functions as a symbol, synecdoche, and metonymy. However, these rhetorical tropes prove inadequate because they fail to

¹⁶⁴ Alvar 255.

explain everything at hand. An analysis based on symbolic economy still deals with representation because the other part of the vase that gets left behind becomes a representation of someone who is not there. Although interpreting Andoy as a synecdoche and symbol allow us more insight into Andoy's social relationships, as part of a whole he still becomes the representation of the other workers because they all wear the same suit. On the other hand, a metonymy does not tell us much about his actions. Andoy is a bridge; he carries different types of connections together. He has material presence in all three different places and does a lot of material operations that links different locations, people, and even economies. He works as a zeugma, an ancient rhetorical trope that yokes heterogeneous entities together.¹⁶⁵ It is named after zeugma, a famous bridge on the Euphrates that linked the Greek world to the Persian Empire, or, as they had it, Europe to Asia. It is only through reading Andoy as a zeugma that the materiality of his presence and actions become revealed. The only rhetorical trope that actually covers everything previously discussed, offers more insights, and the best one to counter representation is a zeugma.

The living condition of contract workers abroad such as Andoy's can be best described through a zeugma. Andoy is present in several geographical locations all at once: in Saudi Arabia with his friends, in the Philippines with his friends' families, and in his journey through different locations as he delivers money and other items. He connects his friends abroad to their families back home and in doing so he connects the Philippines and Saudi Arabia together. He even links together all the

¹⁶⁵ Wlad Godzich, "Zeugmatic Formations," 3 May 2016, UCSC, Santa Cruz, CA, Lecture.

places that he covers in his travels to deliver money from Saudi Arabia to Manila and from Manila (city) to the different provinces such as Laguna (country). He brings together people from across ages and gender, from children, wives, to mothers. He even creates an affinity between his little sister to his friends' younger siblings, "I even recognized myself, in teens who surfaced from their textbooks long enough to crack a joke and count the money."¹⁶⁶ Two distinct temporalities become connected, Andoy's sister's past and other children's present, based on their similar experience of having a sibling that works abroad. Andoy even brings together people from different classes, from those living in shanty houses to the ones dwelling in tiled roof homes with pianos.

Andoy yokes the economy of Saudi Arabia and the Philippines through his conversion of Riyal to Pesos. He actually exchanges, calculates, counts, and distributes the money. Instead of handing off the money in Riyal to his friend's families and have them exchange it on their own, he does the work for them and changes one monetary value into another. In this way, he becomes a center of conversion but a moving one that holds different linkages together. He not only produces capital through his labor but he also enables the flow of currencies across nations and people. He ferries money both at the level of the nation and the individual and embodies both social and economic relations. Yet, Andoy is involved in a much more complex transaction than just as a carrier of money and other objects. Interestingly, the money is not sent from one person to another already individually

¹⁶⁶ Alvar 255.

allocated. But the transfer of money comes from an individual abroad, goes into a pot of money, and then the one who brings it home divides it accordingly: “At the kitchen table, he went down a list of names and riyal contributions, converting them on a calculator into pesos, which I doled into envelopes.”¹⁶⁷ Each of Andoy’s friends can easily send a sealed envelope with money inside to his respective family. But what explains this peculiar set-up? There are several possibilities here. Each worker gives a certain amount of money in a pot and that exact quantity is what his family receives. However, the word “contribute” suggests the likelihood that the workers all give money in whatever amount they can and they then equally divide it among their families back home. This instance indicates that the workers appear to have their own collective system that considers the different economic capacities of these workers and the financial needs of their families back home. It does not matter how much one contributes but what remains important is that each of their family receives money. Andoy’s friends also reveal to him how much money each one of them sends. The act of sending money to their families is an act of community based on need and trust. Converting money is also an unpaid labor that falls outside their work obligations, and while they help the state economy through the money they exchange in the banks and bring back into the country, at this moment, they are the ones in charge of their own money. The practice of sending money moves it from an individual-to-individual relationship and from private ownership to a collective one. Whoever goes back home becomes in charge of the responsibility, everyone plays a

¹⁶⁷ Alvar 255.

part, and no one person is purely in charge the entire time. This is not an alienated relationship in a Marxian sense, but this manner of sending actually takes money out of the process of exchange and in this particular instant albeit temporarily, money only becomes use value, especially since there is no process of exchange. They are not paid to do this work and they are giving the money to their families. Most importantly, in this process, Andoy not only yokes two different national economies but also connects these two with the economy of the household or *oikos*. Andoy performs the monetary transaction on the kitchen table and ends up sharing a meal with his friends' families in their dining table when he delivers the money. He brings these bigger economies together with the household economy, but through their own collective banking system, he also displaces the national economies and brings it to the level of the household. There is a management of various economic systems that happens through Andoy as a *zeugma*. But it is Andoy who is actually in control and deftly navigates across these different linkages.

B.

In Carlos Bulosan's short story, "Be American," the boxes, crates and barrels filled with food and even the envelopes with pornographic materials are figurations of *balikbayan* boxes. These containers work as *zeugmas* because they link together workers, who are friends and even strangers from each other, at different places and situations. Most importantly, these bridges allow them to create a community bigger than their individual selves.

I did not think much of his disappearance because we are a wandering people due to the nature of our lowly occupations, which takes us place to place, following the seasons. When I received a box of asparagus, I knew he was working in Stockton. But when it was a crate of lettuce, he was working in Santa Maria or Salinas, depending on the freight mark again. And in the summertime when I received a large barrel of salmon, I knew he was working the salmon canneries in Alaska. There were no letters, no post cards—nothing. But these surprising boxes, crates and barrels that arrived periodically were the best letters in the world. What they contained were lovingly distributed among my city friends. Similarly, when I was in one of my own wanderings, which were done in cities and large towns, I sent my friend or friends unsealed envelopes bursting with the colored pictures of actresses and other beautiful women. I addressed these gifts to poolrooms and restaurants in towns where my friends had lived or worked for a season, because they were bound to go to any of these havens of the homeless wanderer. However, when another curious wanderer opened the envelopes and pilfered the pictures, it was not a crime. The enjoyment which was originally intended for my friends was his and his friends. That is the law of the nomad: finders keeper.¹⁶⁸

The crates of produce and other food items connect the speaker of the story with his cousin and friends. The speaker and his cousin are each other's subject of knowledge because they are the subjects of each other's thoughts. They worry and wonder about

¹⁶⁸ Carlos Bulosan, "Be American," *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan*, ed. E. San Juan, Jr. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) 69.

one other. In this context, they are subjects and not objects of knowledge because they can never fully know each other's situation. They have no mastery over one another. They can only estimate their probable location and occupation and know that that they are okay but cannot gather any more information.

These crates, barrels, and envelopes, these figurations of *balikbayan* boxes, are quasi-persons.¹⁶⁹ The word person comes from *persona*, the masks worn in Ancient Greek theatre. These masks are conventional and one can easily read how they are supposed to affect the audience's affect. For example, if the mask has a happy face, one is supposed to have a happy reaction. These mini-containers are quasi-persons because similar to masks they can produce those effects that can affect us.¹⁷⁰ In other words, they have an effect on one's affect. This is precisely why they have cultural agency. They are not passive objects that merely bring content to somebody. Their very arrival is an event because the recipient responds with affect such as joy and love. The workers convey each other through the containers. These barrels and crates connect one subject to another; they mediate the relationship between two subjects of knowledge. They commune with each other through the practice of sending each other containers and create a community among them, one based on the logic of love instead of kinship or blood relations. Not only are these

¹⁶⁹ I am borrowing this idea from Wlad Godzich's argument that works of art are quasi-persons. Wlad Godzich, Meeting, 15 January 2016, Santa Cruz, CA.

¹⁷⁰ But at the same time, they are much more harder to read than masks. Similar to works of art such as literary texts and sculptures, they are legible but not transparently legible. That is why we have to learn how to read them. It is harder to determine their effect on one's affect.

packages common or free to everyone in their community, but they also freely send each other these items not because they are obligated to do so.

In the passage, the boxes, crates, and barrels of food function as a type of labor and knowledge. The food in these boxes, crates, and barrels, are part of the migrant workers, not as representations of their occupation, but as part of their labor, specifically their alienated labor. The goods within these containers are part of themselves through their work but they become separated from them once their labor and the products of their labor become commodities. Yet, the story does not reveal the procurement of these items whether they are stolen or not purchased. If this is the case, then these goods no longer count as commodities. The lack of letters and postcards implies that the migrant workers, similar to Consorcio, are illiterate, they do not possess the knowledge to read and write. The boxes, crates, and barrels operate as the “best letters in the world.” Since “letters” pertains to learning, the circulation of these boxes among the migrant workers refers to a movement of a different kind of knowledge. With these boxes, the workers learn that their friend is doing okay and has a job somewhere without giving the specificity of their location. Because most of the workers are illiterate, communication needs to be performed through these boxes, crates, and barrels. The workers connect to others with part of who they are, their “occupations.” The phrase “our lowly occupations” suggests a sense of ownership on the part of the migrant workers in relation to their own work. But the word “our” shows collective ownership of their work and not an individual possession. The migrant workers have a collective relation and not an individual one with their work.

They also “lovingly” distribute or share the items in the containers. Love, in this instance, pertains to the act of sharing among friends. Sending boxes, crates, and barrels to their friends only to be shared by their friends with their other friends creates a collective network among people who might not directly know each other. The items in the containers are shared from the migrant workers working in the rural areas to those in the city without work. Sending boxes, crates, and barrels to their friends and indirectly to persons unknown to them, operates as a response to the needs of their friends and others they do not know. Most importantly, the migrants workers’ “lowly occupations” do not only belong to them but also to their friends and to strangers, thus, it belongs to everyone in their community. The migrant workers understand their “occupations” in relation to other people’s needs outside their own and even beyond their acquaintances and thus beyond friendship. This act then refers to a type of love predicated on an immediate need than on recognition of friendship, individual identity, or kinship. They send gifts of food items primarily because of others’ need for sustenance not because they are their cousin or friends.

The workers create their own communal practices on the margins of the capitalist economic system and the state. Contrary to existing state laws, their “law of the nomad” establishes a loosely defined community with their own logic. Rules of ownership do not exist in this act of sending gifts. They send “unsealed envelopes” because they are not concerned about their privacy or property. Despite the fact that they barely own anything, they do not see their possessions as only belonging to them. Pilfering through someone else’s envelope or property is not considered as a crime.

They do not criminalize stealing. The only thing at work here is a notion of sharing. This practice of gift sending among migrant workers open up a space based on the act of collective sharing instead of individual ownership.

The practice of sending boxes, crates, barrels, and envelopes does not pertain to an economy of exchange based on values. Since there is no specific sender or addressee, this act of gift sending does not pertain to an equal exchange since there is no guarantee of return for the sender because of the absence of a specific sender or addressee. Consequently, there is no subject and object relationship in this practice because there is no mode of address in the process of exchange. The gift can be for anyone and thus giving back can be for anyone too. This act of giving is not about reciprocity, debt, nor is it about equal exchange between the original sender and addressee. Since the packages arrive “periodically,” these are gifts that keep on giving. They continually give to each other without strings attached. This practice also contests a notion of original, origins, beginnings, or source. The concept of origin in this passage relates to ownership with the phrase “originally intended for my friends.” The word “originally” also has ties with property, intention, and thus authorship. In addition, there is a logic of ordering at work in the term “originally” because it implies position and sequence. It denotes what comes before or after the original. Most importantly, giving here is not predicated upon value but predicated upon needs, such as other people’s need for food, enjoyment, and communicating with others.

This practice of gift giving implies a notion of literature as experience based on the act of sharing and not predicated on ownership, exclusion, and aesthetic quality. The movement of these boxes creates a space without origins, ownership, authorship, and hierarchy. It refers to the knowledge of their friends not based on their physical properties but predicated on their needs and location. Because “letters” also means literature, the migrant workers are creating a world of “letters” or world literature, an organization of knowledge, not based on writing or formal education. Instead, these boxes respond to the need of others to eat and enjoy life, and thus be able to live and communicate their experience with others. Since this act of giving is not about exchange values and the quality of their writing, this transfer of knowledge is not based on aesthetics. The sentence, “But these surprising boxes, crates, and barrels that arrived periodically were the best letters of the world,” indicates that boxes, crates, and barrels, are also types of letters, knowledge, and literacy. The migrant workers assert their literacy through the practice of responding to other’s needs and bring together a community of their varied experiences. This is a concept of literacy that is about responding to the needs of others instead of a qualitative or quantitative measurement of one’s intellect, which has only been used to exclude and discriminate against them.

III. Figurations and Zeugmatic Formations: *Balikbayan* Boxes and the Filipino Diaspora

This chapter attempts to provide a zeugmatic account of the history of the Filipino diaspora through *balikbayan* boxes. How did the *balikbayan* box as a

zeugma come about? It is through heterogeneous histories, from Marcos' establishment of the *balikbayan* program, Filipino labor migration, tradition of Filipino gift giving, containerization of the shipping industry, to the linguistic history of the words *bayan* and *balikbayan*. These are all different kinds of histories that are not necessarily synthesized together but they sustain and even coexist together. Most importantly, it came out of the need of the Philippine government to manage its citizens in order to extract income from them, but it also came out of the necessity for Filipinos to create a community among themselves and to maintain their social relations back home, a need to share their experiences with the ones they have left behind. The practice of sending *balikbayan* boxes has become the process of linking themselves to others and the various facets of their lives, especially since Filipinos are present in many different places all at once. *Balikbayan* boxes have become the means of navigating the diaspora, Filipinos living across different spaces. Filipinos are moving centers, they are in between but not necessarily isolated, trapped, and without agency. *Balikbayan* boxes are material linkages that sustain the Filipino diaspora; they are zeugmas that yoke together different types of relations from social, economic, linguistic to material. A figurative reading of *balikbayan* boxes through zeugma allows us to access a literary text not as a representation but as the materiality of an individual's lived experience. The *balikbayan* box as a zeugma, as the absolute trope of the Filipino diaspora, is one of the ways that can best relate to us the lived experience of Filipinos in the diaspora. Through zeugma, we are able to connect at least two disparate spaces and link individuals together with their distinct experiences,

without flattening out their specificities. Through figuration, we are able to put together different temporalities. In this way, we can read against the dominant meanings of *balikbayan* boxes to create new ones in order to open up other possibilities in the present and thus future.

