**Towards a Philippine Transnation: Dreaming a Philippines in Ninotchka Rosca’s *State of War***

The history of nations is often imagined as a story, a narrative. We imagine a progression in time and speak of racial beginnings, or genealogies of heroes, and myths of founding fathers… The narrative enables us to make sense of our collective passage in time, and pampers us with a sense of progressing, a moving forward in time. Yet, it is also a form that carries with it a particular tyranny, its mystifications and exclusions, predisposing us to determinate ways of framing our subject, of breaking up experience into semantic units so we can read the past in ways that make intelligible who we are and why we are where we are. (Mojares 270)

In the Philippines, an archipelago of more than seven thousand and one hundred islands, the exclusive, tyrannical nature of national history becomes all too readily apparent. Colonized by Spain for more than three hundred years, then sold to America to become its territory for another half century, the Philippines and its history are plagued with silences, gaps, and contradictions. Just consider that the very words “Philippines,” “Filipino,” and “Filipina” themselves are xenonyms: they are signifiers that have been imposed on peoples and their land by a foreign entity. What is more, they are signifiers whose signified needed to be invented first. Initially, Spanish explorers baptized only a subgroup of islands “Las Islas Filipinas” to honour King Philip II. But the name was soon extended to the entire region, so that in the end the multiverse of the archipelago, its diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultures, were meshed together into a single, unifying denomination that commemorated a far-off king (Joaquin 148). In a remarkable way the problematic nature of Philippine history is thus encapsulated in the word “Philippines,” for the word itself bears the traces of a foreign sovereign imprinting his claims on a distant land and people—a country for which an identity and culture had to be reinvented, but whose inhabitants were excluded from this act of reinvention. Inventing the Philippines meant for the Spanish empire to create new subjects, but it also meant, more by accident, the creation of new subjectivities, of new subject positions, and thus of new spaces for resistance. Finally, the creation of the signifier “the Philippines” invited the creation of a new history: Philippine history.

The story of the Philippines therefore is, unsurprisingly, punctuated by moments of resistance. In the course of this article we take a closer look at one of these moments by examining Ninotchka Rosca’s *State of War*. This novel, the first major publication of the feminist activist Rosca, continues the tradition of resistance-through-alternative-history-writing, which the great Filipino writer Jose Rizal had initiated. In this article we investigate how Rosca problematizes in *State of War* the national history of the Philippines, particularly how she resists a simplified, homogenized interpretation of Philippine history and culture. The publication date of Rosca’s novel is significant in this respect, since *State of War*, published in 1988, came out just two years after the Marcos regime was overthrown by the People Power Revolution. Unquestionably, the more than two decade-long dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos represents the single most haunting source of inspiration for contemporary Filipino writers. The time of Martial Law, declared by Marcos in 1972 after a series of civil disturbances, left such a traumatic mark on the peoples of the Philippines because it gave the Marcos regime the legal basis to restrict press freedom and other civil rights, and to detain and torture the politicians, activists, and writers of the opposition. Families were considered lucky if they ever got a body back, or at least saw photographs of mangled bodies; most families, until this day, have not seen hide nor hair of their loved ones. For those who survived, some were silenced, some went underground, or like Rosca, forced into exile abroad. After the lifting of Martial Law in 1981, there was a deluge of novels—eighteen of the forty-one novels published between 1981–1992 (Pison)—that grappled with the traumatic legacy of this period. Rosca’s *State of War* represents a remarkable example of these Martial Law novels, for it attempts to make sense not only of this traumatic episode, but of the problematic nature of Philippine history in general.

