

Gender, Language, and Identity in *Dog eaters*: A Postcolonial Critique

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Gender Oppression and Postcoloniality

Jessica Hagedorn's 1990 novel is set in postcolonial Philippines, during the years of nation building and martial law under President Ferdinand Marcos, who ruled Philippines from 1965 to 1986. Nationalism, as it appears in the revisionary history of *Dog eaters*, continues the oppression of colonialism by remolding the binary paradigm on which the colonial conquests were based. If the imperialist patriarchy justified its colonizing endeavors by presenting the conquered as the different, savage, inferior and exotic other, nationalism involves a concerted attempt at the recovery of the manhood lost in colonization, projecting woman as the other, to be gazed at, tamed, conquered, and enjoyed. Nation building in postcolonial Philippines becomes a search for recovering a lost masculinity for the indigenous men of power. Hagedorn's feminism opens up a site in the text for a succinct critique of the anti-woman tendencies inhering in nationalism. The patriarchal, forked imaging of the woman as the virgin or the whore is replicated in some of the novel's women-characters. The female figures in Filipino postcolonial society portrayed by Hagedorn embody the "patriarchal contradictions [and] bring together the dichotomized icons of idealized femininity and degraded whoredom, of feminine plenitude and feminine lack" (Chang 639-40). Zenaida, "Mother of a whore" and "a whore of a mother" (Hagedorn, *Dog eaters* 205) is a disembodied "deviant, impure femininity" (Chang 640), appearing in the background haze of the novel, a ghostly figure trampled by patriarchy.

If, as Carol Hanisch points out, "the personal is political," and if the sexual relations between men and women carry a political implication, then the disarray in the power equations of the genders, within and outside the institution of marriage in *Dog eaters*, points to a much larger national malaise. The "woman question," foregrounded in the novel, is germane to a postcolonial text, since the dialectic of the sexes involves another variant of the same hegemonic mythology (positing one group as superior to another) that underlies colonial expansions. Women, as a sub-culture, always removed from the reigning paradigm of patriarchy (thrice colonized in the process of history, first by the patriarchy within and then by the colonizers from without and then again by the nation-builders), become the special focus of Hagedorn's postcolonial perspective. That

Hagedorn chose to have about a dozen stories in the text with women as central characters shows her investment in this issue.

As patriarchy is engaged in the task of remolding its machismo identity after the emasculating assault of colonialism, women become further removed from the political process itself. The only way that women can feel an illusion of power is by collusion with patriarchy, as in the case of the General's wife, the first lady in the novel, the Iron butterfly. As Juliana Chang notes, "female figures like the first lady and the talk-show host Cora Camacho create and embody spectacle in the service of the state" (642), ideal figures in the eyes of a patriarchal state, seeking and getting patriarchal approbation. The first lady in the novel, based on Imelda Marcos, the wife of former president Ferdinand Marcos, interprets women's willingness to participate in beauty contests as a gesture of nationalist spirit and in effect colludes in the replacement of the "imperialist gaze" with the "nationalist gaze." The attempt to push women into beauty contests and making this participation a signal of patriotism depletes women of their subject positions by turning them into objects of gaze. Transformed into sexual locations where masculinity is tested and authenticated, women, as *Dogeaters* demonstrates, are encouraged, in the name of nationalism, to become objects. The gaze, as Ann Kaplan suggests, is a hierarchical act, empowering the agent and emaciating the object: while "look" is "a process, a relation" (xvi), gaze "connotes an active subject versus a passive object" (22), essentially disempowering the person gazed at. The beauty contests are sites of this power play that authenticate male power and deplete women's agency.