Chapter 4

Beyond Representation: Reading Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

The title of Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is both so provocative and pejorative that it has inspired the ire of many Filipinos. The name *Dogeaters* refers to a racial slur typically used against Filipinos, and no Filipino would want to identify with it. In an interview with the *New York Times* in the mid-1990s, a few years after its publication, Hagedorn relates how a fellow Filipino publicly accused her of a “wanton disregard for the people.”¹⁷¹ She playfully responds with the statement that she knows, she has “set the race back 400 years.” Hagedorn notes that this type of backlash pertains more to Filipinos' preoccupation with how they are viewed by white Americans than anything else. Her critics take the novel's title as a literal representation of Filipino identity. On the contrary, as part of her postmodern strategy, Hagedorn wants Filipinos to understand the expression as a metaphor with many different meanings. According to her, the term refers to the brutality of life in the Philippines and as a means for confronting culture.¹⁷² She wants to show to those besmirched by the slur not to merely shake it off but to actually challenge it.

Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* is set in Manila and consists of several storylines, each with its own point of view—generally that of a character. The novel not only shifts from one storyline to another but it also moves in a non-chronological order without immediate apparent logic. The point of views of the storylines correspond to

¹⁷¹ Somini Sengupta, “Cultivating The Art of Melange,” *New York Times* 4 Dec. 1996, 11 April 2015 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/04/garden/cultivating-the-art-of-the-melange.html?pagewanted=all>>.

¹⁷² Ameen Meer, “Interview: Jessica Hagedorn,” *Bomb Magazine* Winter 1999, 11 April 2017 <<http://bombmagazine.org/article/1398/>>.

different social strata. There are two main plots in the novel with at least ten other minor ones not counting the stories culled from newspaper articles, radio serials, movies, speeches, and quotations interspersed throughout.

One of the two main storylines comes from the perspective of Rio, a ten-year-old girl at the beginning of the novel. Although Rio ages, her character does not undergo any development, and she primarily functions as an observer of her social milieu. This milieu is that of her bourgeois family. Bourgeois is used here in its technical sense: they are rentiers. They enjoy a lifestyle of leisure living with servants and spend most of their time socializing at the country club or at home for dinner parties and *merienda* (snack time). They do no work and collect no salary; only their servants work regularly. Rio is aware of this class difference and often feels more comfortable surrounded by servants than her own family. Her perspective provides the readers with a tableau of bourgeois social mores, especially their involvement with class and power, and their desire to link themselves to the Spanish colonial past and to the newer colonial ties to the United States. By adopting Rio's perspective, the narrator avoids discussing the source of the bourgeois family's wealth, only revealing the origins of Severo Alacran's assets. Alacran, a self-made man, owns everything in the novel from the media (radio station, daily newspaper, weekly tabloid, movie studio) to a munitions factory to the point that he has enough power to issue orders to the country's president. Alacran controls not just the regime of representation and arms but also the head of the military. His wealth comes from having sold arms to everyone from the Japanese invaders to American troops and

even to the guerillas trying to topple the government. The linked storylines with their specific point of views allow the narrator to reveal how this privileged bourgeoisie relies upon and controls the military to eliminate any threat to its power.

The other main story line of the novel comes from Joey's perspective. Joey is a street urchin, "rescued" by a shady character called Uncle. Joey's mother was a prostitute and his father is believed to have been an unknown African American GI. He lives in the slums of Manila with Uncle, who adopts him after his mother dies of apparent suicide. Joey makes his living by prostituting himself to wealthy foreigners attracted to his exotic looks. He also works as a DJ in a sex show bar that primarily caters to foreign tourists. Joey and Uncle belong to the marginal criminal lower class. Their status is defined by how they break the laws. Joey describes Uncle as a junkie and an opportunistic criminal. Uncle has taught him everything he knows from stealing to sex.

The novel also features an intermediate group between the bourgeoisie and the lower class. Romeo Rosales works as a waiter at Alacran's country club and dreams of becoming a movie star. He only lives on other people's promises to him. His lover, Trinidad Gamboa, exchanges her education for the opportunity to work as a salesgirl with twenty percent discount at the Alacran owned SPORTEX department store. However, the representatives of the working class in the novel do not have any class-consciousness and remain disillusioned.

The novel does not seem to have a plot, focusing much more on a description of manners. There is only one event that happens in the entire novel, the assassination

of the president's chief opponent, Senator Domingo Avila, who sees himself as a promoter of democracy. His assassination causes a huge impact on the lives of the lesser characters in the novel. Joey witnesses the assassination and leaves Manila for fear that Uncle sold him out to the authorities. He escapes to the mountains and ends up joining the guerilla movement. He befriends Senator Avila's daughter, Daisy, a former beauty queen now turned guerilla. There is no mention of peasants in the novel and it is unclear whether the guerillas actually come from the peasantry or from other social classes in the city as evidenced by Joey and Daisy's transformation. Romeo Rosales unknowingly becomes the scapegoat for Senator Avila's death. The president's Special Squadron, headed by Alacran's son-in-law, Pepe Carreon, kills Romeo, and Trinidad Gamboa eventually disappears too. In order to avoid falling into a comedy of manners, the novel assumes an ironic way of storytelling in depicting a society in which no one remains secure. All the lives in the novel are held into Alacran's power to the point that even the senator can be killed for posing a threat to his control. None of the characters remains free regardless of their social standing. Even Rio appears to be trapped and frozen in time despite moving from Manila to the United States. Her storyline ends with her recurring dream: transformed as a moth, Rio remains stuck staring at a tableau or a representation of a run down empty house.

The reception of *Dogeaters* has been full of divergent views and confusion among literary scholars, revolving around two main concepts: nationalism and postmodernism. For E. San Juan Jr., nationalism pertains to an anti-colonial

nationalism against the U.S. Empire. He focuses on popular nationalism, particularly on the history of insurrection against U.S. neocolonialism.¹⁷³ On the other hand, Lisa Lowe's criticism of *Dog eaters* uses the novel as a means to get away from a nation-state sponsored nationalism that homogenizes the heterogeneity of the Asian American experience.¹⁷⁴ For Lowe, nation-state sponsored nationalism operates within the colonialist logic of development. Lowe avoids this kind of nation-state sponsored nationalism by focusing on the popular or the people instead. Yet, contrary to San Juan, Lowe's notion of the popular does not solely focus on the non-elite or popular revolutionary groups. Her concept of the popular seems to refer to the people at large. But it remains unclear if Lowe aims to address the Philippine nation-state, the U.S. nation-state, or both in her criticism. Rachel C. Lee uses a transnational framework in her interpretation of *Dog eaters* in order to criticize postcolonial nationalism's exclusion of women and queer subjects.¹⁷⁵ She argues for an anticolonial feminist and queer nationalism as a possible counter narrative to a male, Western or native, centric nationalism.¹⁷⁶ Caroline Hau uses the novel as a means to intervene in the debates around Filipino identity within Philippine academia.¹⁷⁷ Her criticism is concerned with a type of nationalism that essentializes

¹⁷³ See E. San Juan, Jr., "Mapping the Boundaries: The Filipinos Writer in the U.S.A.," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 19:1 (1991) 117-131.

¹⁷⁴ See Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 112-121.

¹⁷⁵ See Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999) 73-105.

¹⁷⁶ Lee 104.

¹⁷⁷ See, Carolyn Hau, "Dog eaters, Postmodernism, and the 'Worlding' of the Philippines," *Philippines Post-Colonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature*, eds. Christina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1993) 113-127.

Filipino identity, yet she fails to specify which kinds of nationalism. Nerissa Balce-Cortes reads the novel through Benedict Anderson's idea of nationalism defined as an imagined community.¹⁷⁸ Of all these literary critics, Allan Isaac remains the only one that discusses the specific types of nationalism at work in the novel: neocolonial nationalism (nation-state nationalism propagated by the president's wife), elite nationalism (Senator Domingo Avila's nationalism), and populist nationalism (guerilla movement).¹⁷⁹

In terms of *Dogeaters*' postmodernist writing style, these literary critics appear to be divided between two camps: Philippine Studies scholars against postmodernism and Filipino American and Asian American Studies scholars in favor of postmodernism. Philippine Studies scholars such as San Juan and Hau both agree that postmodernism pertains to an imperialist style of writing that merely orientalizes Filipinos for the Western audience. For San Juan, postmodernism fails to accurately represent Philippine historical reality and thus it depoliticizes the revolutionary potential of literature. Similarly, Hau thinks that postmodernism's self-referential style functions as a mode of self-othering and therefore remains guilty of imperialism. On the contrary, Asian American literary critics take postmodernist writing as an alternative history that not only goes against the grain of official histories but also provides access to those obfuscated by the dominant forms of representation. Lowe characterizes postmodernism as "culturally heterogeneous" and therefore salutary in

¹⁷⁸ See, Nerissa Balce-Cortes, "Imagining the Neocolony," *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 2:2 (1995) 95-120.

¹⁷⁹ Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 149-177.

representing who and what gets left out of official histories. In other words, the novel's postmodernist style reveals the various historical experiences of people and thus challenges nationalist homogenizing discourse. Similarly, Balce-Cortes understands postmodernist writing as a type of realism or historical truth that allows the postcolonial writer to reclaim forgotten memories and rewrite Philippine history. Contrary to San Juan, Balce-Cortes argues that postmodernism is both political and historical. In a similar vein, Lee sees postmodernist writing as a means by which the marginalized such as women and queer subjects are allowed to emerge and thus become empowered. Interestingly, Lee claims that *Dogeaters* is best described as decolonizing writing rather than postmodern because of its nonlinear style. For Lee, Hagedorn's non-linear writing devoid of any agenda for a universal truth that could operate as a critique of U.S. imperialism.

On the one hand, for Asian American critics, postmodernism caters to the politics of identity representation that works against American imperialism, and on another hand, for Philippine Studies scholars, postmodernist writing perpetuates American imperialism, yet these two camps are actually not mutually exclusive from each other. Their notion of postmodernism all relates to a politics of representation: who is being represented and how are the people being represented. Contrary to these notions of postmodernism, Allan Isaac defines postmodernism as a type of "postcolonial imaginary" or grammatical form that complicates any easy understanding of both Philippine and American national territorial borders and consequently Filipino, Filipino American, and American identity. To some extent,

Isaac is not so much interested in identity representation as he is interested in signification, or how characters in the novel make and remake signs that have been imposed on them by empire.

Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* has been mired in controversy among Filipino literary critics because of its relationship to different types of nationalism. San Juan harshly criticizes the novel because it fails to provide a blueprint for how Filipinos should be and how they should act in ways that would benefit the populist anticolonial movement. San Juan also expects Filipino writers to become the voice of the popular and speak on behalf of the Filipino people. But Hagedorn's story resists these qualifications. As a result, San Juan sees postmodernism as antithetical to a populist anticolonial revolutionary politics and accuses Hagedorn of being an elitist, who merely promotes the status quo. Hau thinks that the novel appeals to a type of Filipino representation, and by doing so, she accuses Hagedorn of being similar to Filipino nationalists that tend to essentialize Filipino identity. Hau argues that Hagedorn's writing is guilty of epistemological violence and thus of perpetuating American imperialism. Paradoxically, Hau insists that *Dog eaters* is an American text and not Filipino.

Yet, scholars such as Balce-Cortes celebrate Hagedorn's work for serving as an example on how Filipino American literature imagines the construction of a Philippine nation outside the territorial borders of the Philippines. She inscribes *Dog eaters* as part of the project of a Filipino nation and even draws a comparison

between Jessica Hagedorn and Jose Rizal.¹⁸⁰ By invoking Hagedorn in such a way, Balce-Cortes seems to utilize the novel as a model for some sort of Filipinoness. Only this time instead of being critical of the Spanish empire, this imagined community is now critical of American imperialism in the Philippines. Balce-Cortes is actually not so different from San Juan. They are both committed to a concept of a Filipino nation and desire to use the book to propagate a type of anticolonial nationalism against American imperialism. On the contrary, Isaac argues that Hagedorn's novel does not cater to any type of nationalism at all. According to his interpretation, the text's postmodern form resists a national telos and appears disinterested in proposing a nationalist ending. For Isaac, Hagedorn's postmodern writing goes against any homogenizing notion of the nation. Her work instead reveals the pluralities of spaces, temporalities, and experiences. Isaac seems to hint that the novel might actually be imagining a different type of community beyond any notion of nationalism. But his works stops short of elaborating what he means.

Most of these literary criticisms tend to instrumentalize *Dog eaters* as a means for identity representation either through postmodernism or nationalism or both. These literary criticisms on *Dog eaters* reveal that postmodernist writing easily lends itself for identity representation since it attends to different experiences of people at various levels of society. Yet, this quality also makes it difficult to use the novel as a model and representation for nationalism or any notion of a Filipino identity. The

¹⁸⁰ Benedict Anderson takes Jose Rizal and his writings, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, as his paradigmatic example of nationalism, an imagined community that begins outside the territorial borders of the nation state. Rizal's writings are often interpreted as a critique of Spanish colonization in the Philippines.

novel's various storylines resist a type of universality since it counters an easy totalizing approach to it. Most importantly, these literary criticisms' focus on identity representation overlook the novel's desire to break free from representation and do away with it. *Dog eaters* examines the ramifications of living in a world of representation built and controlled by Severo Alacran. The novel portrays representation as a trap that freezes its characters within its narrative time.