*State of War* is a thinly veiled fictionalization of the brutalities of life under the Marcos dictatorship. As the title suggests, the novel is set against the backdrop of the Philippine nation in a state of war. It begins innocuously, with the three protagonists wanting to visit the popular “Festival of K------,” and ends tragically, with the detonation of a bomb on the festival site, planted by rebels to kill the “Commander,” Rosca’s fictional rendition of Marcos. Rosca thus anchors her narrative in the chaotic climate of the Martial Law period, which finds more than symbolic representation in the tumult of the festival. The novel is presented in three sections, all of which have biblical titles: “The Book of Acts,” “The Book of Numbers,” and “The Book of Revelations.” It revolves around three protagonists, Anna Villaverde, the tortured and revengeful widow of a political dissident, Adrian Banyaga, the spoiled son of a wealthy landowner, and Eliza Hansen, the cunning mistress of a high ranking military official—all three trying to lose and find themselves in the chaos of the festival, figuratively as well as literally. In line with the novel’s religious undercurrent, the three protagonists form a sort of trinitarian unity, each of them personifying a different aspect of Philippine culture and history, while the three together can be viewed as an emblematic representation of the heterogeneous totality that lies behind the signifier “the Philippines.” Couched between the first and the last section of the book, which are set at the festival, the central section represents an imaginative retelling of various events in Philippine history; it takes the form of a collective flashback, during which the narrative traces the genealogy of the novel’s three main characters through the interconnected stories of their mutual ancestors.

Fundamental to Rosca’s novel is the idea that the current state of war is the net result of the complex, heterogeneous nature of Philippine identity. As Rocío G. Davis has observed, the thematic centre of the book is formed by the “Filipinos’ elusive, problematic, palimpsestic identity as a people and as a nation” (65). The Philippines’s conflict-and-war-ridden history is literally inscribed into the skin of the two female protagonists, as becomes apparent in the novel’s opening pages, where Anna and Eliza are introduced via Adrian’s point of view:

Were it not for their color, the two women could have been twins. But where Eliza was of that rare fortuitous sienna skin, accidentally bred by a mingling of Caucasian and Malay blood, Anna was of a golden tint that testified to an indefinable mixing of Chinese, Malay, and other strange bloods. A true child of the archipelago. (12)

The diverse and complex tapestry which constitutes Philippine history, and in which the encounters and conflicts of native, Malay, Chinese, and Spanish people are tightly interwoven, thus finds reflection in the skin colour of the two female protagonists. Corresponding to the two ways in which Rosca’s novel approaches the social, cultural, and historical heterogeneity of the Philippine nation, our analysis will concentrate on two major points: firstly we will examine, with recourse to Bakthin’s concept of the carnival and Ashcroft’s concept of the transnation, how Rosca uses the festival as a microcosm in which she can showcase the heterogeneous constituency of the Philippines. Secondly we will discuss the importance of memory and remembering, particularly for the imaginative history through which Rosca re-traces the genealogy of her three main characters, and in the course of which the complexities of the signifier “Philippines” are unravelled.

**The Festival of the Ati-Atihan as Carnival**

It is probably beyond dispute that Rosca’s cryptic “Festival of K-----” refers to the Ati-Atihan festival, which is held annually in the small coastal town of Kalibo in Aklan Province, Panay (Pison 35). Although the origin of the Ati-Atihan dates back to the thirteenth century when a group of Malay chieftains arrived on the island of Panay, the actual Ati-Atihan of today has lost much of its local character and resembles in many ways the modern Western carnival of the Mardi Gras. In an illuminating article William Peterson has traced back this “Mardi-Gras-ization” to the beginning of the Martial Law period, when the Ati-Atihan was deliberately remodelled after the Mardi Gras and other successful tourist attractions such as the Brazilian carnival. Peterson subsequently emphasizes that the Ati-Atihan does not celebrate “a happy history of peaceful coexistence” (519) of local and foreign influences; on an ethnographic level, it rather pays tribute to the century-long subjugation of the Philippines’ different cultures by dominant political powers.

In fact, the Ati-Atihan is best understood as a palimpsest in which conflicting ideological layers overlap and converge. From its original significance as a celebration of local history, the Ati-Atihan experienced its first major reinterpretation under the influence of Spanish Catholicism when Christian iconography was mapped onto its indigenous symbols and rituals. Shaped by the influences of modern consumerism, it then eventually turned into a tourist attraction. During this eight-century-long cultural and ideological transformation, the festival has acquired a variety of new elements and meanings. By virtue of these multiple inscriptions, the palimpsest of the Ati-Atihan represents almost a cross section through the numerous layers of Philippine history, and thus preserves an insightful slice of it. In this way, the Ati-Atihan provides a microscopic glimpse into the numerous cracks and fractures that traverse the cultural identity of the Philippines.