"The stickiness of female consent for male violences" (Lee 98), perceived in the first lady's endorsement of beauty pageants, is also seen in the self-mortifying, ascetic Leonor Ledesma who atones for the murders and acts of cold-blooded brutality committed by her husband, the General, and in a sense absolves him and sets him free of compunction to continue his spree of violence:

Upstairs, the General's wife tosses and turns on her spartan bed, a regulation army cot she once asked her husband to send over from one of the barracks. The General found her request perfectly understandable, in light of her devotion to an austere, forbidding God and her earnest struggles to earn sainthood through denial. (67)

In her ascetic penance that is tantamount to tacit consent, Leonor functions as an enabler and is guilty of complicity with her brutal husband. In a masculine state where violence and brutality are normalized, how does a woman negotiate her life and come to peace with her conscience? Leonor's austerity is not merely a survival strategy; her religion provides the sacrificial fire in which the General finds purgation for his repeated acts of violence. In contrast, Daisy Avila is certainly not a consenting female. Her opposition to male brutality takes the form of violence. As Leonor immerses herself in ritualistic stoicism, Daisy picks up the tool of patriarchal violence to fight this very same type of violence. Rejecting the beauty halo, much to the first lady's chagrin, on a nationally broadcast talk

show Daisy denounces beauty contests “as a giant step backward for all women” (109). The fact that Daisy becomes Aurora, that the beauty transforms into a rebel fighting the nation builders, indicates the intensity of Hagedorn’s fierce feminism. As Aurora marches into the streets with grenades hidden in her dress, she manifests a feminist challenge to the heavily male-centered nationalist politics. By choosing violence as her tool, she levels the political playing field.

However, the gang rape of Daisy/Aurora shows that politics is still an unequal field. Central to the feminist politics of the novel, Aurora’s violation by the nation builders functions as a trope for the defilement and dehumanization of the othering process with which imperialist ideology rationalized its rape of other lands and women. Aurora’s rape at the hands of the Filipino national leaders makes a statement about the warped power structure in postcolonial Philippines; it suggests that instead of setting right the wrongs let loose by the colonizing patriarchs, the national patriarchy continues the colonization of women by desecrating the female body and by degrading women to mere bodies. The gang rape, a collective male act of violation of the female body, is “performed” literally in the text, to the background voice-overs from the favorite radio show of the Filipinos. As one man rapes Daisy, others witness it. This performative display of violence on the female body, carried out by the country’s power-wielders contains, besides its pornographic import, the ominous implication that it will be told and retold as a moral tale to threaten women into submission and subjugation. Susan Brownmiller’s claim that both the possibility and actuality of rape are political tools perpetuating “male dominion over women by force” (209) is very much to the point here.

The disruption of the body politic, set in motion by colonization and perpetuated in the neocolonialist endeavors of the nationalists, is thus inscribed in the text as an invasion, a specular violence, and a diseased eruption of the body erotic. The violence of the colonizer, as the text depicts, is perpetuated in the ways in which women are treated in a postcolonial regime. Postcolonial critic Ania Loomba rightly notes that the imagining of a nation “is profoundly gendered” and that “[n]ational fantasies, be they colonial, anti-colonial or postcolonial also lay upon the connections between women, land or nations” (215). Daisy’s invaded body carries all the burden of her country’s historical nightmare, just as Baby Alacran’s body breaks into undiagnosable eruptions mirroring the distortions occurring in a country and its culture. The daughter of an influential, highly placed businessman in the Philippines – a “wheel-dealer, ruthless and ambitious” (20) – Baby Alacran, it appears, bears the burden of her father’s callousness and hypocrisy. The relationship between the female body and the body politic is made clear in the words of the Alacrans’ family doctor, Dr. Katigbak, who conflates Baby Alacran’s bodily mishaps with the land’s malformations: “Think of your daughter’s body as a landscape, a tropical jungle whose moistness breeds fungus, like moss on trees” (29).

If Daisy Avila and Baby Alacran enact the explosive violence of neocolonial, nationalist patriarchy, Lola Narcisa embodies what the reigning ideology has suppressed. Described by Rio, one of the narrators, as unseen and silent, Lola Narcisa, Rio's Asian grandmother, typifies what Gayatri Spivak refers to as the subaltern who cannot speak and who is "deeply in shadow" (2203). Hagedorn enacts her silence and invisibility in the limited textual space that she assigns to her. However, in a brilliant postcolonial gesture, Hagedorn gives substance to the shadow and gives her a voice. Transforming a Hollywood movie sequence from *A Place in the Sun* into an ironic retelling in the imagination of Rio (making way for a teasing *mise-en-abyme*: for isn't the entire text a product of the writer's imagination?), Rio imagines "Lola Narcisa bending over my grandfather's bed like Jane [Wyman], an angel of mercy whispering so softly in his ear that none of us can make out what she is saying" (16). The silent woman is given a strong voice as she "screams," "DON'T TOUCH HIM" (16-17). Ultimately, it is the reader who is "stunned that the shriveled brown woman has so loudly and finally spoken" (17). Indeed, Hagedorn makes the subaltern speak in Rio's fantasy.

