Narrativizing United States-Philippines 'Postcolonial' Relations: Gender, Identity, Politics, Nation in the Novels of Jessica Hagedorn

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By grace of over 400 years of colonial and neocolonial domination, the inhabitants of the islands called the 'Philippines' have acquired an identity, a society and a culture, not totally of their own making. We share this fate with millions of other 'third world' peoples. We Filipino(a)s have been constructed by Others (Spaniards, Japanese, the *Americanos*); recognition of 'our' utterances and deeds has not been fully given. We are still misrecognized. What is ours and what has been imposed is still a burning issue, reflecting divisions across class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and so on.

Four hundred years of servitude to Spanish feudal suzerainty preceded our famous American 'tutelage', a racialized experience which made us almost fortuitous *tabula rasa* for the doctrine of market liberalism and meritocracy; at the turn of the century, the metropolis wrote its signature in our psyches in the form of U.S. 'manifest destiny', the 'White Man's Burden' of civilizing the barbarian natives into free, English-speaking forever adolescent consumers. The traumatic fixations began in those forty years of 'compadre colonialism' and patronage. When formal independence was granted in 1946, after the harrowing years of Japanese imperial occupation, U.S. 'tutelage' –to use this academic euphemism– assumed the form of a perpetual high-and-low-intensity warfare of 'free world' democracy led by the U.S. over our souls and bodies threatened by the evil forces of communism. Recently the U.S. government's gospel of salvation redeemed us from the banal corruption of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. You can read this version of contemporary events in Stanley Karnow's *In Our Image*, an inflated apologia for imperial plunder and neocolonial hypocrisy. And you can read an oblique commentary of Karnow's narrative (which Peter Tarr calls the 'Immaculate Conception' view of U.S. imperial history) in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1989), acclaimed by American novelist Robert Stone as "the definitive novel of the encounter between the Philippines and America and their history of mutual illusion, antagonism and ambiguous affection". "Definitive" may be

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premature, to say the least; but the epithet "mutual" presumes a topsyturvy make-believe world where the players begin with clean hands, all cards face up on the gaming table.

In this essay I want to explore the themes of U.S. imperial hegemony and the construction of a historically specific, gendered, national identity by a leading Filipina-American writer, Jessica Hagedorn, in her two novels, *Dogeaters* and *The Gangster of Love* (1996). The largest segment of the Asian Pasific American category in the U.S. population, the culture and ethos of the Filipino community (now close to 3 million) have not received the scrupulous and sympathetic attention it deserves. This is due not only to racial discrimination against citizens of Asian ancestry in the U.S., but mainly to the relentless neocolonial domination of the Philippines the effects of which still defy inventory by orthodox postcolonial casuistry.

Postcolonial criticism today seeks to compensate for the subalternity of people of color by eulogizing their 'hybrid', 'in-between', decentered situation. In other words, we need not grieve over the predicament of exploitation, underdevelopment, and marginality. We need to celebrate our Otherness, our *differance*. Now, it is easy to resolve one's problematic situation of being situated on the borders, or on no man's land, deterritorialized by powers whose operations seem mysterious, by making a virtue of necessity, so to speak. It is easy to perform the unilateral trick of reversing the negative and valorizing our plight as immanently positive, as in 'Black is beautiful', for instance. Or else, taking pride in the fact that we are beneficiaries of both cultures, North and South, and that our multicultural awareness, our cosmopolitanism, enables us to partake of the feast of humanity's accomplishments –from Egyptian funerary art and Plato's Ideas to the latest IBM computer. This is in fact the fashionable axiom of postmodernist theorizing which has also overtaken the academic and cultural elite of the periphery.

Dogeaters is a work that confronts the multilayered contradictions of Philippine society, an uneven terrain alluded to by one of the characters as "a nation of cynics... betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams". It is a product not so much of American pop culture and archaic primitivism (epitomized, for example, by Imelda Marcos in a Manhattan courtroom) as of a deracinated, diasporic sensibility torn apart by the crisis of late capitalism in the sixties and seventies. The novel seeks to render in a unique postmodernist idiom a century of vexed U.S.-Philippine interactions: the novel can be conceived as a swift montage of phantasmagoric images, flotsam of banalities, jetsam of cliches, fragments of quotes and confessions, shifting kaleidoscopic voices, trivia, libidinal tremors and orgasms, hallucinations flashed on film/TV screens –virtually a cinematext of a Third World scenario that might be the Philippines or any other contemporary neocolonial milieu processed in the transnational laboratories of Los Angeles or New York.

The feminist literary critic Catherine Stimpson compares Hagedorn to Salman Rushdie: both deal with the collision of cultures, "the saga of immigration, cultural meltdown and renewal" (Talbot 17). In the introduction to her collection *Danger and Beauty* (1993), Hagedorn herself damns borders and describes her work as "a love letter to my motherland: a fact and a fiction borne of rage, shame, pride..." (xi). Is this mimesis of Philippine history and the ambivalent attitudes it arouses the 'message' or signifying import of the form of the novel?