I. Representation

“I am ashamed at having to invent my own history.”¹⁸¹
--Rio Gonzaga

Dog eaters consists of unreliable timelines. It opens in 1956 with Rio as the narrator. In the near end of the novel, her cousin, Pucha, corrects Rio and claims that the story “must have started around 1959 at the very least.”¹⁸² Rio also cites that her brother Raul gets involved with several “sticky situations during martial law” around “[m]aybe 1960 or 1961.”¹⁸³ In historical reality, Ferdinand Marcos was the president of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986 and martial law under Marcos was not declared until his second presidential term in 1972.¹⁸⁴ Even Pucha cannot pinpoint the exact date when Rio's story begins with her use of the word “maybe.” In the same way, other characters in the novel often have a hard time telling the exact time of the day. Rio fails to distinguish between night and day in her mother's room with all the windows boarded up and Joey cannot tell the time while inside Uncle's windowless

¹⁸¹ Jessica Hagedorn, *Dog eaters* (New York: Penguin Group, 1991) 239.

¹⁸² Hagedorn 248.

¹⁸³ Hagedorn 241, 242.

¹⁸⁴ Here are the actual Philippine presidents before the Marcos regime and during the supposed time period of the novel: Ramon Magsaysay, 1953-1957; Carlos Garcia, 1957-1961; and Diosdado Macapagal, 1961-1965.

shack. In the last chapters of the novel, the characters even mix up the deaths of their grandparents. Rio claims that her maternal grandfather has passed away and only her maternal grandmother lives. On the other hand, Pucha contests that only Rio's maternal grandmother actually has passed away and her maternal grandfather is not dead, and that both their paternal grandparents are alive and well. Rio and Pucha do not know their histories.

The anachronisms in the novel further make its narrative time unreliable. The most obvious one pertains to the existence of colored television. Details relating to television in the story do not correlate with the actual history of television in the Philippines. Joey watches a colored television at the Hilton hotel with Neil, his American GI client. He turns on a "giant color TV" to watch an afternoon variety show called "*Tawag ng Tanghalan*."¹⁸⁵ This show was first aired in 1958 and in black and white, and the first colored television broadcast in the Philippines did not happen until 1966. In 1963, colored broadcasting was only in the testing stages. In the story, the variety show even gives out a 12-inch Motorola color television set. Later in the novel, Joey angrily pokes fun at his friend Boy-Boy for only having a black and white television. Baby Alacran, Severo Alacran's daughter, also owns a colored television and watches it in her bedroom. There are several other examples of anachronism in the novel. The owner of the CocoRico club, Andres, loves to dance to the songs "The Way We Were" and "I Will Survive." Yet, these songs were not released until 1973 and 1978 respectively. Lolita Luna listens to Chaka Kahn,

¹⁸⁵ Hagedorn 75.

who also became popular in the 1970s. These anachronisms indicate that the novel is not interested in realism because it is not a direct reflection of the historical reality happening in the Philippines.

In a letter Romeo writes to his mother, he claims that he watched Dolphy movies with his family as a young boy. Romeo meets Trinidad at the age of nineteen. Dolphy rose to popularity in the early 1950s and the story supposedly begins in either 1956 or 1960. Mathematically, Romeo's age and the dates do not seem to correspond accurately, especially if the story does begin in 1956. He also notes that he has been working at the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club "exactly two years and four months."¹⁸⁶ While, Trinidad says that she has only been working for SPORTEX for a few months. However, the duration of the plots in the novel appear to have happened within the span of months or even within a year, until later when the novel appears to speed up or compress narrative time. Even the time lines of the other characters do not seem to line up logically. It is unclear if Romeo and Trinidad's storylines match that of Rio's.

The characters' inability to tell time or to convey historical accuracy suggests that they have no historical consciousness at all. They experience narrative time as something at a standstill and unchanging. Rio's storyline ends with her dream as a moth repetitively flying around in circles unable to escape time, and although she moves to the United States, she continually feels trapped. What imprisons her then is not her geographical location but the repetitiveness of time. The final lines of the

¹⁸⁶ Hagedorn 164.

novel further mark its never-ending temporality, “*Now and forever, world without end. Now and forever.*”¹⁸⁷ These unreliable timelines are not flaws of the novel but actually its important feature. The novel is not interested with adhering to historical truth or realism. It deliberately shows how the characters are not historical agents. They only know how to tell stories and not histories. They relate stories that cannot be fully trusted.

The novel has several unreliable narrators. Rio is a ten year old, who is a good observer of people’s behaviors, but she has no interpretative framework of the incidents going on around her. She does not fully understand the significance of her observations. While having *merienda* with Pucha, a group of boys lead by Boomboom Alacran, sexually objectifies Pucha:

The teenage boy starts to hiss again. Then he starts making kissing sounds with his fat lips. I am disgusted by his obscene display and the giggling reaction of my flustered cousin. I stick my tongue out at him, this flat-eyed snake who makes a fool out of Pucha in public. He is oblivious to me, his shining flat eyes fixed on my dim-witted cousin. His friends are laughing. I am powerless; I am only ten years old. I remember to this day how I longed to run out of the fluorescent Café Espana back into the anonymous darkness of the Avenue Theatre, where I could bask in the soothing, projected glow of Color by De Luxe.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Hagedorn 251.

¹⁸⁸ Hagedorn 5.

Rio can see that her cousin is being made fun of, but she actually does not understand the different levels of social hierarchy at work in this passage. First, there is an order indicated by the ages of the characters. The passage opens up with Boomboom Alacran, a teenage boy, and his friends. Pucha is also a teenager; she is four years older than Rio, which makes her fourteen years old at this point. Rio is younger than the rest. Second, there is gender dynamics at play when the teenage boys leer at Pucha and look down on Rio by ignoring her and then laughing at her. Third, Boomboom, Severo Alacran's nephew, have both money and social connections through his uncle's wealth. This is what makes Boomboom desirable to Pucha and why she wants his attention. Boomboom and his friends harass Pucha in public. Rio sees this act as disgusting but she also does not understand it as a form of her cousin's sexual objectification. She notices that there is something wrong going on and she actually appears to make a moral judgment, but she does not have the vocabulary to accurately describe or question the situation at hand. Rio sees the act as obscene and dirty but not sexual. She possibly does not know how to use such a word yet due to her age. She can only vilify Boomboom as snake like or an evil character because of his actions, the sounds he makes, and his physical appearance. She cannot do anything else than to portray him with harsh critical language in her head without the ability to even verbalize her thoughts. She can only stick her tongue out and again be perceived as childish for her behavior, which provokes the laughter of Boomboom's friends.

However, Rio does show some resistance by asserting herself with her many uses of “I,” but she eventually gives up and feels powerless. She wants to publicly disappear and thinks that somehow running back inside the more secluded movie theater will make everything go away—that these social stratifications will no longer be imposed on her. She gets ignored as the passage continues and most importantly, she also starts removing herself from the situation by imagining an escape from it. She is unable to do anything substantial to intervene with what is happening around her. In the end, she desires to remain unknown and invisible.

Joey is also an unreliable narrator because he looks at everything in terms of his own advantage. He hustles to survive:

To tell you the truth, not much interests me at all. I learned early that men go for me; I like that about them. I don't have to work at being sexy. Ha-ha. Maybe it's my Negro blood.

Uncle says I prefer men because I know them best. I take advantage of the situation, run men around, make them give me money. For me, men are easy. I'm open to anything, though. If I met a rich woman, for example... If I met a rich woman, a rich woman who was willing to support me... TO LOVE ME NO MATTER WHAT... You'd better believe I'd get it up for her too... Be her pretty baby. I know how to do that. Make them love me even when I break their hearts, steal, or spend all their money. Sometimes, you'd be amazed.

Maybe I'm lying. Uncle says I was born a liar, that I can't help myself. Lies pour out of my mouth even when I'm sleeping. The truth is, maybe I really like men but just won't admit it. Shit. What's the difference? At least Uncle's proud of me.¹⁸⁹

Due to his social condition, it becomes necessary for him to see the world in terms of what would provide him with the greatest benefit or advantage. His notion of unconditional love becomes dependent on his material desires and his actions are not defined by the law but by his needs. For Joey, it is not a matter of right or wrong but whether his actions will provide him with money or not. The prevalence of "I," "my," and "me" indicates his selfishness. He is not considerate of others and does not think about the consequences of his actions on them. Joey's sexuality even appears to be dependent not on his sexual preference but through his economic necessity to live. It is not that Joey is a born liar but that he manipulates the truth even to the point of changing his sexuality in order to survive. This brings to the fore important questions regarding Joey's sexuality. Is Joey actually queer? Does Joey only pretend to be gay because foreigners find him exotic and attractive? Joey appears to perform queerness to make money. He becomes attracted to men because his primary market consists of male foreigners and he knows too well how to control them for what he wants. Most importantly, Joey lacks self-awareness. He mentions "Uncle says" twice and prefaces his narration not by his own thoughts but of Uncle's perception of him. He caters his

¹⁸⁹ Hagedorn 45.

actions towards those who can provide him with benefits. He molds himself according to what people make of him and this is how he earns his living, he plays on what other people want to see him as their fantasy. Joey acts in such a way in order to please Uncle. He lives under Uncle's house and thus under his purview. He not only needs money but also desires attention. His manipulation of others, stealing, and spending their money, is Joey's little game of trying to one up the system. It is the only way he knows to assert himself over others, rendered by his social condition. It becomes difficult to trust Joey's narration as it is skewed so much by his selfishness and need to survive.

Romeo Rosales is delusional and lives on other people's promises to him. He thinks that he can become an actor just because a now famous one from his hometown promised to help him in the future. The most dramatic scene that happens to his character in the novel is the confrontation between his delusion and reality through his conversation with Mr. Chen, the manager at his work, when he asks for a promotion from waiter to an administrative position. At this point, Romeo has failed all the talent and singing competitions he has entered on radio and television shows. He now wants to step up the ladder based on his previous conversation with Severo Alacran:

“My job. My promotion sir. *Ay*, sir—Mr. Alacran said maybe someday a desk job would be available in the lobby. I've been here exactly two years and four months—”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, sir. I have a high school diploma—my highest grades were in English and spelling. I’m not a bad typist—“

“Is that so?” Young man, you’re lucky to have this job at all, “ Mr. Chen replies, smiling coolly and moving past the blushing waiter.

As he watches Mr. Chen walk away from him toward his office, Romeo mutters to himself, *Yes, Mama. I guess I’m just a lucky fuck.*

The house manager turns abruptly to confront him. “Did you say something, young man?”

Romeo shakes his head. “No, sir.”

...

“Rosales, if you don’t watch it, I’ll promote you down to a caddy or ditch boy on our beautiful golf course. How would you like that?” Mr. Chen chuckles, but his eyes remain hard and cold as he studies the young waiter. “Just think—you can live on your tips! I think I’ll call Mr. Alacran right now, get his opinion—.”¹⁹⁰

Interestingly, throughout the story, Romeo appears to be able to leave his job whenever he wants. He does not seem to be working regularly, which can be attributed to the unrealistic feature of the novel. The novel shows him as always watching movies, spending time with Trinidad, or trying to go on auditions and competitions. Yet, this is the only time that the reader actually sees Romeo at work. We see his girlfriend, Trinidad, working regularly, but not Romeo. Not to mention

¹⁹⁰ Hagedorn 164-165.

that all this time, Trinidad, who works two jobs regularly, has been supporting Romeo financially while he dreams of hitting it big one day as an actor.

Romeo is naïve. He thinks that he should be entitled to a desk job promotion with merely two years of experience as a waiter and a high school diploma. He believes that he can realize his ambitions through his connections and because of his brief and supposed interaction with Alacran. However, cultural capital, Alacran's network, does not work for Romeo, since Romeo belongs outside of Alacran's class. Just because he works for Alacran does not necessarily mean that he also benefits from Alacran's prestige value even though he wanted to believe this myth. Romeo's delusion shows how class hierarchy gets maintained in the story—by buying into the illusion that social connections can get you anywhere. Yet, this only works in the story if one belongs to the privileged class. Social connections do not help anyone from the working class such as Romeo, or someone from an even lower class like Joey.

According to Mr. Chen, Romeo is lucky to have a job at all. Mr. Chen's remarks imply that a job here depends on luck and not through years of service or skill. Romeo is supposed to believe that he is lucky for having a job in order to overlook the truth that he really is unlucky with what he has because he can never break the class ceiling. Interestingly, Mr. Chen's rhetoric on luck simultaneously breaks Romeo's delusion and keeps it in place in order to maintain the social order. Luck, as Mr. Chen harshly reminds Romeo, refers to a privilege that Romeo does not have. Mr. Chen basically says that Romeo needs to be thankful for his job as a waiter.

In other words, Romeo cannot aspire for more and climb up the social ladder. He can only go lower from where he now belongs. Mr. Chen enforces the social hierarchy that Severo Alacran controls. This is the reality that Romeo fails to comprehend due to his lack of class-consciousness. Mr. Chen places Romeo back to his “proper” place by threatening him with a demotion to a caddy position that only lives on tips. This moment also reveals that Alacran partly gets his wealth from exploiting his workers by not properly compensating them for their labor. In this instance, the reader finally gets a glimpse of realism in the novel and some reliable account regarding Romeo’s character.

Lolita Luna’s character illustrates the transition from the character as a narrator to the character as the narrated. She works as a bomba queen, a soft porn movie actress for Mabuhay Studios, which Severo Alacran partly owns. She is General Nicasio Ledesma’s paid mistress but she still maintains sexual relations with Alacran. General Ledesma acts as the president’s right hand man in charge of military operations and he pays for Lolita Luna’s apartment. Her place is completely white with regulated temperature and without any connections to the external natural world:

She storms out of the living room and locks herself in the bathroom. Like the rest of the apartment, the bathroom is white, the walls and ceiling mirrored. The white tub is sunken, the floor around it carpeted with a plush white rug. The effect is both antiseptic and sexual. The bathroom is her favorite room, her hideaway. The sight of her naked body in the mirrors excites her.