Like Lola Narcisa and Daisy Avila, Lolita Luna, the film actress, is another woman in the text caught in a nexus of suppression, ownership, and violence. Her life, reduced to mere sexuality by her two lovers—an Englishman with "colonial obsessions" (170) and General Ledesma, the postcolonial military leader—dramatizes the predicament of women in colonial and postcolonial societies. Lolita Luna's body encodes the national body, trapped by two forms of patriarchal power: colonialism and nationalism. Like her country, she is objectified, commodified and exoticized and is brought totally under control. The ironic title of the chapter, "Movie Star" (170), depicts the contrast between her glamorous façade and the reality of her defilement. This is rendered poignant by the suggested association that very often the colonized other, nation and woman, was an object of exoticizing gaze while being subjected to colonial rule. That Lolita Luna's life is at the mercy of the ruling men, as the nation's existence is, is depicted in the anxiety she expresses over her possible death by "accident" (174). The theme of migration central to postcolonial literature surfaces in her desire to buy "her own ticket out of the country" (177).

Language, Structure, and Counter-Discourse

The migrant yearnings in the novel testify to the feeling of homelessness characteristic of the postcolonial condition. An expatriate writer herself, Hagedorn writes her novel with a double vision afforded by the hybrid nature of postcoloniality. However, the reality of her expatriation to America and the fact of her writing in English, some critics argue, testify to the writer's collusion with the colonizer. They suggest that, instead of functioning as an oppositional text, the novel subscribes to the canon, aiming to please the western world: "Conflating heresy and orthodoxy,

Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* possesses the qualities of a canonical text in the making—for the multiculturalists" (5), says San Juan Jr. In a similar vein, D'Alpuget notes that the language variations in the novel become "exotic" and that "[t]he exoticisms become tiresome, more a nervous tic than a desire to make a connection across the gulf of culture" (38). The assumption behind such criticism seems to be that Hagedorn's required goal is to bridge the gulf of culture by putting Philippines on a platter for the west. However, as Gladys Nubla points out, the novel works in a "transnational space, apart from both national abstractions" (201) and is linked to the marginalized multitudes erased or merely glossed over in these abstractions. Rio, much like Hagedorn, is negotiating two worlds in her search for identity, and the schizophrenia of the postcolonial condition becomes clear in the clash of worlds and the combining of idioms. Rather than identifying with one nation's citizenry or the other in absolute terms, as Melinda L. De Jesus notes, the novel uses the figure of the "mestizo," an important modality in Filipino fiction, to "discuss aspects of identity formation and liminality" (226). Victor Mendoza's insight that the novel "offers the possibility of assembling political associations . . . not according to Philippine nationalist terms but according to something altogether exterior to the discourse of the nation-state" (816) is precise. What we get in the novel is a "third space," not traceable to two originary contexts, but "which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha, "The Third Space" 211). One could say that identity, as portrayed by Hagedorn, cuts through bicultural politics and is liminal and substantiates the claim that the "project of decolonization is carried forth in the postcolonial site but may equally be deployed by immigrant and diasporic populations" (Lowe 108). Expatriate writers like Hagedorn carry the postcolonial site into the empire's mainland.

As an exile living in the United States, speaking, reclaiming, and refiguring self's and nation's histories in the English language, Hagedorn raises the issue of colonial mimicry. The colonial subject's mimicry, as we know from Bhabha, "is at once resemblance and menace" (*Location* 86), whereby the reappropriated language becomes a rebellious tool. Bhabha suggests that the colonized native, on whom the impact of the British or any other colonial enculturation makes an indelible mark, uses English but repeats it with a difference. This colonial mimicry bordering on mockery – of which Hagedorn's writing in English is a superb example – becomes a hybrid site. The nativizing differences and the lexical interpolations that compose the peppered style of *Dogeaters* destabilize the homogenous standard English of colonial discourse and become simultaneously "resemblance and menace."