The novel is less a resolution of conflicts and ambivalences than a symptom of aestheticist resignation to them. Less feminist than feminine, its oppositional impulse dissolves in exhibitionist and stylized gestures of self-transcendence. The postmodernist technique of pastiche, aleatory juxtaposition, virtuoso bricolage carried to its logical culmination, is what presides in the first part of *Dogeaters* –a flattening of heterogeneous elements approximating Las Vegas simultaneity– until the introduction of Joey Sands, symbol of what is actually meant by 'special Filipino American relations', forces the text to generate a semblance of a plot (cause-effect sequence, plausible motivation, etc.) whereby the scenario of sacrifice –Joey's slaughter of Taruk, iconic sign for the surrogate farther who also functions as castrator/betrayer, and for all the other patriarchs upholding the code of filial piety– is able to take place and the discourse to end in a prayer to the Virgin "mother of revenge". But that vestige of the traditional art of storytelling, in which irreconcilable victims of a neocolonial regime end up in a revolutionary guerilla camp plotting retribution, finds itself embedded and even neutralized by a rich multilayered discourse (exotic to a Western audience) empowered by what Henri Lefevbre (*Everyday Life in the Modern World, The Survival of Capitalism*) calls the capitalist principle of repetition. This culture of repetition (pleonasm, tautology, recycled simulations, in effect Baudrillard's world of pure mediations) of which the tell-tale index is the Hollywood star system (and its counterpart in the commercial mass culture of the Philippines: the regurgitated routine of cliches, stereotypes, debased sexual rituals) conditions most postmodernist art, reducing even parody, satire, and irony to aspects of a relativistic and redundant cosmos against which the 'Kundiman' concluding *Dogeaters* can only be a stylized gesture of protest. In sum, this narrative machine converts the concluding prayer of exorcism and *ressentiment* into a gesture of stylized refusal.

Conflating heresy and orthodoxy, Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* possesses the qualities of a canonical text in the making –for the multiculturati. It unfolds the crisis of U.S. hegemony in the Philippines through a collage of character types embodying the corruption of the Americanizing oligarchic elite (San Juan, "Beyond Identity Politics"). In trying to extract some intelligible meaning out of the fragmentation of the comprador-patriarchal order that sacrifices everything to acquisitive lust, Hagedorn resorts to pastiche, aleatory montage of diverse styles, cliches, ersatz rituals, hyper-real hallucinations –a parodic bricolage of western

high postmodernism– whose cumulative force blunts whatever satire or criticism is embedded in her character portrayals and authorial intrusions.

Addressed mainly to a cosmopolitan audience, Hagedorn's trendy work is undermined by postmodern irony: it lends itself easily to consumer liberalism's drive to sublimate everything (dreams, eros, New People's Army, feminism, anarchist dissent) into an ensemble of self-gratifying spectacles. At best, *Dogeaters* measures the distance between the partisanship of Bulosan's peasants-become-organic intellectuals and the pseudo-yuppie lifestyles of recent arrivals. As a safe substitute for Bulosan and as one of the few practitioners of Third World/ feminine 'magic realism', Hagedorn may easily be the next season's pick for the Establishment celebration of its multicultural canon.

From another perspective, this time from an Italian feminist, Hagedorn's fiction cannot be coopted by an omnivorous U.S. multiculturalism because it is a cyborg's manifesto. Giovanna Covi argues that the main protagonist's movie-novel is not just stereotypical representation; its rhetoric aims for "a semiotics capable of producing a discourse on the neo-colonial condition of the Philippines in the context of the Americanization of world culture" (74). So far it is Covi who, to my knowledge, is the only critic who enunciates most cogently the internationalist horizon of *Dogeaters* for a cosmopolitan audience:

> Hagedorn expresses the Gramscian version of nationalism as the national-popular: she articulates the sense of her own country as the sense of her own *place*, of herself as occupying a given position whose social meaning derives from belonging to a historically-defined tradition. She rejects the nationalism of the nation-state which is supported by the identification with a specific ideology ... Precisely because the Philippines [is] an American colony –and this is not an invention– *Doreaters* is not only a realistic portrayal of the cultural, social, and fragmentation derived from centuries of dependence on first the Spanish and later the Americans, but also – in Gramscian terms– the expression of a sociality which is historical and ethico-political and which is the condition for the artistic rendering of a genuine and fundamental humanity (65-66).

Covi's perspective is salutary and prompts the contextualization of my previous remarks on *Dogeaters* in the allegory of the historical contingencies and ambiguities that subtend Hagedorn's *The Gangster of Love*.

In contrast to the quasi-surrealistic montage of her first novel, Hagedorn's second novel centers on the adventures of a young Filipina in the United States growing up against the background of the obsolescence of the rock/hippie/youth counterculture of the sixties, the decline of civil rights struggles and 'Third World' revolutions, and the resurgence of reactionary ideology and practices. Can nostalgia replace the shock of living through alienation and commodity-fetishism, racial bigotry and sexism, in the imperial metropolis? What is the fate of the post-1965 Filipino immigrant generation? Rocky Rivera's search for a vi-

able community (the rock band functions as temporary surrogate and compensatory device) dramatizes the predicament of the adolescent Filipina stranded in the milieu of neoconservative America. Rocky decides to be a mother and replace patriarchal culture (signified by her aging mother still fixated on the absent philandering father) with the shifting positionality of a nomadic subject –Covi's cyborg– who somehow survives the predatory disasters of her 'flower-power' companions. She deploys tactics of mimicry, satire and burlesque, comic ruses and happenstance stratagems. Her situation can be read as an allegorical rendering of the post-1965 cohort of Filipino immigrants whose neocolonial roots can only prompt a clinging to fragments of indigenous, damaged culture while aping the suburban lifestyle of conspicuous consumerism. The narrative stages Rocky's return after her mother's death to face the dying father in the Philippines and what he comes to symbolize: the decadent world of the Marcoses (a return of the past sacrificed in *Dogeaters*) and the moribund oligarchy. A politics of memory emerges whose libidinal figuration captures the uneven, unsynchronized social formation of the neocolony.