Transfixed by her own image, she caresses herself, then remembers the old man waiting in the other room.”¹⁹¹

Her house looks artificial similar to a movie set and its whiteness makes it appear like a blank movie screen. She acts in real life as if she is performing in a film. In this scene, she is making a performance of and for herself. She mimics her sexual movie routines in front of the mirror and becomes absorbed by her reflection, a mere representation of her real self. Her apartment and bathroom lack windows so that she is unable to see the outside world and can only see herself through the surrounding mirrors. Her perception is always directed internally and not externally to the point that she becomes a narcissist and only sees representations of her own self and nothing beyond it. At some point in the novel, Lolita Luna actually puts on a show for General Ledesma similar to how she appears on film: “Everything for her is a scene from a movie: zooms, pans, close-ups, climaxes and confrontations followed by whispered clinches. The General finds her habits greatly amusing—‘What costume are you putting on for me today?’ he wants to know.”¹⁹² Not only does Lolita Luna exist in a blank canvas, but she also becomes one. Her actions become dictated by the depiction of herself in the movies and the necessity to please the men who pays for her livelihood. She is always in character playing a bomba queen and thus exists only in representation. In this moment, Lolita Luna is no longer the storyteller of her story; she becomes narrated by the speaker of the novel. She is the lynchpin of this movement from the narrator to the narrated, which defines a radio serial, the matrix of

¹⁹¹ Hagedorn 176.

¹⁹² Hagedorn 96.

the entire novel. Similar to the characters in the radio, she turns into an object of the narrative.

Dogeaters takes the radio serial *Love Letters* as its prototype. The serial shapes and informs the characters, plot, and the structure of the novel. In the first chapter aptly titled, “Love Letters,” Rio, her maternal grandmother, and the rest of the household workers listen to the serial produced by Alacran’s Radiomanila. It is the most popular radio broadcast in Manila that even the president admits to being a fan. Top movie actors perform in these programs and many of its episodes have been adapted into movies by the Alacran controlled Mabuhay Studios. The station airs a new story weekly and it always pertains to a letter with a generic plotline. The narrative structure of *Dogeaters* follows that of a radio serial. In the novel, the radio serials are either in the beginning or already in the middle of the story without any conclusion. Similarly, the novel's chapters are short and serialized often focusing on one character’s storyline only to pick it up a few sections later. The various storylines cut across each other in the same way that radio serials are also interspersed within the book’s narrative. Its plotlines also have no proper endings.

Each actor in *Love Letters* plays several characters. In the first chapter of the novel, “Love Letter #99” relates a love story between a poor young woman and her wealthy lover. She works as a servant at his family’s household. She gets pregnant and his lover’s mother plans to stage an accident to get rid of her. Her lover is unaware of her pregnancy and situation. In this serial, Nestor Noralez, a popular actor, plays three different personas: the wealthy landowner, school headmaster, and

the lead female character's father. Similarly, Patsy Pimentel, another famous performer, plays two different characters in the same story, as the second female lead and the mestizo mother of the male lead. The same actors and actresses play different personas in the same story. They are used interchangeably from one character to another. In the same vein, the novel has a character generically named president, who plays the Philippines' real president such as Ferdinand Marcos, Diosdado Macapagal, Carlos P. Garcia, and Ramon Magsaysay. The specific names of the real presidents do not matter since the president is a character. *Dogeaters* focuses on the function of the character and how many different actors can play it. Hence, the novel lacks direct reference to Marcos or his exact time of rule. It does not matter if Marcos is the president or not because the experience remains the same, nothing changes.

Therefore, the novel borrows its logic from the radio serial. This further explains the unrealistic features of the novel from its unreliable timelines to unreliable narrators. The characters in the novel are also disconnected from nature and live in a set-like environment. The main locations in the novel are all artificially constructed. Most of the scenes take place inside dark confined spaces such as the CocoRico club, movie theatres, living room, bedrooms without natural air and lighting, hotel rooms, apartments, and Uncle's shack. The characters themselves play archetypes borrowed from radio serials, soap operas, movies, and even from other novels. Romeo Rosales plays a stereotypical wannabe actor, Lolita Luna acts as the movie star with a rich sponsor, and Uncle uses dialogues from American gangster movies. Rio's character could have been derived from Isabel Allende's *House of Spirit*. Hagedorn is

deliberately working with representations and not reality. She is drawing a critique of representation.

II. Divided Communities

Dogeaters presents the Philippines as a fragment of two different types of communities: the lower-class and the country club community. These two communities live in parallel worlds that are held together by Severo Alacran's power.

A. The Lower-class Community

The brief description of *Love Letters*, the radio serial followed faithfully by Rio, her grandmother, and the household servants deserves close analysis:

Without a fail, someone dies on *Love Letters*. There's always a lesson to be learned, and it's always a painful one. Just like our Tagalog movies, the serial is heavy with pure love, blood debts, luscious revenge, the wisdom of mothers, and the enduring sorrow of Our Blessed Virgin Barbara Villanueva. It's a delicious tradition, the way we weep without shame. (12)

This description moves from plot elements ("someone dies") to the affective reaction of the audience ("we weep without shame") and appears to indulge in some irony ("the enduring sorrow of Our Blessed Virgin Barbara Villanueva"). What explains the peculiar designation of the actress Barbara Villanueva as "Our Blesses Virgin"? In a largely Catholic country such as the Philippines, to apply the epithet reserved for Mary, the mother of Jesus, to an actress is tantamount to blasphemy. This blasphemy, however, is lessened by the use of "Our" because it makes everyone complicit in its use, and since Catholic Filipinos are not heretics, the epithet must be used ironically

to describe the audience's reverence of the actress. The question then is: in what way does the epithet reserved for the Mother of God apply to the actress?

The Virgin Mary occupies a singular place in Catholic theology. Medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas worried that her popularity among the faithful and the cult of her figure could challenge the Holy Trinity and give a mortal woman a status akin to that of the transcendental God. For Aquinas, and indeed to most theologians, the Virgin Mary was a scandal to reason: a virgin who is a mother and a mother who remains a virgin. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception promulgated by the First Vatican Council in 1854 compounded the problem: alone among all humans the Virgin was free of original sin, a status so exceptional that it earned the description applied to her virginal motherhood: a mystery of faith—a less brutal way of saying “a scandal to reason.” The faithful, less troubled than the theologians by her scandalous status, focused on another aspect of her figure: she was the ultimate intercessor. To be sure, the saints can intercede on our behalf if we pray to them and make the proper offerings, but the Virgin is the intercessor of last resort because she can play a trump card only she holds: God violated his own rules for creation when he made her, thus creating a precedent for miraculous intervention in the order He laid on the world. She can ask Him to do it on the behalf of the faithful who implore her help. Medieval “miracle plays” highlight her ability in this respect.

Intercession comes from the fact that the Virgin connects the world of humans to the divine world. This connection is established first through the Incarnation of Jesus: he is God and he has been an ordinary human. The Fathers of the Church

understood him as linking two radically distinct temporalities: the eternity of God and the historical time of humans. There is no past and future in eternity because everything in it is co-present. Hence, there is also no narrative in eternity. This is the reason why God knows the future: it is not a future to Him. Humans live in unfolding time. The Virgin has access to both. On the other hand, her son, Jesus, entered into historical temporality into eternity, the aspiration of all Catholics. Yet, unlike other humans, the Virgin has ascended into heaven not as a mere soul but also with her body because her body is already the “glorious body” that was promised for the resurrection at the end of times. As a result, she brings together two different temporalities and two distinct orders of being: the human and the divine. Ancient rhetoric named the trope that linked heterogeneous entities together, a zeugma, after a famous bridge on the Euphrates that brought together the Greek world to the Persian Empire, or Europe to Asia.

Is Barbara Villanueva a zeugma as well? And if she is, what does she link together and how? The radio serial consists of separate episodes and each one could stand on its own as a radio play. They deal with the same subject matter of unhappy love stories. The fact that the principal roles are played by the same actors across all the episodes makes *Love Letters* a serial. Barbara Villanueva may have different names and characteristics in each episode but her distinct voice is the same from episode to episode and it yokes together all the different episodes. In this way, she functions as a zeugma but an imperfect one. The episodes are not quite heterogeneous entities and do not represent distinct orders of being. She also does

not play the role of an Intercessor between the episodes. She does not deserve to be called “Our Blessed Virgin.”

However, the text offers us with a clue on why she might actually deserve this title. It refers to the “enduring sorrow of Our Blessed Virgin Barbara Villanueva.” Devout Catholics know the link between “sorrow” and the Virgin Mary. In fact, there is a special Feast Day reserved on the 15th of September to celebrate the *Beata Maria Virgo Perdolens*, also known as “Our Lady of Sorrow” in English, and “Nuestra Señora de la Mercedes” in Spanish in the Philippines. This representation of the Virgin is one of the “Lamentations,” or expressions of sorrow at the death of Christ. The others are the *Mater Dolorosa*, also known as *Pietà*, and the *Stabat Mater*. All these three have a sorrowful and lacriminating affect. Lacriminating refers to the fact that these representations of the Virgin provoke the shedding of tears on the part of the faithful viewers, or in the case of the text, “shameless weeping.” Our Lady of Sorrow endures the painful loss of her son and her pathos provokes the faithful to weep. Barbara Villanueva also endures many painful losses as the many characters she plays in the serial and provokes the audience to cry. The audience’s tears are real and their reality makes the “enduring sorrow” of Barbara Villanueva real as well. In other words, Barbara Villanueva links the fictional world represented in the serial to the actual world of the audience. She works like a zeugma linking the heterogeneous orders of fiction and reality into one seamless continuum.

The affective economy of the serial and its place in the lives of the members of its audience make this zeugma work. The reality of their tears blurs the distinction

between fact and fiction. But there is more at work here in regards to the engagement of the audience. As mentioned previously, the episodes are freestanding radio plays. Barbara Villanueva does not function as “Our Blessed Virgin” in the radio serial but only as the specific character that she plays. How does she then become “Our Blessed Virgin” and through what mechanism? The serial’s episodes are hackneyed stories and the narrative voices in the stories are predictably hackneyed as well. However, the audience has crafted a narrative that encompasses all the episodes and melds them into a single story. It is in this story that Barbara Villanueva is “Our Blessed Virgin.” This is the story behind or above all the individual story. It is the “true” story of *Love Letters*. Medieval theories of reading distinguished between different levels: stories could be read as simply literal accounts of whatever was narrated in the plot; they could also be read allegorically as telling a different story by means of the literal elements; they could also be read tropologically, that is as injunctions to the readers to draw a lesson from them and apply it to their own behavior; finally they could be read as the hidden expression of the universal truth: this was the anagogic or mystical reading. The anagogic reading required the active intervention of the reader and their knowledge of the universal truth, one that transcends the objective and subjective distinction. While tropological reading is fundamentally individual, the anagogical comes from and addresses the *oikumene*, the *ecclesia*, or the community of the faithful as a mystical body.

The radio audience, composed of Rio, her grandmother, and the household servants, has a set of definite habits when they listen to *Love Letters*. They assemble

silently, take up their appointed places, listen to the broadcast, and do nothing more but weep. They behave as if they are celebrants of a ritual. They do not speak to each other but they execute their individual parts perfectly. At first, they can be hastily described as passive recipients of the Word proclaimed by the radio. Yet, they are the ones that create the unspoken narrative that resulted in the title “Our Blessed Virgin Barbara Villanueva.” They are the narrator of the anagogic narrative. How is this possible? First, they do not listen to the serial casually while attending to other tasks such as preparing food or cleaning up after dinner. They give the serial their full attention and they form an assembly. More importantly, other listeners similar to them also form similar assemblies. This formation is unspoken but obviously tangible through their bodily presence. They, and their counterparts elsewhere, bring themselves to listen to the program. Their assembly and other assemblies form an invisible assembly of assemblies that is far from passive since it requires the coordinated delivering of their bodily presences and of their attention in a synchronized movement. Each of the assemblies is an appearance of the larger assembly of assemblies. In terms usually reserved for the description of religious rituals, they commune; they form a community, an unspoken one but not devoid of intelligence. This intelligence transcends individual intelligence and is the collective intelligence of the mystical body of *Love Letters* listeners. This mystical body knows the anagogic story and is indeed the narrator of this story. It knows the motifs and the themes of the story: “pure love, blood debts, luscious revenge, the wisdom of mothers, and [the] enduring sorrow.” It knows it is a “delicious tradition,” one that includes

“our Tagalog movies,” as opposed to the imported movies originating in foreign narratives. However, although the listeners of the radio serial are not passive receivers, they are also not engaged with their own lives but are only absorbed by the radio serial. *Dogeaters* presents the affective and anagogic economy of *Love Letters* as a crucible of meaning and community formation. It also draws up a critique of it.

B. Country Club Community

Senator Avila depicts the “Suffering Pilipino” as a “complex nation of cynics, descendants of warring tribes which were baptized and colonized to death by Spaniards and Americans, as a nation betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams.”¹⁹³ Yet, this description only applies to a segment of Filipinos in the novel. It aptly portrays the country club community, which is primarily comprised of the bourgeoisie. Rio and her family belong to this community, the exclusive Monte Vista Country Club. The members of this community try to be part of the foreign discourse. They favor imported movies and songs over local ones. Rio’s uncle calls those who listen to *Love Letters*, a local radio program, as the *bakya* crowd or the lowest common denominator. In family gatherings, they prefer to drink French cognac or Spanish brandy. Many of them hold multiple passports either American or Spanish and claim either lineage even though they are clearly born and raised in the Philippines without any clear foreign ancestry. They try to align themselves with either Spain or the United States. They are exiles, strangers in their own country, as Rio remarks, “My father is a cautious man, and

¹⁹³ Hagedorn 101.

refers to himself as a ‘guest’ in his own country.”¹⁹⁴ Rio’s father does not claim ownership of his birth country. This is a community not rooted in a place but defined by their affinity of not belonging to the Philippines and their desire to link themselves with the world outside of it. They see themselves as outsiders but they are also the ones who have more power and control compared to any other segments of society in the novel.