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* perceptively note that English "was made . . . central to the cultural enterprise of Empire" (3). Critics like Viswanathan concur with the observation that English played a big role in inducing "compliance in native subjects" (93). Hence, a postcolonial writer who uses English to re-present his/her reality is engaged, according to Boehmer, in the process of "cleaving from, moving

away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonialist discourse; and in order to effect this, cleaving to: borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic and textual forms of the colonial power” (106-07). This hybrid cleaving results in an anti-colonial mimicry that deals “syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange . . . ‘identity’ and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power” (Bhabha, *Location* 120). Salman Rushdie, another example of the artist as émigré, states his ambivalence regarding the use of English:

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves . . . To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (17)

Hagedorn’s use of English is a hybrid site of creative transformation and appropriation of the language. English as used by Hagedorn becomes unintelligible at times to a western reader due to the Filipino infusions into the language. However, the title of the novel, *Dog eaters*, is an Americanism, a depreciatory term used by the colonists to refer to the Filipinos. Hagedorn follows up this title with a series of diverse, poignant stories that expose the narrowness of the titular label. Also, hybridizing the English language, and breaking the rules of linear narration and semantic purity inhering in colonial narratives, Hagedorn transforms English into something other than itself. Opting for complexity and obscurity in style and deprioritizing clarity, Hagedorn refuses to be a colonial subject. For, as Trinh Minh-Ha observes, “Clarity [in style] is a means of subjection . . .” (16).

“I set out to write on my own terms and in the English I reclaim as postcolonial Filipino,” Hagedorn states in her introduction to *Danger and Beauty* (xi). Splitting open the closure of standard American English by ruptures and indeterminacies brought in by traces of *tagalog* (the vernacular), *tsismis* (local gossip), radio shows and nonsensical vocabulary, Hagedorn’s postcolonial English breathes the very hybridity and confused complexity of the characters whose tales it tells. According to Helena Grice, Hagedorn “blends feminist and/or historical writing with experimental modes of narration, which are themselves sources of creative and oppositional energy” (181). Vital to the experimental style of *Dog eaters* is “gossip,” which is an “antifiguration of narrative” (Lowe 101). Both Lowe and Mendoza observe that official history comes from the unitary standpoint of the state (Lowe 113, Mendoza 1); gossip feeding on official history erases the binary of legitimacy/illegitimacy (Lowe 113). *Tsismis*/gossip is a stylistic tool that contests the unitary history of hierarchical depictions. As Patricia Meyer Spacks contends, “Female gossip . . . functions as a mode of feeling . . . of undermining public rigidities and asserting integrity, of discovering of means of agency for

women” (170). In the novel, *tsismis* or gossip primarily emanates from Rio, Pucho, and their circle, and is mostly confined to women. As Pucho says, *tsismis* is “the center of our lives” (166). One woman tells another, “sit down let’s make *tsismis*” (55). Sarita See’s observation that “*Dogeaters* deprioritizes any monumental notion of history by deferring instead to gossip—*tsismis*—as a centripetal, destabilizing structure for the novel” (47) is very much to the point here.

Besides providing stable, unitary narratives of history, colonialism also had Christian proselytization at the center of its expansionist enterprise. Contesting the colonial legacy of religion by deliberately committing blasphemy, Hagedorn makes brilliant use of Filipino English to disrupt the Lord’s Prayer in the final *kundiman*, or prayer (*Dogeaters* 250-51). Hagedorn’s *kundiman* reenacts the quintessential postcolonial situation of Caliban throwing the language of his conqueror, Prospero, back at him through his acquired gift of the English curse. Sacrilegious mimicry becomes a tool of protest and self-affirmation. In the *kundiman*, Hagedorn fulfills Trinh Minh-Ha’s prerequisite for a postcolonial native-woman-writer: that she who “works at unlearning the dominant language of ‘civilized’ missionaries also has to learn how to un-write and write anew” (148).