In the final analysis, one can say that Hagedorn's production of a 'postcolonial' minoritarian discourse depends for its condition of possibility on what it denies or represses: the culture of resistance symbolized by the Manongs, and by extension the revolt of the Filipino masses erased by Jimi Hendrix and Hollywood. On the other hand, one can argue that impulses of resistance are not completely extinguished but manifest themselves here in the form of grotesque characters, melodramatic juxtapositions, breaks and discontinuities in style and idiom, above all in the absurd and fantastic incidents whose bizarre texture reflects precisely the profound crisis of late global capitalism registered in the bodies and performances of Hagedorn's "gangsters of love", temporarily disbanded and/or routed, in quest of laws and authorities they need to defy.

Here I interject the phenomenal explosion of the Filipino diaspora in the historical conjuncture of the eighties and nineties, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of *pax Americana*.

Given the unprecedented fact of 6 million Filipinos scattered around the world as 'contract workers' (including 'hospitality' women in Japan and elsewhere), the neocolonial (not post-colonial) impasse of Filipino society has not suffered attenuation. On the contrary. The whole country has been refeudalized as a Western enclave in the cartography of global, transnational capitalism. This change demands a new historically grounded analysis, properly a collective and open-ended enterprise, one which would ideally be informed by an emancipatory and counterhegemonic praxis.

Within this horizon of exploring the terrain of the possible, adjacent to the embattled zone of subaltern metanarratives, I would like to examine more closely the thematic motivation and ethico-political agency implied in the *Gangster of Love*. One might remember that Hagedorn's first novel *Dogeaters* enjoyed a brief notoriety as an afterimage of the Marcos-dictatorship interlude in our history.

This is the pretext to pose questions that have now occupied centerstage in the debate on multiculturalism, identity politics, the existence of a 'common culture', nationalism, racialized ethnicities, and globalized borderlands –themes and motifs rehearsed in the resurgent tide of 'political correctness'.

The commentator Russell Jacoby (1995) censures postcolonial discourse for its obscure and solipsist grandiosity, its banal politics, its jargonized language, its tiresome and infantile self-obsession. Lest someone mistake me for Jacoby's target –he is actually referring to Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and their epigones– I hasten to assure the reader that I don't consider myself a postcolonial critic if by that is meant someone from the Commonwealth countries that formed part of the nearly all-encompassing British Empire –a diasporic writer like Salman Rushdie or a successful 'third world' intellectual in a first-world institution of higher learning. But certain questions raised by Edward Said and others about the Orientalized construction of the Other by western knowledge-power (to use Foucault's term), about the legitimacy of representations of indigenous and subaltern subjects and their capacity to speak for themselves, about the nature of agency and the possibilities of critique and transformation of world-historical inequalities –these questions rather than purely formal questions of aesthetic form will serve as the framework around which I offer the following brief observations on *The Gangster of Love*.

The story is simple: brought by her mother to the United States on the year Jimi Hendrix died, Raquel Rivera (together with her brother Voltaire who eventually returns to the Philippines) grows up in the milieu of the sixties, meets a felicitously named partner Elvis Chang, and forms a band with him called 'The Gangster of Love'. She then befriends a versatile woman, Keiko Van Heller, and plunges into a series of somewhat *deja vu* adventures with her as well as with a host of other idiosyncratic characters like her uncle Marlon Rivera. She then moves to New York City from California, teams up with Jake Montano with whom she has a child, goes through grotesque and tragicomic scenes of her mother's death –a turning point in her life. She then returns to Manila to visit her dying father (the concluding episode is named after him) whose philandering –an index of the patriarchal regime she is revolting against but also elegizing– led to the dissolution of the family. Does the ending imply a return of the 'prodigal' daughter, a reconciliation? Or does it prefigure a bridging of the gap between the homeland that had just witnessed the turmoil of the February 1986 uprising against the U.S.-backed Marcos dictatorship and the imperial power that offered a refuge to the despot in its Pacific outpost, Hawaii? Even if that is so, the dead Jimi Hendrix can not be resurrected so easily and the 'Gangster of Love' remains defunct.

Part Four indeed carries the heading "To Return". But that rubric is a provocative alibi. It is undermined by the duplicitous connotation of the yo-yo, the toy which serves here as an icon of Filipino ethnicity, which (Hagedorn instructs us) means not just "to return" but also "to cast out". At the beginning of Part One, Hagedorn provides the slang definition of the yo-yo –a person regarded not

only as stupid and ineffectual but also eccentric. More apropos of the narrative design of the novel –a bricolage interweaving of scenes using interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness, parody, lyric transcripts of memories and dreams, a thesaurus of trendy codewords, etc.– is the colloquial sense of yo-yo: fluctuating, variable, but also automatic. If the postcolonial text is usually categorized as a pastiche of styles and idiom, a montage of heterogeneous materials that syncopate linear plot with a polyphony of voices, tones, and rhythms, then Hagedorn's invention fits the bill.