In her novel Rosca capitalizes on this mnemonic function of the Ati-Atihan. She consistently describes her rendition of the Ati-Atihan as a “festival of memories” and a “festival of commemoration.” Yet her fictional festival is far from a harmonious and peaceful celebration of cultural memory. For one thing, Rosca again and again evokes the image of a chaotic maze of intoxicated people, of a shifting and shoving, amorphous horde: “The town plaza was a riot of confusion with walls of bodies” (20). Her “Festival of K-----” is peopled by an unruly, motley crowd, in which individuals, accompanied by the steady beat of tribal drums, lose themselves among parading transvestites, painted warriors in g-strings, and dwarfs in miniature cardboard tanks. This multifarious crowd oscillates between excessively hedonic consumption, covert political activism, and Catholic Masses, in which “all who wished for the sacrament received it: warriors and urbanites, transvestites, the malformed, the soldiers, the children” (361). The Ati-Atihan thus becomes the site on which a peculiar state of war manifests itself. As the back of the novel’s jacket states, the festival itself “is but a metaphor for an entire society and culture in conflict.” However, the festival represents not just a symbolic arena in which religion, indigenous tradition, and consumerism are vying for cultural dominance; it moreover represents an actual battleground, on which the political struggle of the Martial Law period is fought out – as the constant presence of armed soldiers and disguised rebels makes all too clear.

It is crucial to recognize that this is not just an insignificant competition for the festival’s meaning, because what is really being negotiated here is nothing less than Philippine identity itself. Amidst the ideological conflicts of local and foreign influences and against the background of the unruly, transgressive crowd of the festival, individuals seek to assert their own subjectivity. As Myra Mendible describes it, while the people thus attempt to claim and maintain their forms of identity, they turn the site of the festival into a stage on which the heterogeneity of the Philippines’ cultural heritage is dramatized:

Spanish Catholicism and indigenous religions claim their authority through rituals and ceremonies; the rhythms of tribal drums and American pop music assert pre-colonial and neocolonial influences; and street spectacles showcase cultural icons and symbols. During festival, the people occupy, disrupt and claim public spaces, asserting their right to perform and display an identity. (“Literature as Activism” 359)

During this performance of cultural struggle on the site of the Ati-Atihan, the conflicting histories and divided memories that are bundled together within the problematic signifier of the “Philippines” become disentangled.

As a consequence, Rosca’s Ati-Atihan displays much of the subversive potential which Mikhail Bakhtin ascribes to carnival (Pison; Mendible “Politics and Poetics”). Bakhtin, the great theorizer of carnival, has argued that carnival celebrates the “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10). Precisely this spirit of liberation, this temporal suspension of social hierarchy defines Rosca’s Ati-Atihan, in which the normal social order with its assigned social positions of gender, ethnicity, class, age, etc., has been levelled out. However, while this flattening of the social hierarchy creates a certain spirit of egalitarianism, it does not bind the tumultuous multitude to a harmonious unity. On the contrary, within the “shifting” and “relentless mass of bodies” (15) of Rosca’s festival the plurality of Philippine culture bursts forth with all its force: “One morning, seven thousand and one hundred islands awoke with an ominous roar and the Festival began” (21). Rosca continuously employs this image of archipelagic diversity, of the “past, present, and future, and the seven thousand and one hundred islands of a fractured history” (339), to convey the extent of the Philippines’ cultural and historical heterogeneity. The Philippine nation thus materializes in the Ati-Atihan, the “festival confused by time and history” (156), as a multitude in which not only social hierarchies, but also official historical and cultural discourses are suspended.