“I would curse you in Warray, Ilocano, Tagalog, Spanish, English, Portuguese and Mandarin: I would curse you but I chose to love you instead. Amor, amas, amatis, amant, give us this day our daily bread” (250), Hagedorn asserts in the *kundiman*, which is a prayer to Mary. In a sublime subversion of the Lord’s prayer, nation and woman become one as Mary is described as “defiled, belittled, and diminished” (250). An array of violent images—death, blood, daggers, arrows, slingshots, grenades, despair, longing, ignited flesh, exploded flesh (251)—add up to conjure the epistemic violence to which the nation has been subjected. The prayer trails to a close with “forgive us our sins, but not theirs” (251), the ambiguous “theirs” perhaps alluding not only to the destroyers of a culture, the colonists, but also to their latter-day *avatars*, the nationalists.

Bhabha’s observation that “[b]lasphe my is not simply a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular” but “is a moment when the subject matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation” (*Location* 225) is crystallized in the *kundiman*. A translated English prayer, a love song, a blasphemous curse all rolled into one, the *kundiman* subverts religion and language, two colonial bequests, in one fell swoop. The language of the colonizer (a metonym for the educational rationale put forward for colonial enterprises) and colonial religion (missionary work was invoked for justifying colonialism) are reappropriated as native assets in this superb subversion.

The voice of the prayer is ambiguous. In one of her interviews, Hagedorn talks about the rage and love in the prayer and then suggests the voice could be hers:

There's a lot of brutality in *Dogeaters*, and I think that especially with the suffering that the character Daisy goes through and the loss of the senator and all the other people who die or are tortured, and just the daily suffering of the poor there, which is enormous, the Philippines is still a beautiful country and I wanted somehow to convey that. So I decided originally that the Kundiman section was going to be the grandmother's prayer . . . But I thought, No, I want to even lift it above a specific character's voice, and maybe it's my voice that speaks at the end.

Undeniably, it is a woman's voice.

If the *kundiman* is a quintessential female postcolonial text, the four epigraphs from Jean Mallat, the nineteenth-century historian of the Philippines, constitute a quintessential colonial text. Official history, which presumes its own omniscience of the conquered other, is seen most explicitly in Mallat, whose words Hagedorn prefaces to her own scrambled, fictional and idiosyncratic visions of history. In contrast to Hagedorn's narrative, there is a solid certainty in Mallat's record of the Filipinos. The confident and condescending tone with which he characterizes a whole group of native others seems to arise out of what Said refers to as the culturally hegemonic "idea of Europe" that posits "European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (7). Mallat's colonial text defines the Filipinos as a monolithic entity, a seamless culture of sleeping natives without conscience. This epigraph condenses the binary paradigms (nature/culture, instinct/reason, and emotion/reason) operative in colonial ideology. Mallat's book also shows the direction of the imperialist, historical argument that the natives were unchristian savages who needed to be reformed by the missionary work of the Europeans. The authoritative and homogenizing voice of this colonial text is set in contrast with the contrapuntal, plural retelling of Hagedorn's varied histories. The juxtapositions of official histories with local gossip and blasphemous retellings show the artist as a political provocateur. As Marie-Therese Sulit notes, *Dogeaters* "questions the systems of dominance that structure the Philippines, defining them in masculine ways that her characters redefine with the infusion of the feminine, a strategy that moves the sacred imagery of Catholics into more secular, albeit perhaps blasphemous space" (146).

Identity and the New Nation

Hagedorn's aesthetic choice to incorporate colonial texts (Mallat, McKinley's address etc.) in her fiction marks *Dogeaters* as a definitive postcolonial tale attempting to retell history (and *herstory*). In the end, however, the text subverts its own pretense to finality of meaning when Pucho unwrites/rewrites Rio's version of *herstory*. By making Pucho refer to the entire text as the work of a "crazy imagination" (249) and by making her proclaim, "Rio, you've got it all wrong" (248), Hagedorn gives a new spin to the already ambiguous text, hinting that there could be other versions to the story that she has narrated painstakingly, if scatteringly, thus far; and that Rio, Hagedorn's alter ego perhaps, can at

best present an incomplete and questionable version of an elusive truth and at worst tell an “intelektwal” (248) lie. Pucho, Rio’s resisting reader, problematizes what the text intends to represent. Her resistance is the text’s courageous confrontation with its own incompleteness. It points to the textuality and constructed nature of all narratives—canonical, colonial histories included—and to the constructed nature of our identities. It certainly points to “pure Filipino identity” as a myth.