The country club community is a material order owned and governed by Severo Alacran. What happens in the country club reveals the operations of Alacran’s power:

Part of my father’s job includes playing golf from dawn until dusk every Saturday, and Sundays after Mass, gambling for high stakes with his boss Severo Alacran, the nearsighted Judge Peter Ramos, Congressman Diosdado “Cyanide” Abad, Dr. Ernesto Katigbak, and occasionally even General Nicasio Ledesma. Congressman Abad cheats to win, and doesn’t care who knows it. The caddies are in cahoots with the flamboyant politician and Severo Alacran, who is less blatant about his cheating. The Congressman is president of the board at Monte Vista, and Severo Alacran is Severo Alacran; both men are therefore untouchable.¹⁹⁵

Instead of a tradition, the members of this community have a ritual devoted to Alacran through playing golf and gambling at the country club. It is not a religious ritual, but it happens after church, outside the anagogic community, and it revolves

¹⁹⁴ Hagedorn 7.

¹⁹⁵ Hagedorn 58.

around Alacran and his money. It is an observance of Alacran by his followers, a display of their allegiance to the “king.” Everyone buys into this practice even if the game is rigged. It is a high stakes gambling in which Alacran and those who follow him in the social hierarchy are the only ones who always win. What we have here is a façade of the circulation of money through gambling, a play, since there is no real risk or monetary loss among the different players. The only thing that operates here is Alacran’s money because they all work for Alacran and thus benefit and use his money. This game is not so much about gambling for money but an exhibition of Alacran’s power. Since Alacran owns most of the wealth in the story, everyone agrees with him and follows his lead. This instance also reveals the collusion of the different sectors of society at large in order to uphold Alacran’s clout. He controls the judiciary, legislative, medical institutions, and the military. Even the lowly caddies or errand boys are complicit with the organization of power based on Alacran’s money.

Alacran’s material wealth ties this community together. However, working for Alacran is a sham because they do not perform real labor but only play golf. Alacran even creates a bogus company position to employ Rio’s uncle in order to return a favor to Rio’s father. Playing golf at the country club occurs beyond normative work hours and the office setting. Rio’s father’s employment is not a regular profession. His job, similar to others, refers to profit earned through gambling and cheating, and thus to speculation and rigging the game. They all work as some sort of fixer serving Alacran and compliance to his demands rewards one with favors.

This occupation pertains to the continuous exchange of favors to maintain loyalty. The game has no rules but only follows Alacran's interests and those who are in the power hierarchy. Alacran's money runs this community, a system based on blatant cheating that everyone knows, yet they condone this corruption because all their livelihoods depend on Alacran.

The discussion on alcohol's authenticity in the novel reveals how the country club community draws its boundaries, who they include and exclude. After dinner, Rio's family and relatives sit together, drink, and gossip. They discuss the difference between what counts as real and fake imported whisky:

“Genuine *ba ito*, or *putok*?” Mikey asks Aida when she returns with his drinks. It is a reference to the common practice of selling deadly mixtures of rubbing alcohol and brown tea in brand-name bottles as imported liquor. Aida is confused by my insolent cousin's tone. She answers in a meek voice.

“Johnny *Lumalakad, ho*.” “Genuine *ba ito*, or *putok*?” Mikey repeats, growing impatient. He addresses her in a loud voice, as if she were retarded. Aida's face flushes crimson and I want to leave the room, which suddenly makes me feel stifled. Raul joins in the fun. “That Johnny Walker is *sprikitik*, boss!” Mikey cracks up. My mother rescues Aida from further embarrassment. “Never mind Aida. The boys are just teasing—you can go now and have your dinner. Just ask Fely or Pacita to make more coffee for us.” Relieved, Aida hurries out of the room. My mother turns to my father. “I

don't get it Freddy. What's the difference between putok and spirikitik?

Don't they both mean fake?"

My father thinks for a moment. "You might say Congressman Abad *sprikitiks* when he plays golf, but General Ledesma rewards his army with cases of *putok* liquor."¹⁹⁶

There are two jokes going on in this passage: Aida's and the one between Mikey and Raul on General Ledesma. Although this instance shows Aida's embarrassment and confusion, Aida's witty retort of "Johnny Lumalakad ho" displays irreverence. Aida translates Walker in Johnny Walker into the Tagalog "lumalakad" or walking. If this episode is meant to demarcate who is in the know, or who has the knowledge on imported goods, and the difference between real and fake, Aida's rejoinder through her mistranslation shows how she tries to level up with Mikey and Raul. But the two fail to see it as a joke and only perceive it as a kind of ignorance on Aida's part. By translating Walker into the local language, Aida makes fun of the imported alcoholic drink's name. For Aida, the drink is neither fake nor genuine; it is funny. Aida's translation is in the present progressive, which is not a direct translation of Walker. Walker in Johnny Walker is a proper noun that refers to a person's last name. Johnny Walker in the passage pertains to the whisky and not to the person the whisky is named after. The noun walker pertains to the person doing the act of walking. Aida's translation localizes the alcohol's proper name by turning it into a Tagalog joke.

¹⁹⁶ Hagedorn 63-64.

Aida plays with words and Mikey and Raul do not understand this situation as such. This reveals their limited familiarity with the Tagalog language and consequently, turns Aida's response into an inside joke, understandable only to those who know and appreciate the language well. Aida's humorous response only becomes comprehensible to those who share her interests in the Tagalog language. Although Mikey and Raul speaks Tagalog, they are not concerned with Aida's play on language. On the other hand, Mikey and Raul's joke draws a line of exclusion. Johnny Walker has symbolic value because of its expensive and imported status. It connects its drinkers and owners to the outside foreign world. Aida resides outside the symbolic order of the imported alcohol. She does not recognize its value and only thinks of its name as amusing. Johnny Walker is not of value to Aida but it is only significant to those who care about its authenticity, or those who care for its symbolic value. The alcohol's foreign symbolic value marks who belongs to the country club community. To gain access to this community, one needs to be able to understand the symbolic value of and afford Johnny Walker.

Sprikitik and *putok* both mean fake and are used as a method to cheat on others. The difference between these two terms depends on the context of its usage and reference. In one situation, the country club community employs the term *sprikitik* in relation to Congressman Abad, who is next to Alacran in the power hierarchy. The word is used as a verb, which means that Congressman Abad fakes when he plays golf at the country club. He uses it as a scheme to trick others into winning. On the other hand, they use *putok* to describe an incident outside of the

country club. General Ledesma gives counterfeit alcohol to reward his soldiers for their work. The General does not quite fit into this community because he has no family wealth and is rumored to be an illegitimate son. He is only able to access the country club because of his job as the head of the military, the president's "expert torturer," who leads the military in squashing communism and any opposition against the president.¹⁹⁷ The fake alcohol is also used to refer to the army, which does not belong to the country club, but is only used to protect the people in the country club and preserve their status. Both *sprikitik* and *putok* are used for deception, only the latter instance has a negative connotation because of its connection with those outside the community. The country club community associates General Ledesma with cheap imitation because of his suspect familial background and for failing to buy the real thing. The soldiers get excluded because they fail to differentiate between authentic and real whisky. The concept of authenticity, which refers to notions of class, foreignness, and even pedigree, is used as a means to exclude others out of the country club.

However, this instance needs careful assessment because it reveals the General's understanding of how symbolic power works and how he utilizes it for his advantage. Drinking Johnny Walker makes the soldiers feel that they are part of the exclusive country club community. By providing the soldiers with bogus alcohol, the General attempts to connect several worlds, the country club community, who has access to the foreign world, and the soldiers who belongs outside this community, in

¹⁹⁷ Hagedorn 97.

order to assert his authority. His attempt to buy his soldiers with fake alcohol proves effective since they do not know how the real thing taste like and they only recognize the brand as expensive and imported. Yet, this strategy ultimately fails since the people in the country club know that the General and his soldiers are circulating counterfeit ones and therefore do not properly belong to their community. Instead of being recognized as an influential figure, the General becomes the butt of the jokes at dinner parties in high society. Similar to Aida, the soldiers are prohibited from the country club because they do not know the alcohol. They are excluded from foreign knowledge and thus from this particular type of experience. Foreign goods and the symbolic value that gets attached to them are used to demarcate the boundaries of the country club community. However, for the General, it does not matter if it is fake or not, but if he can use the name of the alcohol to make others believe in him and thus gain their favor. He understands that the value of the whisky lies in its name and not necessarily on the quality, especially for those who cannot afford the drink and therefore do not know the real thing. For him, it is not a question of authenticity, but what can a symbol get him and how can he use it for his own benefit. He sees the separation between the content and the façade and comprehends that symbolic value is all a play on appearances. But he needs a more effective symbol in order to breakthrough the barriers erected by the country club community. Here, he perceives Lolita Luna as his most valuable asset.

Lolita Luna plays as a counterpart of Barbara Villanueva in films. If Villanueva is prominently known in the radio, Luna, the bomba queen, reigns in the

Filipino movie industry.¹⁹⁸ The novel presents these two characters as diametrically opposed to each other: Barbara Villanueva as “our blessed Virgin Mary,” “saintly,” and “generous,” and Lolita Luna as a sex symbol, a “torrid siren.”¹⁹⁹ In fact, when Romeo is having sex with Trinidad, he imagines Trinidad as Luna and calls her “my darling Madonna, my whore,” which makes Trinidad “feel like the most desirable woman in the world.”²⁰⁰ Luna is not Madonna, the mother of Jesus, but the “Like a Virgin” and “Material Girl” Madonna. She is a sexual object and fantasy owned by men and to some extent by women as well. They idealize Luna not for her purity or virtue but for her erotic allure. Everyone longs for Luna, even Joey, who usually prefers foreign men, wants to “fuck” the bomba queen, and women like Trinidad secretly wish to transform into Luna in the bedroom.²⁰¹ Lolita Luna is the manifestation of everyone’s innermost desires.

The General sees Alacran as his primary rival and his jealousy of Luna’s relationship with Alacran actually refers to his own aspiration to acquire Alacran’s power:

She fiddles with her Japanese stereo system, a gift from another admirer. It is a constant reminder to the General that he is not that only one. If he had his way, he’d throw the damn machine out the window and execute his rival. But his rival is a powerful friend, and he’d surely lose his Lolita. With her, he

¹⁹⁸ Barbara Villanueva also makes appearances in movies but is more prominently known for her role in *Love Letters* on the radio.

¹⁹⁹ Hagedorn 53-54.

²⁰⁰ Hagedorn 53.

²⁰¹ Trinidad Gamboa also desires to become similar to Barbara Villanueva for her saintly and generous qualities in one of her musicals *Serenade*.

must always stay one step ahead, must never reveal the real depths of his jealousy.²⁰²

But the General understands the extent of Alacran's power and knows that he cannot easily displace Alacran from his position because Alacran owns the material order. Throwing Alacran's gift out the window proves insufficient since destroying Alacran's material possession will not incur any considerable damages against him. He is simply too rich. The General has limited power and is actually subservient to Alacran. He merely works as a mercenary for the wealthy; he performs their dirty jobs for them. He cannot compete with Alacran at the level of the material order that it becomes necessary for him to figure out how to effectively challenge Alacran. The only way the General can compete with Alacran is by possessing Lolita Luna. Yet, his competition with Alacran over Luna is actually a conflict over power, an authority to govern everyone, since to own Luna means to reign over what everybody desires. This is why he wants total control of Luna so he can compete with Alacran at the level of symbolic capital. He prohibits Luna from leaving the Philippines despite her desperate request, "I don't want you out of my sight. I want you here in Manila, where you belong."²⁰³ He keeps her trapped in a white walled apartment, a virgin sanctity environment. He sees Luna as the new Virgin, and wants to keep her pure and virginal, not necessarily in a literal way because he does not mind that she sleeps with others, he only wants to preserve her status in the Filipino film industry. The General wants to fuck Luna, "our blessed Virgin" of the movies, to show that he has

²⁰² Hagedorn 96.

²⁰³ Hagedorn 174.

the supreme power. What Alacran is in the material order, the General aspires to be in the symbolic order. The General aspires to be the key to the symbolic order that aims to unify these two divided communities, country club and anagoric, through Filipino movies.

The country club community distinguishes itself through the existence of those outside its borders. Trinidad, Joey, Romeo, and Lolita belong to the margins of the country club community and their position at its periphery makes this community workable. Trinidad and Joey belong to the other side of the country club. They are counterparts of each other. They both work and earn money through selling: she sells foreign goods, while he sells to foreigners. Trinidad exchanges her education to become a teacher for a twenty percent discount she gets through her work at the Alacran owned Sportex. She sells imported goods to well-to-do Filipinos. She works long hours without any proper breaks and health insurance for a very small income. Joey is a purveyor of Filipino bodies. He not only prostitutes his own body but also sells his fellow Filipinos to foreigners. Trinidad and Joey both connect Filipinos with the world market. He leads foreigners to the dark side of Manila by leading them into sex tourism, while Trinidad connects rich Filipinos to foreign goods. They work at the world market's underside, its less glamorous aspect, removed from the glitz of the country club.

Romeo Rosales and Lolita Luna are both outsiders that wish to become part of the country club community. Romeo Rosales is framed as the murderer responsible for Senator Avila's death. In an interview, the first lady presents Romeo as an

undercover assassin working as a waiter plotting to kill Senator Avila. Romeo wants to become an actor at Mabuhay Studios similar to how his friend from the province, Tito Alvarez, is able to transform into an actor and become a member of the country club. He wants to use his connections as a waiter at the Alacran owned country club and as Tito Alvarez's friend to become an actor. Romeo understands the value of connections and how it can help him achieve his dreams. Throughout the novel, despite his persistence, he never succeeds in using his supposed networks. He gets killed at the sidewalk, at the margins. His killing marks the boundary that he cannot cross. Lolita Luna shares a similar path with Romeo. She desires to be part of the country club community and wants to align herself with the foreign world. She has a penchant for imported music and goods, and in the near end, she wants to escape, live abroad, and leave everything behind in Manila. But the General forbids her to leave his side and she remains locked up in her apartment. She never crosses over to the country club community despite her links to Alacran and continues to be a kept woman, outside of what is proper.