We are in the presence of a classic postmodern artifice: the causal narrative of the modern realistic novel inherited from 19th-century bourgeois Europe is here articulated with a picaresque mode reminiscent of feudal times, recurrent snapshots of grotesque characters symptomatic of an atomized industrial society, scenes of ribald festivity, sexual encounters, tableaux of recollections, quotations from the mass confections of Hollywood and the pop music industry, all interwoven with introspective diarylike notations. This highly stylized fabrication tries not only to dovetail the past and present in a meaningful configuration but also intimate the emergence of the new, of future forms of life that escape the fatal cycle of the yo-yo and the reproduction of the seemingly eternal round of the 'return of the repressed'. What I am trying to get at is that this work attempts to render the experience of transition, of what it means to live in and through the collision of contradictory modes of production in a historically determinate social formation defined by the colonial nexus between the Philippines and the United States. What is privileged here is the process of transition, not the terminals of origin and destination. That experience of uprooting, the subsequent struggle for survival translated here as the reconstitution of 'family' or some analogue of traditional consanguinity in an alien environment, and with it the construction of a new identity, is usually designated as the archetype of the postcolonial experience.

My own argument, however, is that this is not postcolonial but anticolonial, or if you like counterhegemonic and oppositional in motive and telos. This is not the surface intent of the novel, of course. I call it the "political unconscious" (after Jameson 1981) of the text, which goes beyond the exposure of the spurious 'civilizing mission' of Anglo-Saxon white supremacy. I suggest a reconstructive reading here. What makes Hagedorn's text transgressive is its supersession of the countercultural cult of the superstars of the sixties and its alignment with the social memory of the Filipinos in California crystallized by her mother's illness and death. In this itinerary of exile, the narrative begins to shape a modality of resistance to the commodifying power of late-capitalist culture and ideology. One may even suggest that its 'unconscious' project, sublated in the variegated texture of the prose and its melange of genres, is to mobilize the submerged and hidden resources of indigenous forms of life for the goal of popular-national liberation. This paramount objective is indivisible with sexual and gender emancipation.

To illustrate my thesis, let me point to the fundamental contradiction expressed on the level of thematic detail. Rocky Rivera, a Filipina woman of mixed ancestry, seeks to chart her life in a society dominated by the instrumentalizing rigor of business and individualist competition. What is her point of departure? Two things are insinuated in terms of native resources: food and language. While the temper of postmodernist art is to refuse universals and exalt particulars, we discern here a fascination with spatial ordering that becomes a surrogate means of cognitive reconaissance. There seems to be a fetishism of place (a metaphoric geography of culture, moods, and enigmatic personalities) that tries to compensate for the secular uniformities of industrialized society. Hagedorn knows that a rupture has taken place –her body and psyche have been transported in time and space– but pretends that it hasn't happened: her mother and relatives cook and eat the native foods, talk the same language (now exoticized or defamiliarized), and carry on their customary ways, with some minor adjustments. But all the same this pretense is grounded on the recognition of the truth of separation, of unequivocal distance: the brother's return confirms this. I locate this fetishism in the "Prologue", a testimony that celebrates the sheer incongruities, absurd juxtapositions, seemingly gratuitous coexistence of idioms, lifestyles, artifacts, and tastes whose resonance dramatizes the variegated temporal/spatial stratification of Philippine social life:

> There are rumors. Surrealities. Malacanang Palace slowly sinking into the fetid Pasig River, haunted by unhappy ghosts. Female ghosts. Infant ghosts. What is love? A young girl asks.
>
> Rumors. Malicious gossip, treacherous tsimis. Blah blah blah. Dire predictions, arbitrary lust. The city hums with sinister music. Scandal, innuendo, half-truths, bald-faced lies. Adulterous love affairs hatched, coups d'etat plotted. A man shoots another man for no apparent reason. A jealous husband beats his wife for the umpteenth time. The Black Nazarene collapses in a rice paddy, weeping.
>
> I love you, someone sings on the omnipresent radio. Soldiers in disguise patrol the countryside.
>
> Love, love, love. Love is in the air.
> Background, foreground, all around.
>
> But what is love? A young girl asks.
>
> A fatal mosquito bite, the nuns warn her.
>
> Rumors. Eternal summers, impending typhoons. The stink of fear unmistakable in the relentless, sweltering heat (*The Gangster of Love* 1).

At first glance, this opening landscape strikes us as a multimedia composite of elements with dissonant matrices and contexts. Location is not random nor

contingent but deliberate. Organized around a metonymic axis are the seat of government (the mention of Malacanang Palace fixes the historic determinateness of the narrative); the Pasig River that treads through Manila, the urban center; news of domestic violence carried by newspapers and radio; the religious icon of the Black Nazarene suffering an accident; the presence of the military in the countryside, and so on. This collage is cut through by a refrain, a deflated query about love. What sutures this series is the metaphoric cluster of "rumors" and the extremities of the climate. How to make sense of this seemingly unintelligible conjuncture of features of the natural and artifactual surroundings, of ubiquitous rumors whose reverberation is punctuated with violence, and religious codes trying to put a lid on the explosive mixture –this crux, this bundle of contradictions, is what the novel will try to resolve on an imaginary plane. In other words, Hagedorn will attempt to grasp the deformed, uneven, fractured social landscape of the Philippines with the apparatus of a self-reflexive aestheticizing consciousness, one which is itself a product of the phenomenon of imperial violence it is trying to grapple with and master.