Rio, the female protagonist from whom we hear much of the narration, shows Filipino subjectivity as evolving out of a complex relationship with a colonizing culture. San Juan notes that “most Filipinos have been so profoundly ‘Americanized’ that the claim of an autonomous and distinctive identity sounds like a plea bargaining after summary conviction” (5). Identity, for a postcolonial state, is hybridity, “a contingent, borderline experience [that] opens up *in-between* colonizer and colonized” (Bhabha, *Location* 206). As Rio Gonzaga—one of the two central narrators in the novel—and, through her, Hagedorn, look back and attempt to reconstruct themselves and their nation, the book itself embodies a postcolonial quest and enacts what Timothy Brennan refers to as a “national yearning for form” (44) that would be inclusive of the broken fragments of different identity formations. Senator Avila, portrayed as a major political player in the novel, expresses the crisis endemic to postcolonial self-definitions. According to him, the Filipinos are “a complex nation of cynics, descendants of warring tribes which were baptized and colonized to death by Spaniards and Americans, . . . a nation betrayed and then united only by our hunger for glamour and our Hollywood dreams” (101). San Juan’s remarks are to the point:

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 *Amerikanos*) . . . (6)

The “blurring of Filipino and American identities” in the nation, as Rachel Lee points out, “has a genealogical corollary in the ancestral backgrounds of the novel’s first person narrators, Rio Gonzaga and Joey Sands” (75).

Rio’s narration dwells on the colonial remnants embedded in her family roots. Her father “believes in dual citizenships, dual passports, as many allegiances to as many countries as possible at any one given time” (7) and considers himself a guest in the Philippines, though, as his wife points out, his family has lived here for generations—“a *mestizo*, but a Filipino” (8). In contrast, Rio’s “Rita Hayworth mother,” who carries American papers because of her father, “feels more viscerally connected to the Philippines” (8). Pucha Gonzaga, Rio’s cousin, idolizes Hollywood stars. Pucha’s elder brother’s dream is “to see Elizabeth Taylor naked” (15). The exile-native-narrator, Rio herself, traces her family roots through Hollywood iconography, reimagining and reconstructing her genealogy (16). Lola Narcisa, Rio’s Asian grandmother, is allied to America by her

marriage to a Midwest American. Thus the postcolonial residue in the Filipino psyche, as Lee observes, “renders questions of purity and authenticity unresolvable” (167).

Rio’s grandfather moaning for “Chicago” on his deathbed in an American hospital in Manila (16) draws attention as much to his American origins as to the general American presence on Filipino soil. Suffering from *bangungot*, he acquires the dubious honor of being the first white man to be afflicted by this native ailment, though the American doctor dismisses “the tropical melody as native superstition, a figment of the overwrought Filipino imagination” (14). His wife, Lola Narcisa, Rio’s “gray-eyed grandmother,” is “brown-skinned” (7) and their marriage, at one level, symbolizes the uneasy and complex alliance of the east and west wrought by colonization. Lola Narcisa is, as Rio depicts her, a colonized subject in her own home. Described as “invisible,” and as “some tiny woman who happens to be visiting” (9), she lives in a “guest room next to the kitchen” (9) and eats with the servants. In this postcolonial family, the dark-skinned, native-identified grandmother “is not asked to sit at our dinner table” (9). Listening to the radio show *Love Letters* with her servants, Narcisa becomes part of the “lowest common denominator” (11). In this familial reproduction of postcolonial politics, Hagedorn shows the neocolonial tendencies in an upper-class family in the Philippines. Rio’s psychic alliance with her grandmother and the appreciation for *Love Letters* that she shares with her ancestor mark her out to be one of the “*bakya* [low] crowd” (11), and Rio’s present life in America could, perhaps, define her as an elitist, colonial agent/mimic. Rio herself is a confused postcolonial product and this “schizophrenic cultural response” (De Jesus 226) is Hagedorn’s center.

The layered nature of postcolonial Philippine identity, glimpsed in Rio, is exemplified most tellingly in the roots of the novel’s other narrator, Joey Sands. The son of a Black American military man stationed in the Philippines and born to “a legendary whore” (42), Joey emblemizes the fluidity and instability of the Philippine national identity itself. The fact that he is gay further emphasizes this instability, and through his parentage the military presence of a colonial power is brought surreptitiously into the novel, validating the claim that the “textual submergence of the militia’s presence mimics the subdued infiltration of the islands by an American neocolonial presence” (Lee 76).