On the other hand, Leonor Bautista, the General's legal wife, does not belong to either the anagogic or country club community. She stands in opposition to Lolita Luna. Contrary to Luna's apartment, Leonor requests her room to be unpainted and without air-conditioning, fans, and mirrors. The novel further describes her room as narrow and coffin like and she imagines it collapsing on her. She wishes for a painless death and spends her days locked in her room praying and fasting on the cold cement floor. She often retreats to a Carmelite nunnery and acts like one. She avoids

prolonged communication with others, lives like a hermit, and punishes her own body. Interestingly, the novel names her chapter as “Her Eminent Ascent into Heaven” alluding not to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, but to Jesus’ ascension into heaven after his death. Christ was crucified and resurrected in his earthly body. He then ascended into heaven in a glorious body. His transformation from his earthly body to his glorious body is a demonstration of what is to come in the final judgment. Similar to Christ, the devout will be rewarded with a glorious body that is not prey to the vagaries of time. In Catholic theology, during redemption, even the dead will be resurrected and ascend into heaven not in their souls or earthly bodies but in their glorious bodies. Yet, Leonor’s suicidal thoughts and treatment of her body disqualify her from being a Christ figure. She has no glorious body. She is on her own without affiliations to any community and the General has no interest in her because she is of no use in his ambitions for power.

A different type of community is inchoately forming in the mountains far away from Manila. Joey escapes to the jungle with the help of Boy-Boy and his connections with an underground movement. For the first time in the novel, a character becomes completely exposed and connected to nature: “Joey feels enveloped by intense greenness, the dizzying effect of the lush vegetation and dense foliage that surrounds him. He shivers from the chill of the morning air.”²⁰⁴ Joey is in awe and awakened by the open environment. He is no longer confined within artificially constructed settings such as Uncle’s windowless shack or the dark

²⁰⁴ Hagedorn 230.

CocoRico club. He arrives at a training ground most possibly for an armed movement: “A clearing suddenly emerges out of the tangle of twisted vines, the moist blades of leaves and prehistoric trees. There is a camp, a smoldering fire. A barefoot boy runs up to them. Joey stands still, frozen by the sea of faces turned toward him, wary yet curious, young men’s faces.”²⁰⁵ The clearing emerging out of prehistoric trees suggests that there is an opening that will now become the beginning of history. Clearing pertains to an open ground, or new possibility, and Joey’s entrance to this space indicates that he is leaving behind the past and is now entering into history proper. History, in this case, refers to the camp or training ground for an armed movement. History then begins with training for a revolution. However, although this passage imparts a sense of a change to come, these barefooted-young men also suggests that time in the mountains has been on a standstill. The boys are untouched by time. Joey also encounters an old man with a “nasal, clicking dialect,” which suggests that this newly formed group is largely made up of an indigenous population. They do not speak Tagalog but speak in another unidentified language. The promise for a new beginning in this chapter relies on the militarization of the indigenous population.

Although this community attempts to incorporate the indigenous, it still remains somewhat exclusive. The indigenous population is left unnamed throughout the chapter. The “sea of faces” emphasizes the overwhelming amount of men that freezes Joey to inaction. Joey experiences affect, he becomes the subject of their gaze,

²⁰⁵ Hagedorn 232.

he cannot move. Calling these young men as “sea of faces” obscures each of their singularity. We do not know anything about them only that they are huge in number and that they are “wary yet curious.” We know they are capable of thinking and action, especially with the fact that they can freeze Joey into inaction by their mere stare and sheer number. One of the young boys also runs up to Joey to give him water. This gesture shows that the boy understands Joey’s need at that moment, especially after Joey’s long trek up to the mountains. Though the boy might not speak Joey’s language, he understands that Joey might be thirsty. Even if they are left unnamed and we never hear any of these young men speak, they are not necessarily without individual thought and agency.

This group’s purported leaders seem to be Tagalog speaking and from the city, they are exiles from Manila. In addition to Joey and the indigenous population in the mountains, it also includes Daisy (now known as Aurora), Clarita (Daisy’s cousin now named as Lydia), Edgar, and a priest named Tikoy. Except for Joey, everyone in the mountains has anonymous identities opting for a new name and leaving the old one for safety reasons. Joey and Daisy are also the main focus of this chapter. They speak to each other about their personal experiences and discuss the death of Daisy’s father. Joey relates his mother to Daisy, while Daisy tells Joey her painful experiences as a captive in Camp Meditation. The chapter’s closing focuses on the budding relationship between these two starting with their experiences of loss:

She herself returns home as soon as possible, under an assumed identity, with the help of powerful friends. She arranges her journey back into the

mountains, to the refuge provided by her comrades. She laughs sadly when she uses the term “comrade.” There is a tinge of irony in everything she says. Except her cousin Clarita, her comrades are her only family, now. “I claim responsibility for everything I do,” she says to Joey.

They will get drunk together on cane liquor one night. She cries while Joey describes his mother, what he remembers of her. She reproaches herself, and apologizes for being sentimental. She will not cry when she describes how her lover was captured while she was in detention, or how her unnamed baby girl was born premature and dead. They are together all the time. She teaches him how to use a gun.²⁰⁶

What kind of community does this portray? It starts at the level of an individual experience and it redefines family. For Daisy, her comrades in the mountains are now her family but she remains suspect of the term comrade. Their relationship is no longer based on blood but on experience and empathy. It is a nascent community that begins with listening to each other’s individual experience, empathizing with each other, and providing assistance while right next to one another. It does not pertain to a type of individual or group identity and it is not grounded to a known specific location despite being connected to nature. This community does not refer to a class or nationalist struggle. Indeed, the community does not seem to have an agenda or a clear map of what they will do. Who are they fighting against? What are they

²⁰⁶ Hagedorn 233.

fighting for? What kind of armed revolution do they want? Is there an overall ideology that governs them? We can only tell from Daisy and Joey's experiences that they possibly want to avenge Daisy's father's death, but we do not know the other people's motivations. The chapter remains open ended and does not dictate what is to come. The last sentences are in the present tense without an indication for a known future or a prediction of the future. The ending focuses on the present and the newly formed partnership between Joey and Daisy. Yet, so far, only Joey and Daisy and their stories appear to be at the forefront of this community.

III. Reading for Possibilities

Dogeaters presents an overdetermined world where freedom seems impossible. This section practices a mode of reading that reads for freedom instead of looking at how freedom becomes restricted. It loosens up the text and reads it in a way that opens it up for other possibilities. If there are other possibilities, then there is a choice and agency exists. Most importantly, it reads for responsibility. How do the characters respond to the need of others? In this process, the reader and the text constantly interact with and challenge each other. The text orients the reader to various obstacles and the reader responds by figuring out a way for a different course of action aside from the one already inscribed by the text. In other words, the reader together with the character have to find moments where other types of movements can become possible, especially in locked-in situations or when both the narrative situation and even the sentence structure already restricts one's actions. This mode of reading closely examines the characters' motivations and situations as well as the

text's grammar such as the changes in the mode of address, syntax, and tenses. It reads in ways that abolish the subject and object relationship within the text. At the same time, this interaction between the text and reader constantly changes both the reader and the text. The reader becomes immersed in the text and the text changes with the reader's participation. In this instance, the subject and object relation between the reader and the text no longer exists. The text and the reader become intertwined through this act of reading and there is no longer a divide between fiction and reality. Consequently, the text is not a representation but an account of lived experience since it examines how individuals make decisions grounded on their concrete historical situations. The characters are no longer mere representations; they are not characters but individuals, who are historical agents.

Reading for Rio's Agency

Throughout the novel, Rio appears trapped without any agency. As mentioned previously, she is a good observer but has no real power to effect change. In here, I present two examples that read for other possibilities of behavior for Rio. This mode of reading empowers Rio and enables her to help others. She is precocious and becomes capable of establishing a relationship with others based on responsibility. As a result, she opens up a different course of action not only for herself but also for others.

A.

My father orders us to call Severo and Isabel Alacran "*Tito*" and "*Tita*," as if we're related by blood. "We're related by money," Uncle Agustin snickers,

proud of his connection, however marginal, to the king. My cousin Pucha is just like her father; she leaps at every chance to call Severo Alacran “uncle,” says it loud enough for everyone to hear. She flirts with him in her coy, petulant way. I’ve caught the old man looking at her, sizing her up slowly. I can tell he finds my silly cousin desirable; her eagerness amuses him. I’ve told her it’s disgusting, she should lie down on a bed of money and die, the way she acts these days. She pisses me off so much, sometimes I’m embarrassed to be seen with her—wiggling and strutting all over the place.²⁰⁷

Several types of relationships exist in this passage. First, there is a blood relationship between Rio and her father and it pertains to both a biological and kinship relation. Second, the word “orders” brings to light the legal relationship between Rio and her father. Rio as a minor has no legal standing and she remains under the authority of her father as her guardian. As a result, she needs to obey her father’s “orders” since she does not count as a legal subject under the law. More than their blood relation, their legal relationship binds Rio to her father the most because he is her legal representative. Her father’s “orders” not only enforce the legal relationship between the two of them but they also establish rules on how Rio should behave in their household. The law then becomes a framework for rules in the household even though they usually regulate public and not private life.²⁰⁸ In this

²⁰⁷ Hagedorn 60.

²⁰⁸ Laws usually determine public life but not the private though there are some exceptions such as prohibition of abuse in the private sphere.

instance, rules become an extension of the law to determine order in the private sphere.

Rio's father creates a rule for both Rio and Pucha to treat Severo and Isabel Alacran as their relatives. Interestingly, Rio's father's rule also extends to Pucha despite the fact that Pucha does not legally reside under the authority of her uncle. This shows how Rio's father's rule becomes law-like. Typically, laws in the public sphere may intervene in the private one, but rules in the private sphere cannot interfere in the public sphere. Rio's father, a patriarchal figure, intervenes into another private sphere, Pucha's father's household. Rio's father's rule then erases the divide between the two households and thus the distinction between the public and private. Her father's rule shrinks the private sphere and consequently expands the public sphere. This transformation of the private into the public only benefits the realm of the law, which has more direct influence on the public sphere. Rio's father's rule then opens up the private domains of the household towards Alacran's influence.

The legal relationship between Rio and her father also enables the establishment of a different type of relationship based on symbolic capital. Rio's father asks Rio and Pucha to develop a relationship of affiliation with Severo Alacran. This affiliation appears similar to a familial kinship since they have to call Severo and Isabel Alacran "*Tito*" and "*Tita*," or uncle and aunt respectively. But this affiliation does not pertain to kinship because they compensate for this association with honor or

symbolic capital.²⁰⁹ They pay homage to Alacran by treating him similar to a real “uncle.” The relationship between Rio’s family and Severo Alacran pertains to a relationship based on symbolic capital. In the opening of the paragraph, “order” and “call” are linked to each other through the father’s order. This connection between “order” and “call” suggests that symbolic capital depends on and operates within the legal structure. However, it is actually through the rule to call Severo “uncle” that enables the relationship based on symbolic capital to take place. Despite the differences between the law and rules, they both work together to support the relationship based on symbolic capital.

Rio’s family honors Severo Alacran for his money, which is made up of both economic and symbolic capital. Money then consists of both an economic and a symbolic relation. In return for paying Alacran with honor or symbolic capital, Rio’s family gets two types of capital back from Alacran. Money as a symbolic relation provides them with the connections that come with being affiliated with Alacran. On the other hand, money as an economic relation becomes the source of their family’s livelihood. Both Rio’s father and her Uncle Agustin work for Alacran. Pucha’s father’s bogus position at Alacran’s company affords him to pay for a bungalow and two servants.²¹⁰

Consequently, Rio’s father’s close connection to Alacran also provides him with money both as an economic value and symbolic capital. For this reason,

²⁰⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) 291.

²¹⁰ Hagedorn 59.

although Rio's father has no legal authority over Pucha, he also "orders" Pucha to call Severo "uncle." This instance demonstrates how Rio's father challenges his older brother's patriarchal authority within the family. Rio's father upholds his position as a patriarchal figure over his older brother due to his connection with Severo Alacran. Rio's father is responsible for getting his broke older brother a job in Alacran's company. In exchange for his position, which provides him with money as an economic value (to pay for his house and servants) and money as symbolic value (to maintain his connection to the "king"), Pucha's father yields his authority to his younger brother. Rio's father's money as an economic and symbolic value gives him more authority in the family than his older brother. Alacran's money as an economic and symbolic relation becomes the source of Rio's father's authority. Alacran's money as an economic and symbolic capital translates into power. Rio's father is able to change the private sphere into a public sphere not only because of the law and rules but also because of the money he receives from Alacran. Alacran's power then changes the old customary patriarchal system because it reorganizes the family into a hierarchy based on economic and symbolic relations. His power allows Rio's father to create a type of imperial mega-patriarchy that only expands and solidifies Alacran's influence. Power then ultimately resides in Alacran's hand.

This passage coming from Rio's perspective renders visible the hidden face of power at work in this situation. "Told" comes from tell which is also a type of order and Rio also gives an order to Pucha. Yet, unlike her father's "orders," Rio's tell implies to narrate, tell a story, or relate. It also means to make known by speech or to

disclose. Rio narrates the operations of Alacran's power. Most importantly, by asking Pucha to "lie down on a bed of money and die," Rio tells Pucha to cease or stop her behavior. Rio wants Pucha to stop succumbing to Alacran's power and thus Rio attempts to stop the circulation of Alacran's power. She wants the relationships based on money as an economic and symbolic value to stop functioning. Rio counteracts her father's authority by telling Pucha an order contrary to her father's rule. Rio's order to Pucha seeks to interrupt her father's patriarchal authority over Pucha. By going against her father's rule, Rio attempts to cut off her father's authority and thus Alacran's power. Rio tries to stop her father from opening up the private sphere in order to further prevent the influence of the law and Alacran's power. Rio's act of telling becomes the means in which she asserts herself against the operations of Alacran's power.