In my opinion, this attempt fails –and that may be the intent of the 'political unconscious'. In the section "Tropical Depression" toward the end of the novel, Hagedorn re-stages the landscape with a revealing dramatic variation: the appearance of a mythical Black Virgin functions to sublimate all the incongruities and discordances, permitting the force of Nature to normalize the phenomena of crisis. This occurs at the time of her return after her mother's death, an event signifying the loss of the preOedipal anchor or center for her self-identifying explorations. On the terrain of chaos and unpredictability emerges a unifying and centralizing image. After the August typhoon subsides, the city is ravaged by epidemics:

> Strange scenes of violence and grieving occur without warning. Grown men weep uncontrollably. Women run amok, hacking at everyone in their path with any weapon they can find –bolo knives, scissors. Infants are born with webbed feet. The general mood of despair is alleviated by frequent sightings of the Black Virgin. She wanders the countryside, seeking to comfort those who cannot be comforted. A young woman wearing a blond wig has herself crucified in a public ceremony. Her spectacle of sacrifice draws thousands of believers, showy penitents flogging their own, mildewed flesh with dainty, custom-made whips. Blood flows, the only vibrant color in this black sea of waterlogged depression. In Manila, phosphorescent crocodiles and moray eels lurk in the aquatic ruins of a submerged megashopping mall on Epifanio de los Santos. (290)

The sight of the flooded megamall on the highway where the February 1986 revolution took place may suggest either the inchoate level of industrialization, symptom of the inadequacy of the Filipino comprador bourgeoisie; or the irresistible power of the past, the archaic, what escapes rational and systematic

control. In any case, the presence of the Black Virgin may be interpreted as symbolic of the enduring hold of mythical and magical thinking in the neocolony amidst a rationalizing, secularized business environment. Ironically, this ruse is available precisely because Weberian disenchantment and commodity-fetishism have not completely dominated, something that escapes the narrator's avantgarde sensibility and secretly assists its desire to ground the self (the imagination) in the field of mutual and reciprocal recognition. The author wants to have it both ways: affirm both primordial ethnicity and its antithesis, bureaucratized individualism. This anarchist politics of representation can also be read as a pretext for vindicating the status quo, business as usual. I think that is the point of the meeting of father and estranged daughter, a strange encounter of self and other, at the end of the novel.

On the level of political significance, this staging of hybridity and 'in-between' confluence of signs, objects, happenings signifies the most fundamental characteristic of the kind of experience shared by subjects in most colonial formations: uneven and combined development. While a preponderant number of characters here may be viewed as walking cyborgs or amphibians, there are two characters that function as microcosms of unevenness: Keiko and Marlon. This uneveness prevails on the sociocultural level as an effect of the diverse modes of production (and its social relations) co-existing together. Underlying the complex social formation of a peripheral, dependent region, we find the juxtaposition of various precapitalist or archaic modes of production, the tributary or feudal and artisanat ones spliced together with assorted capitalist modes the most visible of which are mercantile or trading and comprador business. Absent of course is an industrial fraction –that is the space preempted by the transnational corporations, as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. What is dominant, however, is a combination of bureaucratic and comprador capitalisms to which everything else –semifeudal and pettybourgois operations and class fractions– is subordinate. This non-synchronic combination produces specific effects on the diachronic plane which explain the concrete, quotidian forms of behavior assumed by the juridico-political institutions and ideological-cultural practices of all classes.

I think it is within this perspective of geopolitical uneveness and overdetermination that we can grasp the singularity of the literary/aesthetic mode of production epitomized by Hagedorn's work. In spite of the fact that Hagedorn produces chiefly for a First World audience and more narrowly for a limited multicultural audience in urban zones, the practice she exemplifies is defined by the uneven social formation that is precisely the condition of possibility for her kind of writing. What do I mean by this?

Postcolonial orthodoxy mandates that essentialism or any quest for roots be proscribed in the same breath as syncretism and hybridity are valorized and made obligatory. Gayatri Spivak, for example, congratulates herself for reopening the "epistemic fracture of imperialism without succumbing to a nostalgia for lost origins" (272) and urges us to attend to the "archives of imperialist govern-

ance". Refusing to perform such a hermeneutic task, Hagedorn instead presents an anatomy of the Filipino colonized formation. Her style of cognitive mapping delivers an archaeology of multifarious signs alluding to several periods or stages of the development of the capitalist world-system. I don't mean here a recapitulation of the evolutionary phases of the transition from feudal or precapitalist structures to modern industrial capitalism. What seems to transcend the binary opposites of the politics of blame and the politics of compassion –for Sara Suleri (1995), the "commonality of loss" that masks colonizer and colonized as complicitous binary opposites– is precisely the novel's drive to curb the vertiginous excess of heterogeneity by putting into question its feasibility for the Filipino subject-on-trial. That would mean perpetuating uneven development, even glorifying the hybrid and syncretic wretchedness produced and sustained by global capitalism and its local agencies.

The route of egocentric delirium finally arrives at a *cul de sac*. I have already noted the text's offering of postmodernist options addressed to Rocky Rivera's search for a community that would substitute for the neocolonial extended family her mother's departure repudiated: the first is Keiko with her chameleonic masks –"one day she's Japanese and black, the next day she's Dutch and Hawaiian" (44). She mimicks the role of the performative self, as in some kind of unintended parody that harbors a half-serious and half-mocking resonance: "Yesterday I was Josephine Baker... Tonight I'm Edith Sitwell, and Rocky's Marpessa Dawn. We can be them forever. Anytime we want" (117). The second option is Marlon Rivera, a Filipino gay who claims to have played "Elvis Presley's happy-go-lucky sidekick *in Blue Hawaii* and also as a nonspeaking waiter in a Chinese restaurant in Samuel Fuller's *Pickup on South Street*." In the section "Film Noir", Marlon Rivera, who rechristened himself after seeing the film *The Wild One*, proves to be the only character that grasps his niece's implacable obsession: "She was reinventing herself moment to moment, day by day" (87). Rocky Rivera can only make sense of the craziness of Isabel L'Ange and oddities like her by juxaposing them with movie stars and celebrity films of the past: Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Dorothy Dandridge, Anna May Wong. This is self-identification achieved by metonymy and metaphor, the effect of linguistic mechanisms working on commercial, mass-produced culture in the United States and substituting for kinship and community devalued in the periphery.