As Bakhtin emphasizes, the event of carnival distinctly separates itself from official routines and hegemonic ideologies. It creates a time and space fundamentally opposed to officialdom. In its medieval forms, Bakhtin explains, the practices of carnival “were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (5-6). The same applies to the “Festival of K-----,” which provides precisely such a “second life outside officialdom:” subject positions that are excluded from the official conception of national identity can thrive in the parallel world of the festival. Within the dramatic space of Rosca’s Ati-Atihan, subjectivities and discourses that were marginalized, if not suppressed and displaced during the Martial Law period, move to the centre of the stage. As a consequence of this dramatization of the heterogeneity of Philippine history and identity, Rosca’s festival foregrounds an issue that is crucial to most post-colonial societies: the problematic nature of a homogeneous and unifying national identity.

But as Mendible has already noted, the subversive, revolutionary dimension of the Ati-Atihan is seriously challenged by the fact that it represents a transgression authorized by the state (“Literature as Activism” 361). In Rosca’s novel, this becomes thematized at the governor’s dinner party, where an affluent elite discusses how the Ati-Atihan could be turned into a “true cash economy for the island:” the governor proposes to turn the festival into a commodified tourist attraction that lasts all year, instead of “this annual bash which [drives] the people crazy” (Rosca 37; Mendible, “Literature as Activism” 361). However, even though the Ati-Atihan may be initiated and endorsed by official state structures, the actual event of the festival transgresses and exceeds these official boundaries as soon as it begins; while this may not apply so much to the real, present-day version of the Ati-Atihan, it is certainly true of Rosca’s fictional “Festival of K-----.” Throughout Rosca’s Ati-Atihan, the tension between official permission and anarchic subversion is always present. Eliza directly experiences it: “Eliza, watching the boiling at the back of the crowd, wondered what kept them from spilling over, from filling up that emptiness. Tradition, habit, fear? She didn’t know. She knew though it needed but one person to cross that divide, to violate the sanctity of authority, for all of them to be in the middle of hell” (342). Finally, the transgressive, revolutionary dimension of Rosca’s festival becomes evident in the rebels’—albeit ultimately failed—attempt to kill the Commander, Rosca’s fictional Marcos: as their bomb blows up the stage from which the Commander was supposed to address the people, the rebels literally clear the festival site of the official structures of state ideology. N. V. M. Gonzales and Oscar V. Campomanes are therefore right to describe Rosca’s festival as a “carnivalesque fiesta / revolution” (91).

Given this focus on ideological resistance and cultural diversity, Rosca’s rendition of the Ati-Atihan invites explication in terms of the concept of the Transnation. As Bill Ashcroft explains, the Transnation is constituted by “the exorbitant proliferation of actual subject positions within the state” (“Australian Transnation” 19). The Transnation—although located within the nation state—represents the surplus that exceeds the political, social, and cultural boundaries of the nation. It must not be confused with concepts such as “internationalism” and “cosmopolitanism,” and is even unrelated to the adjective “transnational,” which rather signifies a relationship between nation states. Instead, as Ashcroft puts it, the Transnation is “the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation” (“Transnation” 73). Rosca’s fictional portrayal of the Ati-Atihan appears to capture precisely such a proliferation of subject positions beyond an essentializing national identity. While it showcases the heterogeneous constitution of Philippine society, Rosca’s Ati-Atihan provides a stage on which the Philippine Transnation can find expression. The carnival of the Ati-Atihan provides, to borrow again Ashcroft’s words, a space for “the possibility of ordinary people avoiding, dodging, circumventing the inevitable claims of the state upon them” (“Transnation and Utopia” 13). It is in this way that we should read Rosca’s Ati-Atihan as a protest against the tendency to nationalize Philippine history, to reduce the complex, archipelagic culture of the Philippines into a single, hegemonic identity.

However, it seems that the representation of the Philippine Transnation in the carnivalesque form of the Ati-Atihan leads to a very unstable state. As Eliza’s observation above confirms, the festival’s “shifting mass of bodies” is approaching a critical mass, about to break out at any moment. The Philippine Transnation, just as the title says, is in a constant “state of war,” and this internal conflict inevitably surfaces in the Transnation’s expression in the Ati-Atihan. Unable to contain this pressure, the counter-site of the festival eventually collapses, and its contestation of authority turns into violent conflict:

Turned out the whole fucking place was a nest of insurgents – every single resident. It was funny. Transvestites whipping out sawed-off shotguns from under their skirts; half-naked warriors … Lord, those spears were real! I was half laughing all the time. Shooting and laughing. (370)