Tell also means to relate, which implies to stand in relation with or to feel connected to. In this moment, Rio's act of telling establishes a different type of relationship with Pucha. Seeing Pucha's behavior and how she succumbs to Alacran's power and Rio's father's rule, Rio takes responsibility of Pucha by asking her to stop her behavior. Rio's irreverent action of ordering her older cousin demonstrates her disregard of familial hierarchy. Rio responds to the situation at hand not because of their blood relation as cousins or the social relationship informed by their kinship, but because she feels responsible towards Pucha. She wants to remove Pucha from her entanglement in the relationships based on money as an economic and symbolic capital and from the rules of conduct established by her

father. Rio's father's rule establishes a moral order by providing directions on how they should behave. While, Rio's action here creates a relation based on responsibility, the ability to respond based on the situation and to take someone's need seriously regardless of blood or social relation. Rio develops a theory of action through the act of telling that counters the circulation of Alacran's power. Rio "caught," catches, or apprehends the situation and chooses to act against it. Tell also means to think or to consider. Rio's act of telling gets its authority not from her father's rule but from her own thinking and consideration of Pucha's need at that moment.

B.

We put on our bathing suits and lounge by the pool deck after eating, so Pucha can scan the horizon for the arrival of Boomboom Alacran and his foulmouthed friends. As soon as she spots them, Pucha starts posing. Pucha doesn't really know how to swim and thinks bathing suits have been created for the sole purpose of showing off her body. I jump in the pool and swim as far from them as I can, relieved that my job of keeping my ambitious cousin company is over.

The sign by the Monte Vista pool reads:

NO YAYAS ALLOWED TO SWIM

Which means that when Congressman Abad's daughter Peachy was five years old, her *yaya* Ana had no business jumping in the pool to save her from drowning. Ana jumped in anyway, dressed in her spotless white uniform matching white plastic slippers. She pulled Peachy out of the pool before the stupid lifeguard even noticed anything was wrong. My mother told us all about it—she was sitting right there by the pool and would've jumped in herself except that like Pucha, my mother can't swim.²¹¹

Rio understands the difference between use and exchange value. According to Rio, Pucha “poses” or puts up a front to attract Boomboom Alacran because of his money and connection. For Pucha, her body and bathing suit are means for her ambition. She willingly commodifies herself for her desire of wealth and prestige. Rio sees this as superficial, a mere pretense or façade, with her use of “poses” and “showing off” to describe her cousin. Pucha does not even know how to swim and only knows how to put on a show with her body. On the other hand, Rio differentiates herself from Pucha by jumping into the pool and swimming as far away from her mother and Pucha. Rio's actions subvert Pucha's behavior because she actually uses her body to swim and not to display herself. She chooses not to commodify herself and utilizes her body for its use value. By differentiating herself from her mother and Pucha, Rio uses her body as a way to critique relationships based on appearances and money. She perceives her body as more than a means to establish shallow relationships and make connections solely for material wealth.

²¹¹ Hagedorn 60-61.

This instance establishes a distinction between legal and legitimate. In the story, the sign “NO YAYAS ALLOWED TO SWIM” dictates what becomes “ALLOWED” by the law or what becomes legal. The sign disallows “YAYAS” or maids to swim in the pool. This law enforces class hierarchy by delineating the space in which the maid can legally move. It also controls the maid’s body by restricting her movement and access to the pool. Swimming then becomes both a class privilege and a marker of this privilege. The classed signification of the maid’s “white uniform matching white plastic slippers” further demonstrates the relationship between signs and the law. The uniform as a sign imposes an identity upon Anna as a maid. Her uniform makes her easily recognizable before the law and consequently makes the enforcement of the law more efficient. Signs operate as external constraints on the maid’s body. The law then literally becomes an external constraint on Anna’s body. (This is very similar on how appearances or signs of wealth and prestige have become internalized constraints on Pucha and Rio’s mother.) The law merely protects privilege by marking belonging based on class. In this instance, what counts as legal gains its authority from its recognition and enforcement of the law through signs instead of any notion of justice.

The maid’s act of “jumping into the pool” to save Peachy not only defies this notion of legal but also paves way to a concept of legitimate. Anna acts in a legitimate manner because she logically responds based on the situation. She notices that something is “wrong.” She jumps into the pool, defies the law, and saves Peachy. This moment demonstrates that laws are not necessarily right. It shows that what

classifies as legal is not only wrong but also absurd. Following the law means to let Peachy drown to death. On the other hand, what is legitimate implies that it is not okay to let Peachy die. In this instance, Rio, the narrator of the story, knowingly creates a distinction between right and wrong. The story then develops a concept of legitimate based on what is right or appropriate in relation to the situation. Anna jumping into the pool to save Peachy despite of the law indicates that she made the right decision because she responded based on what is appropriate to the circumstances at hand.

Although Anna still wears her uniform, her act of jumping into the pool invalidates the sign and thus what is legal. By jumping into the pool, Anna removes the external constraints on her body. She not only undermines the sign that prohibits her from going into the pool but also her clothes that mark her identity as a maid. Her action challenges the class hierarchy enforced by the law and questions the authority of these signs by revealing not only its shallowness but also its faulty and classist logic. The word legitimate also connotes a sense of being “genuine” and “real.” Genuine also means authentic, which refers to the Greek word “*authentes*” or acting on one’s own authority. Authority then no longer comes from the sign or what counts as legal but resides in Anna’s act of saving Peachy’s life. What counts as legitimate then paves way to agency. Anna’s course of action not only saves Peachy and allows her to live, but it also makes it possible for Anna to momentarily live beyond the external constraints imposed on her body. Thus, what begins as Anna acting on her own authority turns into a process that involves acting on her responsibility towards

another person—saving Peachy regardless of class distinctions. Her actions then not only pertain to an individual subjective agency but it also involves a responsibility towards another person's life. In this moment, authority comes from the possibility of acting beyond the external constraints dictated by the law, taking risks, and responding to another person's need.

Similarly, Rio's act of jumping into the pool removes herself away from her cousin and mother's space defined by sexualization, commodification, and exchange value. Rio juxtaposes her jumping into the pool with Anna's act of jumping into the pool. This association suggests that Rio, as the narrator at this moment, acknowledges the similarity between her and Anna's actions. The story creates a clear distinction among these four women. Anna and Rio on one hand and Pucha and Rio's mother on the other hand. This scene makes a significant point that the body, far from being defined through money and connection, is capable of saving someone from drowning. In here, Rio makes a connection between her and Anna by showing the capacity of the human body to act beyond the space that defines it. Rio and Anna can both swim and have the power to save someone's life—a capability outside Pucha and her mother's behaviors. Pucha and Rio's mother have completely internalized the constraints on their body that they become unable to use it beyond its exchange value. But Rio finds ways through her actions to defy established norms within her class, which confine her mother and Pucha. She differentiates herself from them by using her body to swim instead of putting it on display.

Rio makes an unlikely affiliation with Anna, who belongs to a different class. Yet, Rio bases her connection with Anna on the act of jumping into the pool instead of making a connection predicated on their gender identity. To remain tied to their identities as women makes them more susceptible to sexualization and commodification as women. More importantly, to remain tethered to their identities is to become easily recognizable and managed by the law. In here, identities defined by class and gender overdetermine their bodies. Their decision to use their bodies differently allows Rio and Anna to challenge the law and social norms. In the end, they are also able to transcend class hierarchy and the commodification and sexualization of the female body. Their story develops a theory of action that opens up different possibilities of behavior. At this moment, despite a seemingly overdetermined world, Rio and Anna assert their freedom through the choices they make with their bodies.

Reading for Uncle Against Joey's Narration

Joey as a narrator frustrates the reader. He only reports a limited number of facts and remains uninterested in understanding other character's motivation. There are lacunas in his narration regarding himself, his mother, and his real relationship with Uncle:

Zenaida. She was a legendary whore, my mother. Disgraced and abandoned just like in the movies. Driven to take her own life. My father was not the first man to promise her anything, that much I know for sure. Uncle identified her bloated body, arranged for her pauper's burial. That's why I owe him. No

one knew her last name, what province she came from, if she had any other family besides me. They say I was five or six years old, that I was mute for months after her death. I was so dark, small, and thin, they called me “Gagamba”—little spider. I went home with Uncle and never shed a tear. I don’t want to remember anything else about my sad whore of a mother. I’ve heard enough. That’s why I never ask Uncle. That’s why he never brings her up.²¹²

These gaps in Joey’s narration provoke the reader to ask the following questions:

Who is Uncle? What motivates Uncle in adopting Joey, using him, and then selling him out? The reader’s questions force Joey’s narration to be read from Uncle’s perspective.

The very last sentence of the passage suggests that Uncle knows more about Joey’s mother than he lets on. The word “brings” implies that Uncle carries more knowledge than he reveals to Joey and the fact that he “never brings her up” indicates that there is something to say. Uncle actually knows more information only he decides not to reveal them to Joey. This decision demonstrates his feeling of responsibility towards Joey, or his way of taking care of him. There are a number of possible reasons behind Uncle’s resolve. Joey becomes mute for several months after his mother’s death. He does not mourn his mother’s death properly. Uncle appears to understand that Joey suffers from the trauma of his mother’s passing. Joey also states that he does not want to remember anything else about his mother and that he

²¹² Hagedorn 42-43.

hears enough. Considering Joey's predicament at that moment, Uncle perhaps thinks that it becomes unnecessary for him to further discuss Joey's mother. He never denies Joey information on his mother, but he only respects Joey's medical situation and his refusal to understand his mother's condition. The information on Joey's mother exists only if it is not disclosed and its circulation is denied. What we do know for sure is that we do not know how much Uncle knows about Joey's mother.

Uncle's decision to withhold information from Joey suggests that Uncle might be concealing his real relationship with Joey. If no one knows Joey's mother's last name, how does Uncle identify Joey's mother? What is Uncle's relationship to Joey's mother? Uncle definitely knows Joey's mother to be able to recognize her. But the extent of Uncle's knowledge of and his relationship to Joey's mother is not revealed. Out of others who know Joey's "legendary" mother, why did Uncle identify Joey's mother? At this time, Joey is unable to speak. Uncle steps in for Joey and identifies Joey's mother. The phrase "I went home with Uncle" implies that Uncle stands right next to Joey. The word "with" also means together. In identifying Joey's mother, Uncle speaks for Joey while standing beside Joey. The singular "I" comes together with "Uncle." Uncle and Joey are no longer two separate individuals but exist in relation with each other. This moment is marked by responsibility instead of asymmetrical power relations. Speaking and acting for Joey in the moment of Joey's greatest need illustrates Uncle's act of responsibility towards Joey. At such a young age, Joey becomes completely paralyzed by his mother's death that he cannot speak. Joey needs assistance in burying his mother. Uncle establishes a relationship

with Joey based on responsibility the moment he acts on behalf of Joey in identifying and burying Joey's mother. Joey becomes Uncle's obligation.

Uncle identifies Joey's mother and takes responsibility of him because Uncle might be Joey's real uncle. Yet, if this is the case, why does Uncle hide the fact that they are actually related to each other? Uncle comes to Joey's aid because this is the moment he needs someone the most. Uncle responds to Joey's need not because of their probable blood relation. Perhaps, one of the reasons Uncle conceals his true relationship with Joey is because their blood relation does not matter to Uncle. At this moment, what becomes more important for Uncle is responding to Joey's need for an adult to speak and act on his behalf and to provide him with shelter. Taking care of and protecting Joey becomes Uncle's priority. Uncle's act of concealing his real relationship with Joey's mother demonstrates his way of preventing Joey from further distress, especially since Joey claims that he does not want to remember his mother. Uncle's relationship with Joey is defined through Joey's needs and how he responds to them.

At the same time, by identifying Joey's mother, Uncle becomes Joey's legal representative by speaking for him. Uncle also becomes Joey's legal guardian the moment he comes home with the newly orphaned Joey. However, in this moment, Uncle steps in for Joey in identifying his mother not because the law needs Uncle or someone older to represent Joey in identifying his mother but Uncle acts on behalf of Joey because Joey becomes unable to do so. Uncle's sense of responsibility towards Joey overshadows his legal relationship with Joey. This legal relation also does not

mean anything for Uncle, especially since in the novel he does not live by the law or follow its rules. He involves himself in criminal activities and even involves Joey in his moneymaking schemes. Uncle lives to survive.

Although one can speculate that Uncle chooses to survive and sells out Joey for money and his own safety, Uncle's betrayal might actually be his way of taking care of Joey for the last time. Joey witnesses the assassination of the president and remembers the gunman. He quickly escapes the scene of the crime and tells Uncle his experience. Uncle helps Joey fall asleep by giving him drugs. Afterwards, he goes off to a cop connected to the gunman to sell Joey for money. Joey only reveals in his narration that he realizes Uncle wants to kill him or have him killed because Uncle leaves his beloved dog outside to prevent him from leaving. Upon this realization, Joey impulsively kills Uncle's dog, leaves Uncle's shack, and runs to his friend Boy-Boy for help. In the past, Joey and Boy-Boy picked pockets and lived together at Uncle's house. However, it remains unknown whether Uncle actually sells Joey for money. The story only discloses how Uncle asks the cop to connect him with the gunman. The narrative also leaves out if Uncle actually receives the money in exchange for Joey. But it remains clear in the novel that Uncle never pursues Joey for killing his beloved dog, which Joey claims Uncle loves more than anything or anyone else. Uncle has the resources to easily locate Joey if he wants to avenge the death of his dog. He also knows Boy-Boy well and has plenty of connections. One can consider that Uncle leaves Joey off the hook or that Uncle intentionally scares Joey for Joey to leave his house for Joey's safety. Uncle also

genuinely cares for Joey. The reader knows that Uncle is capable of affect because he loves his dog. Contrary to Joey's belief that Uncle loves his dog more than him, Joey actually matters more to Uncle.

It becomes necessary for Uncle to sell his responsibility of Joey to save him. Uncle recognizes that this is a chance for Joey to escape. Uncle's betrayal of Joey serves as a ruse to protect Joey and his own self from danger. If Uncle directly helps Joey run away as a witness, he will become implicated in Joey's situation. If Uncle acts carelessly, he might end up in prison or dead because of his connection with Joey. Uncle needs to betray Joey in order to help Joey without further associating himself with him. In the end, Uncle cunningly saves Joey and himself while possibly getting paid with money. Uncle needs to let go of his relationship with Joey in order to save him. His betrayal of Joey is an act of obligation, a fulfillment of his responsibility towards Joey. Whichever the case, Uncle cuts off his responsibility of Joey the moment he betrays him. Ironically, Uncle's betrayal actually brings Joey to the point where Joey becomes able to free himself.