We are in the realm of simulations and mass-mediated images, a space like New York which, aside from being a real place, is for Rocky "a source of intense inspiration, a daily barrage of worthy movie moments" (98). The move from San Francisco to New York signals a shift from the mother/kin-centered milieu that mediates between the semifeudal periphery and the core metropolis to the arena of anomic individualism, between the locus of ascription and the site of performance and social action. Before the second migration eastward, the breakup of Rocky's relation with Elvis Chang prompts Rocky's rejection of the two options as incapable of dealing with pain: "Maybe I'd rather fuck in my imagination. I allow myself to run wild and wallow in my own private kitsch. I

dream of hermaphrodite angels with bronze skin floating alongside the naked, bleeding perfection of my tormented Saint Sebastian ... My mother's right. I am just like everyone else in my family. I believe in heaven and hell, the pleasures of denial, and the rewards of sin ... I enjoy this only because it's forbidden" (129-30).

Whatever the seductions of border crossings and other boundary violations, the protean pleasures of the cyborg, and the free-floating hubris of indeterminacy afforded by consumerism and the liberal marketplace, Rocky Rivera knows that it will be an ordeal to shed the markers of subordination and dependency. The stigma of Otherness persists. She cannot put aside "unbearable questions" such as "What's Filipino? What's in the blood?" Before she moves east and separates from her mother, Rocky meditates on this reprise of the first uprooting. The interrogative mood is displaced by the subjunctive:

> I am unable to leave, overcome by helplessness in the face of family, blood, and the powerful force of my own reluctant love. Family sickness, homesickness. Manila, our dazzling tropical city of memory. The English language confuses me. What is st the core of that subtle difference between homesick and nostalgic, for example?... "Ties to the spirit world, fierce pride, wounded pride, thirst for reverenge, melodrama, fatalism, weeping and wailing at the graveside. We're blessed with macabre humor and dancing feet –a floating nation of rhythm and blues", Voltaire answers, repeating what this old guy known as the Carabao Kid used to say: "We're our own worst enemy." (57-58).

This passage reveals both the allure of imperial exoticism and the impulse of critique, skepticism and sentimentality, the presence of the Manichean duality once described by Frantz Fanon (1968) in the period of the Algerian revolution. Evocation of the neocolony as the archetypal locus of incongruities and dissonances, a microcosm of opposites like the sadomasochistic figure of St. Sebastian, may be a tactic of eliding the discrepancy between the homeland and the place of exile. This may by called for by the yo-yo trope that seeks to define the method and architectonics of the whole narrative. But the tactic is not an endorsement of postcolonial multiplicity or 'interactive mutuality' between master and servant. It is, on the contrary, an attempt to transcend the symbolic economy of fetishism which denies what is absent and by that token affirms it.

A telling instance of the novel's allegorical rendering of conflated modes of production may be found in the treatment of the Carabao Kid, a figure as legendary as the grandfather who invented the yo-yo. The section describing Rocky's encounter with the Carabao Kid is a recollection that occurs after the birth of Venus, Rocky's child. The Carabao Kid serves here as the character that links the first generation of Filipino farmworkers, the Manongs (whom Carlos Bulosan wrote about *in America is in the Heart* [1948]), and the post-1965 influx of professionals. He was then considered the "unofficial spiritual leader" of the Filippino arts movement in San Francisco whose emblem was the water buffalo.

Even though the Carabao Kid was leading civil rights demonstrations and rallies against the Vietnam War, he was still a migrant worker (he dies before the start of a shrimping expedition in Louisiana); his residence, Watsonville, evokes the anti-Filipino riots of the thirties. Rocky asserts at the end that she doesn't need him anymore –for her, he symbolizes the mawkish sentimentalism, humility, and need to suffer that affiicts the Filipino sensibility– so that the snapshot of the community at the end of Part Two turns out to be the sacrifice of the father at the altar of the preOedipal mother. We confront here the petty-bourgeois Filipino of the sixties and seventies (still mired in the barbarity of Cold War anticommunism) using a pretext for dissociating themselves from the working-class struggles of Bulosan, Chris Mensalvas, and Philip Vera Cruz. Hagedorn's tribute to this generation is instructive as a gesture of solidarity and of demarcation:

> Ah, the Carabao Kid and what he taught us. How to be a F(P)ilipino. Voltaire's idealized father figure. And mine too, I suppose. He was this Pinoy poet from Watsonville with the sleepy, wise face of a water buffalo, a man totally obsessed with the Philippines who'd never been there. In hushed tones, he'd describe the fiery sunsets, swaying coconut trees, and white sand beaches, sounding like some romantic tourist brochure. Kinda ironic and laughable, except the Kid thought it was funny too. "Oh yeah, sister, I forgot –I've never been there". America was here: vast, inhospitable, and harsh. The Philippines was there: distant, lush, soulful, and sexy. He made constant jokes out of what he called his "carabao dreaming" and wrote a series of self-deprecating haikus called "Existential Pinoy Paralysis", questioning his fears about returning to the homeland. "Maybe I just don't want to be disappointed", went one of the more quotable lines of his poem "Maybe". Another ditty was called "Expat vs. Exile". The fact that Voltaire and I had actually been born in the Philippines had earned us his lasting admiration. (199)