If Rio and Joey are fictional characters embodying the nature of postcolonial identity, historical characters are fictionalized to show the impact of colonization on a nation trying to build itself. In a telling narration, Hagedorn blurs history and fiction by making Joey witness a historic event: the assassination of opposition leader Senator Avila, stand-in for Benigno Aquino who was killed on August 21, 1983. The personal sagas of the characters tumbling into Philippine history enact the transfusion of histories into the body of the fictional narrative, mongrelizing, molding, and misshaping it. Joey plays a crucial role in Hagedorn’s defiance of generic adherence, a defiance that undercuts

hegemonic-dualistic paradigms and aligns the writer's postcolonial politics with postmodern aesthetics; as Linda Hutcheon notes, a primary feature of the postmodern novel is that "the borders between literary genres . . . become fluid" (250). Refusing to settle into generic stability, the text staggers in the slippery zones of "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 245). The melding fiction and history contests univocalist pretences to truth by showing that it is not always the nature of history to be true and that of fiction to be false. Hagedorn's mixing of historical facts with imaginary events not only transgresses generic boundaries that demarcate history and its connotative privilege of truth from fiction, but also challenges the assumption of factuality that underlies canonical histories, including nationalist discourses. Joey Sands, the gay narrator in the tale, is a strategically significant tool in Hagedorn's transgressive art. "Sexual and State politics are intimately entangled in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* (1990) not only in the maintenance of state, nationalist and neocolonial systems of power but also and especially in their transgression or perversion," observes Victor Mendoza (815) and Joey, the queer subject who subverts, eludes, and evades authority, the possessor of an important state secret, and the fugitive who refuses to yield, makes a mockery of state power.

The fact that violence is a feature of postcolonial Philippines, as it was in many nations recuperating after colonization, is made explicit in Senator Avila's assassination. *Dog eaters* mixes history and fiction, and presents Aquino/Avila's assassination, symptom of a nation's malaise, through the eyes of a marginalized, unrecognized citizen-historian, fictional Joey Sands. By making Joey, the outsider (an outsider by class, race, profession and sexual preference), witness and narrate the political leader's death, and by linking his survival to a historic event on whose outcome a postcolonial nation's destiny is tied, Hagedorn coalesces the personal fate of individuals and the larger destiny of a nation, both beset by deadly threats to their existence. Simply to stay alive, as country and as individual, is a challenge now. Joey Sands is thus a representative not only of the plural, scattered, mongrel, unstable psyche of a postcolonial people, but also of a nation coming to grips with the violence unleashed after years of foreign occupation.

Hagedorn does not portray postcolonial, plural Philippines as a monolith, nor glorify its plurality. There is no calm after the storm here. The nation is revealed with its fissures and wounds gaping. As Hagedorn observes elsewhere, "What is literature for? . . . You don't go to literature and say I need to feel good about my race, so let me read a novel" (qtd. in Lee 167). However, the text's major story lines, most of which relate to women, churn out a critique of purity and homogeneity, generously embracing the impure, the perverse, and the off beat in a spirit of historic generosity.

In *Dog eaters*, Hagedorn as a postcolonial writer sets out to explore the problems of identity for a nation and its inhabitants, especially its marginalized inhabitants. This political-aesthetic task is complicated by

the fact that she lives in America and writes in English and also by the hybrid character of her native nation in which Americanness and colonizing attitudes – the text is too complex to make one a synonym for the other – have come to stay. What she reclaims of and for her nation and its people are, perhaps, only imagined fragments of a broken nation. Rushdie’s remark that postcolonial writers in exile “will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we [postcolonial, expatriate writers] will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands . . . of the mind” (10) captures the spirit of Hagedorn’s endeavor. The fragmented, dream-like narration of *Dogeaters* portrays the psychic landscape of a conquered land, staggering under nationalism and surviving the weight of a colonial past. Dealing with what Rushdie calls “broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (10-11), Hagedorn dramatizes the fragmentation of a postcolonial society in a diasporic narrative that exposes the horrors of colonialism and neocolonial nationalism as constituting one long, hegemonic continuum.

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