Joey does not respond to Uncle's kindness because he fails to comprehend Uncle and the reasoning behind his decisions. Throughout the narration, Joey displays disinterest in truly understanding other people's actions from his own mother to Uncle. In this instance, humanity lies in Uncle's act of helping Joey from the moment he became an orphan to Uncle's final fulfillment of his obligation to take care of Joey, his betrayal of Joey. Most importantly, humanity pertains to that act of understanding the motivations behind people's action despite how they are narrated

and represented. In this case, reading for Uncle's motivations against Joey's portrayal of Uncle provides an opportunity for the reader to understand who is Uncle and why does he act in the way he does. Although this episode presents the reader with many unresolved questions, it also allows for a reading in which we can discover humanity in the least expected way.

IV. Not a Conclusion

At first glance, *Dogeaters'* ending seems bleak because it implies continuous entrapment within narrative time. Time is repetitive, nothing changes, and everything is the same. But with a mode of reading that reads for an opening for other possibilities, the ending is not a conclusion of hopelessness nor is it a beginning. It reads for a possibility of something else other than continuity of the past. The last chapter, "Kundiman," rewrites both the "Lord's Prayer" and "Hail Mary":

*I would curse you in Waray, Ilocano, Tagalog, Spanish, English, Portuguese, and Mandarin; I would curse you but I choose to love you instead. Amor, Amas, amatis, amant, give us this day our daily bread.*²¹³

...

*Ave Maria, mother of revenge. The Lord was never with you. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed are the fruits of thy womb: guavas, mangos, santol, mangosteen, durian. Now and forever, world without end. Now and forever.*²¹⁴

²¹³ Hagedorn 250.

²¹⁴ Hagedorn 251.

In “The Lord’s Prayer,” “give us our daily bread” refers to two events from the Old Testament. The first one pertains to the experience of the Jews fleeing Egypt and being fed by Yahweh in the desert by manna falling from the sky. The second one relates to the chasing of Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. Adam is told that he will have to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. On the other hand, Eve's sweat is not mentioned only her pain in labor and parturition. The Lord's Prayer asks for a reversal of the exile from Eden. It functions as a figuration of these two events from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

The novel’s ending rewrites these Catholic prayers in order to free the present and the future of the past. In the rewriting, Ave Maria becomes the “mother of revenge” and no longer the “mother of God” from the original. To remain a “mother of God” means to carry out the past in the future. It means to give birth to Jesus in the present, which was promised in the past as part of salvation that will be fulfilled in the future. The rewriting changes the original “Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus” into “blessed are the fruits of thy womb: guavas, mangos, santol, mangosteen, durian.” By removing Jesus out of the picture, the novel also takes out Eve’s pain in labor and parturition. If the birth of Jesus operates as the fulfillment of the past, or the figuration of the past in the present, then *Dogeaters* frees the present and future of the past by taking Jesus out of the picture and by making the figurative literal. The novel mocks the original by literally turning Jesus into tropical fruits. It breaks up the power of the past that works through figuration in overdetermining the present and the future. Revenge then refers to the

act of undoing figuration and not fulfilling it. In the last two sentences of the novel, “*Now and forever, world without end. Now and forever,*” the past no longer remains only the present and the future. The last sentence also implies that the novel lacks a conclusion. Despite the ending’s sentence structure of how it seems to draw to a close with the reduction of words in each of the closing sentences, the novel actually does not end. It leaves the ending open without a definitive end with “*Now and forever.*” It does not build a footprint of what is to come. The ending breaks figuration; it does not follow a model. This is the appropriate response to the situation at hand. What it changes is for women to no longer bear the past into the present and the future. Rio chooses to never bear a child. Daisy miscarries the child of her lover.

This is how an ethical mode of reading works—that I, as a reader, participate together with the writer of the text and the individuals depicted in the text to read the ending not for what it is but to create other possibilities in the course of justice.

I have read *Dogeaters* from two perspectives: one formal, focused on narrative, voice, and their function and meaning, and the other, an ethical one, focused on possibility, freedom, legitimacy, responsibility and agency. These two perspectives are an artifact of reading. In the text of *Dogeaters*, they are entangled. In other words, the poetics and the ethics of the novel can only be separated artificially by the necessity of organizing the description of my reading, not by the text or the act of reading itself. It is for this reason that I have coined the neologism: Poethics to describe what I have been led to do in this thesis. Of course, a savvy

reader of my text will not fail to read this neologism anagogically and see that Poethics both hides and reveals Politics, that is a concern with Politeia, not nation nor state, but something that is in the domain of the possible and calls for a different type of action that either of these two terms or their conjunction in the hyphenated form nation-state, a term that obfuscates since it is oriented toward the legal and not the legitimate.

Coda

The preceding chapters cannot be tied up by a traditional conclusion. They were not meant to lead to a summarizable end but to open up future possibilities for reading Filipino writing and its many contexts. I will thus end this dissertation with a coda in which I will juxtapose two rather different objects of reading that I claim, benefit from the approach I have called “poethics.”

I. The Play

RIO: I make many visits back to the islands—I’m not sure why, but I do. Long after Lola Narcisa and both my grandparents are dead—everything has changed and nothing is different. A new Miss Philippines walks down the runway—young, beautiful, radiant. There are several familiar faces still in the VIP section: General Ledesma sits with Severo Alacran, the American ambassador and the ambassador’s wife. Lolita Luna, still sexy and fabulous after several facelifts, arrives with a flamboyant, noisy entourage which includes Perlita Alacran, Chiquiting Moreno and the everlasting and ever lovely Barbara Villanueva. In the place of honor where Imelda once reigned, now sits our new president, former action star, Tito Alvarez. My soap opera continues, the soap opera of the Philippines continues.

(Donna Summer’s “Last Dance” comes up.)

END OF PLAY²¹⁵

Hagedorn's *Dog eaters: A Play About the Philippines* is a performance of her novel. The novel and the play treat the same problem albeit in different forms. Rio's lamentation, "everything has changed and nothing is different," is similar to the ending of the novel. It indicates Rio and the rest of the characters' entrapment within the novel's cyclical narrative time. They are still living without agency. The characters are unchanged and they occupy the same positions in society. Severo Alacran owns and controls everything. The president is still the same only now a different person plays it. Tito Alvarez, a popular action star, fills the role of the president. A fact not surprising to Rio, since "nothing is different." For Rio, the course of the story is predictable.

The form of the play differs from the novel. The readers interpret the novel individually on their own time. On the other hand, in the production of a play, the members of the audience sit right next to each other and they watch collectively. The audience also changes every night and varies from each other depending on the time and location of its performance. In fact, the play has been performed in three distinct places and times: San Diego (1998), New York (2001), and San Francisco (2016). More importantly, the play actually works more closely to a radio serial, only in this case the audience watches and listens to it inside the theatre. Most of the primary actors and actresses play two distinct characters just as in the radio serial featured in the novel. Of course the audience is not the same since each one of its members has

²¹⁵ Jessica Hagedorn, *Dog eaters: A Play About the Philippines* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2003) 108-109.

their own specificities. The poetics of a play are obviously different from those of a novel, which is why authors of novels very rarely produce plays out of their own work. The task is usually left to, or rather taken over by, others. It has become common to refer to such plays as adaptations, just as films derived from written works are called adaptations. It is interesting to note that novels derived from films are called novelizations and not adaptations. This neologism reflects better the attempt to effect a translation from one poetics to another. Hagedorn has undertaken to create a play out of her novel. Of course, there is no overarching narrative voice and it is up to the audience to determine the narrative thread. The ability of the members of the audience in this regard will vary, as will their interest in any particular scene, actor, or parts of dialogue. Besides, the members of the audience bring with them their own historical knowledge and experience. Some of them might know the Philippines very well and others might not know anything at all. Although they all watch the same exact performance, their reactions also differ from each other. Compared to reading the novel in which the reader has to imagine how the characters and locations would look like on their own, the play provides the audience with identical images. In other words, the audience is given the same experience—object of the play. They all see the same actors and actresses, detect the same voices, watch the same lights, and hear the same music and sound effects. On the other hand, the reader of the novel has to interpret all of these factors on his or her own terms. Rio's physical characteristics would be construed differently across readers even if they sit right next to each other while reading. In this way, the reader also brings in his or her

own specificity in reading the novel but in a different way. Yet, the relationships between the play and the audience and the text and the reader have their own distinct historicities.

The play creates a different type of engagement with its audience. Aristotle told us a long time ago that a performance of the play purges the emotions of its viewers. It arouses both pity and fear. Rio's lament, "everything has changed and nothing is different," might induce pity and cause the audience to weep. They might realize that although the play ended, tragedy continues. This is actually frightening to realize—that there is no end in sight and everyone is stuck. But the play also bewilders its audience because they do not know whether they should laugh or cry by the end. The commencement of Donna Summer's song together with the amusing spectacle of characters sitting on stage can induce laughter from the audience. At the end of the play, the audience might feel relieved and happy since they no longer see the misfortunes of the characters. To them, the characters' tragic lives end with conclusion of the play. The music also adds irony. It creates a distance between the audience and the play because it distracts the audience away from what they have just witnessed. In the San Francisco production, some of the characters dance the Manila swing with the music. The catchy disco song and dancing on stage might even compel some viewers to stand up and dance.

Consequently, the play creates at least two distinct groupings among its audience. Those familiar with the Philippines, the members of the audience who have experienced living there or understand its condition, already know the

overarching narrative of the Philippines. They are familiar with the story and know what happens next. They function like the anagogic community I described in the last chapter. On the other hand, those who only know Donna Summer's song belong to the heterogeneous group of people who have no personal experience of the Philippines. The divide between these two groupings become more heightened with the inclusion of the Tagalog language in the play without English translation.

Although the play and the novel discuss the same problem, their forms vary from each other. The play is not an adaptation but a performance of its own. More importantly, since the play is a performance, it is based on action and changes with each show. The play, as a performance with its effect on the audience, already has an ethical dimension insofar as it interpellates the members of the audience, who will respond in idiosyncratic ways. In case of the novel, the written text remains constant but changes with the reader's interpretation. The act of reading brings in ethics, or how the reader participates with the text in examining other possibilities. The play's distinct form orients the audience differently and provokes different reactions from it. The play demands a different poethics than the novel.

II. The President

My second example is not a literary one but is drawn from current affairs, and specifically from what has been going on in the Philippines since the election of the current President (whom I will not name, following Hagedorn's example). Here are a few things he is quoted as having said:

“If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful.”

"Hitler massacred 3 million Jews. Now there is 3 million, what is it, 3 million drug addicts. I'd be happy to slaughter them."

"And my orders to you: if he carries a gun, he is not a soldier, he is not a policeman, just kill him. That is my order, because they will kill us..."

At first sight it may seem abusive to invoke the poetics part of poethics to discuss the current situation in the Philippines. But, as I will briefly indicate, the actions and injunctions of the President have precedents and thus become legible and interpretable through our knowledge of these precedents. In other words, they appear to be part of a genre we may call authoritarian rule but which the Ancients would have called Tyranny.

Because the president is elected legally and has been mandated by the people through popular vote, his actions appear to be in-line with the law, but they are far from legitimate. He openly advocates for extrajudicial killing on in his war against drug-dealing and illegal drug use. His words become law-like and they incite vigilante killings. Under the rule of the president, it is justified for anyone from the public to the police to kill suspects of drug use or dealing. He even pledged to provide jobs to unemployed Filipino Overseas Contract Workers by killing drug users. For him, it does not matter if stray bullets kill innocent children or bystanders. He calls them necessary "collateral damage." Within a year of his election, the police and unidentified gunmen have killed more than 7,000 people, an average of 30 people a day. The police claimed to have killed about 2,000 people not counting others killed by their stray bullets.

The president is a character, an imitation of other dictators. He legally declared martial law in Mindanao, the Southern part of the Philippines, under the guise of suppressing militants. He is bombing the area without any regard to civilians and hostages in imitation of Vladimir Putin's destruction of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. He openly embraces this mimetism and has said that he has recently aligned himself with Russia. In return for his pledge of loyalty, Russia has pledged to help the Philippines in fighting off insurgents and has promised to provide sophisticated weapons. Further, in imitation of the Argentine dictator Jorge Rafael Videla and the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, he has admitted to throwing people off helicopters, thereby perpetuating the practice known by the solecism "disappearing," and he has threatened to do the same to corrupt government officials. He also encourages his military to rape women. In fact, under martial law, he created rules, or directions for behavior, for soldiers currently fighting in Mindanao. They are allowed to rape up to three women with impunity and kill anyone even innocent civilians. He added that he would take personal responsibility for their actions and would protect them from any legal ramifications for "accidentally" killing civilians. Human rights advocates are aghast and have openly criticized him. Still nothing significant has been done to effectively stop the president. The militant insurgency has only alarmed other state leaders because the name of "terrorism" has been invoked. They all acted quickly to offer their assistance. The U.S. and Australia sent in military support and China has provided monetary aid.

In the framework of the state, the president rules and illegitimate acts are made legal and protected by the law. He controls the military and the police. His orders trump the legal; they become the law. He goes above the legal and redefines it. He is the law. There are no checks and balances at work even though they are built in the constitution and organization of the state. His notion of responsibility only defends the perpetrators of sexual violence and manslaughter. Rape and murder are legalized and the law ignores the raped and the massacred. Under his law, it is legal to kill anyone as long as you are fighting off insurgents and killing for the drug war. His law has no regards for human rights.

In this world ruled by the president in which many Filipinos actually believe that murder is acceptable and killing others without due process have become necessary for a better Philippines, what is the legitimate or the appropriate response based on the condition at hand? In other words, what are the ethical dilemmas faced by the citizens of the Philippines and their compatriots dispersed around the world and sending remittances back home? Traditional politics do not provide an answer. Another form of politics must arise out of the poethics of the current situation, and it cannot be confined to Filipinos.

Reader, how do we respond?

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