This portrait explodes the model of postcolonial 'sly civility' as one based on a fabric of fetishes, half-truths, and fraudulent mystifications. The dreaming carabao cannot distance itself from the illusion that the Philippines and the United States are on equal footing, autonomous, geopolitically independent from each other. References to the colonial situation abound (one example is the scene with the Puerto Rican taxi driver Eduardo Zuniga). The sections entitled "Lost in Translation" seem like satiric spoofs on the postcolonial idea of translation as a way of negotiating the distance between oppressed and oppressor, a gap acerbically brought home by the "Joke Not So Lost in Translation": "Why did the Filipino cross the road? Because he thought America was on the other side" (70).

One hypothesis may be introduced here. The enunciation of apparent similarities and affinities as deceptive may be Hagedorn's warning that postcolonial erasure of conflict may be a disservice to people of color, not praise for their adaptive resourcefulness. Crossing the 'road' from the Philippines to the United

States is an act of cognitive mapping of present-day neocolonialism, also called globalization. For Hagedorn, the symbolic yo-yo enacts this orientation in terms of an easy compromise between exile and return: she visits the Philippines in 1992 to say goodbye to her father whose terminal cancer he has endured for at least 10 years. The yo-yo as "jungle weapon" also reaffirms a certain native ingenuity and resilience that distinguish his life under Western surveillance and *diktat*. This implicit nationalism, however, finds itself sublimated in the themes of youth revolt, the vicissitudes of the artist's education, and her endeavor to forge an identity outside of the ethnic/racial and class determinations of her origin.

The figure of Jimi Hendrix finally offers us the key to specify the project of this anti-postcolonial text –if one may so categorize it in its generic impulse. Hendrix (together with Janis Joplin and later Jim Morrison) may be construed as emblems for the rock festival of the sixties, the occasion providing the experience of community that the music expressed aesthetically. This experience is a renewal if not recreation of trust, of the sense of possibility, the harmony between public and private life, the sense of honesty and authenticity –what Filipino Cultural Night adumbrates via parody, excess, and commodification. Simon Frith comments on the value of this event for its audience: "Rock performance ... came to mean not pleasing an audience (pop style) nor representing it (folk style) but, rather, displaying desires and feelings rawly, as if to a lover or friend. The appeal ... of Jimi Hendrix rested on the sense that his apparently unihibited pursuit of pleasures was on show, for all of us to see and share" (66). Hendrix was one of the cult stars who proclaimed a utopia without struggle, founded on the immediacy of pleasure and solidarity. In this context, Rocky Rivera's band "The Gangster of Love" seeks to imitate that politics of aestheticism, though now informed with a somewhat cynical toughness and punk's psychedelic playfulness: "Congo today, money tomorrow" (245).

In "Our Music Lesson #I" in the First Part, Hendrix is worshipped as a historical charismatic figure. Rocky salutes him with "flames bursting out your skull. Salvation funky. Redemption funky". But here Rocky also confesses a certain distance. When Hendrix begs her to "Fuck me, then. Save my soul", Rocky retorts: "I know all about you. I was fourteen when you died, but I'm not stupid" (77). She would not –as she puts it– "suck King Kong's dick" to get to him. In "Our Music Lesson #2", Hendrix's ironic pathos is "appropriated and dissolved in 'Filipino blood'", so that his "LSD-laced, corny cosmi-comic mythology" becomes indigenized, so to speak. For Hagedorn's generation, Hendrix represents the young martyr dying young, the doomed outsider who performs the ritual sacrifice to propitiate the gods of order. After Hendrix's death (at which point Hagedorn's narration begins), Todd Gitlin observes the decline of youth counterculture into the monadic narcissism of John Lenon: "Woodstock Nation's symbols peeled away from their Aquarian meanings and became banal with popularity" (429). In a sense, Hagedorn's novel is one long elegy to the demise of rock-culture's internationalism as a strategy for overthrowing U.S./Western imperial hegemony over the oppressed and exploited masses of the planet.

After fifteen years, Rocky Rivera dismantles her band and bids farewell to the illusions of the sixties. "We F(P)ilipinos can imitate, but this audience [in Zamboanga, a city in the southern Philippines] prefers the real thing" (245). Considered "postmodern, postcolonial punks", Rocky's band has to flee the irate natives, "condemned to exile as second-rate, Western imperialist, so-called artists", seeking refuge in the "safety of Motown memory" (246). Deprived of that ersatz community, Rocky Rivera, now a mother, recuperates the memory of her mother's life before her move to the United States –a labor of unfolding the genealogy of her deracination so as to derive meaning from that process. It is an act of constituting experience that is coeval with the narrative (for Hagedorn's reflection on the substance of his experience, see Aguilar-San Juan 1994).

When she returns to the Philippines, Rocky Rivera is no longer just an isolated individual. She becomes a collective presence, holding in a composite and synthesizing trope the dispersed and fragmented lives of generations of Filipinos whose chief claim to distinction is (to paraphrase the Carabao Kid) their unrelenting pursuit of happiness and their equally inexhaustible capacity to suffer. We are already beyond the postcolonial economy of complicity and guilt, of narcissism and paranoia, of Manichean dualism and the metaphysics of difference and ambivalent identity that Hagedorn syncopated in the adventures of her group, "The Gangster of Love". There is no nostalgia for the return of an idyllic and innocent past. There is no easy route to Arcadia or a remote classless utopia. We are in the zone of accounting for difference as a symptom of unequal power relations between the hegemonic imperial center and the colonized periphery, this time transcoded into the decline of patriarchal authority (emblematized here by the dying Francisco Rivera) and the anticipated empowerment of the "mothers". This eventuality takes place in the "weak links" of uneven development, precisely where the layers of temporalities do not coincide, where ruptures and breaks and discontinuities persist in reproducing conflicts that open up the space for grassroots intervention. This novel presents us with an allegory of how such a space can materialize in the interstices of alienation, displacement, and defeats. The carnival of the dispossessed and the conquered is just beginning.

In the introduction to her collection *Danger and Beauty*, Hagedorn outlines the genealogy of her vocation in the sixties, citing not only Hendrix but also George Jackson and Angela Davis aside from "water buffalo shamans" like Al Robles. She recalls their anxiety to celebrate "our individual histories, our rich and complicated ethnicities ... borders be damned" (ix). At about the time the socialist Salvador Allende was overthrown by the CIA-backed junta in Chile, Hagedorn marks a turning-point in her life: "The year 1973 is when I begin discovering myself as a Filipino-American writer. What does this newfound identity mean? The longing for what was precious and left behind in the Philippines begins to creep in and take over my work" (x). In the year when she formed her band "The West Coast Gangster Choir" and Ho Chi Minh finally drove the Americans out of IndoChina, she returned to the Philippines after an absence of many years. Apart from her musical experimentation, it was her journey back

home that inspired much of her later work. In the process, she believes her volatile voice "has hardened, become more dissonant and fierce". It was during the precipitous decline of the Marcos dictatorship, the 1986 February insurrection, and the return of the oligarchs and warlords in the Aquino regime that she composed this novel, her "love letter to my motherland: a fact and a fiction borne of rage, shame, pride ... and most certainly, desire" (xi). It is the politics of this ludic "desire", the "playful and deadly serious" trajectory of Hagedorn's performance, that I have tried to assay here, searching for clues to that permanent cultural revolution which Marx, Lenin, Emilio Jacinto, Edicio de la Torre, and Maria Lorena Barros spoke of beyond the vigil of Philipino Cultural Night and the elegic farewells of balikbayans and other peregrine exiles.

At the threshold of the 21st century, we confront the ruins of U.S. military bases, symbol of neocolonial occupation and imperial bankruptcy. We need to salvage from the consumerist holocaust our indigenous heritage of resistance, four hundred years of revolt against tyranny. In this emancipatory project to rebuilt the scaffolding of our cultural tradition, we can learn how to safeguard ourselves from the danger of reclamation by a strategy of retrospective mapping and anticipatory critique, twin objectives that are approximated, elaborated, and irresistibly acted out in Hagedorn's fabulations.

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Narrativizing United States-Phillipines 'Postcolonial' Relations: Gender, Identity Politics, Nation in the Novels of Jessica Hagedorn

Μετακινούμενη από μια μεταμοντερνιστική θέση αδιαφορίας για σημαντικές πολιτικές και ιδεολογικές αντιπαραθέσεις, η Φιλιππινο-Αμερικανίδα συγγραφέας Jessica Hagedorn εκπροσωπεί μια δυσάρεστη κατάσταση που βιώνουν και άλλοι διανοούμενοι οι οποίοι ανήκουν στις φυλετικές μειονότητες των Ηνωμένων Πολιτειών που προέρχονται από χώρες του 'τρίτου κόσμου'. Δεδομένης της νεο-αποικιακής εξάρτησης των Φιλιππίνων, τη χώρα καταγωγής της, και των μεταστροφών της κατά τη διάρκεια του Ψυχρού Πολέμου, η φαντασία της Hagedorn δεν μπορούσε να υπερβεί τα όρια της φιλελεύθερης φαντασίας: η μυθιστοριογραφία της επικεντρώνεται σε ατομικές αναζητήσεις ταυτότητας. Αλλά με την πίεση του ρατσισμού, της βίας ενάντια σε έγχρωμους και της πατριαρχικής καταπίεσης, το ύφος της και η αφηγηματική της στρατηγική υφίστανται μια απο-σύνθεση που σηματοδοτεί την μοναδικότητά τους. Αρχίζουν να καταγράφουν τα ιστορικά όρια της μεταμοντέρνας και μετα-αποικιακής ιδεολογίας που ηρωοποιεί τις ιδιόμορφες διαφορές πέρα και πάνω από κοινωνικές τάξεις, φυλές και φύλα. Το μυθιστόρημά της *The Gangster of Love (Ο Συμμορίτης του Έρωτα)* μπορεί να διαβαστεί ως μια εθνική αλληγορία της ευαισθησίας των Φιλιππινέζων που επηρεάζεται από το χώρο της ιμπεριαλιστικής υποδούλωσης, της φυλετικής υποτέλειας και της σεξιστικής καταπίεσης. Το έργο της μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ότι αντιπροσωπεύει την κόψη της αντι-'μετα-αποικιακής' γραφής στους όψιμους καπιταλιστικούς σχηματισμούς όπως οι Ηνωμένες Πολιτείες.