As we mentioned earlier, the heterogeneity that lies at the core of Filipino identity is not only enacted on the stage of the Ati-Atihan. It is literally embodied in the “Trinity,” the novel’s three protagonists. And just as the carnival of the Ati-Atihan is caught up in the chaos caused by the “state of war”, so are the main characters. In fact, even their family histories seem to be in an ongoing struggle, in a “state of war.” As becomes apparent in the novel’s second section, the “Book of Numbers,” the family trees of Rosca’s protagonists do not consist of smooth and continuous blood lines that give rise to straightforward positions of the kind that allow simple binary oppositions between victim and aggressor. Instead, they rather grow together into one rhizomatic network of relationships, in which the lines between colonized and colonizer become increasingly difficult to draw. The Philippine Transnation—that inclusive expansion which transcends any form of essentialized national identity, and, in effect, constitutes the indeterminable signified of the signifier “Philippines”—thus comes to be reflected in the novel’s characters and their genealogies, too. Let us therefore now turn from Rosca’s dramatization of Filipino identity via the Ati-Atihan to her problematization of Philippine history through the refraction of her main character’s memories.

**Recuperation of the Fragments of Philippine History**

Resil Mojares reminds us that “How we remember tells us about how important a past event is, and in what way, and about the present we occupy and the selves we are” (291). Rosca’s presentation of events in “The Book of Numbers” reveals her intention to highlight the importance of memory in reimagining the Philippines’ present, past, and future. She deploys the narrative strategy of the flashback, specifically the “collective” flashback, in her retelling of the lives of the ancestors of Anna, Adrian, and Eliza. We argue that it is in the course of this collective flashback that Rosca, weaving together her protagonists’ personal histories with fragments of Philippine history, gradually untangles the distorted memories of the Philippines, and in doing so unravels the historical dimensions of the Philippine Transnation.

The lives of the three main characters collide at the end of the novel’s first section, “The Book of Acts.” Adrian’s drug-induced state and the two women’s musing on how anyone could forget trigger the retelling of their ancestry in the section that follows, “The Book of Numbers,” in which, out of the ashes of these memories, emerges a much clearer picture of the protagonists’ complex connections. All the while the Christian concept of the holy trinity underpins the interrelations of Rosca’s three main characters, whose individual states of war are especially exacerbated during “the festival of memories:” Anna’s connection to a rebel known as Guevarra places her in an active role in the plot against the commander; Adrian’s relationship with his grandfather makes him an unwitting accomplice in the so-called revolution that his grandfather is financing; and Eliza’s devotion to Anna motivates her to put an end to the life of Colonel Amor—who is ironically also the character who puts into motion Anna and Adrian’s first meeting. All these events take place without the others knowing of their respective involvement. But their individual and deceptively separate states of war all lead back to a collective state of war, at the forefront of which is Anna Villaverde. It is from within this rhizomatic network of individual, personal battles that Rosca’s vision of the Philippine Transnation gradually emerges. As will become apparent later, this finds full realization in the novel’s very last paragraph.

When at the beginning of the novel Adrian tags Anna as “a true child of the archipelago” (12), he foreshadows her pivotal role, which far exceeds that of Eliza, Adrian, or the rest of the characters. Anna, as a true child of the archipelago, provides Adrian and Eliza with a glimpse of the archipelago’s complicated past. Adrian was initially described as a man who “never worries,” but his encounter with Anna awakens something deeper, something “transcendental” (27), in him. At the mere touch of Anna’s hands, a storehouse of memories is opened in Adrian. Adrian, in this moment of falling in love with Anna, realizes that he is not only able “to remember” the stories his grandfather told him about the pre-colonial times; but even those memories only a person from the past, who was alive in the past, could remember. It is not only Adrian who falls in love with Anna, but Eliza as well: “I am able to love only one person. Always and constantly, from the day we discovered we were to share a room at the college dormitory” (43). This act of falling in love is symbolically synonymous with the act of imagining their past; to love is to imagine that past. Anna embodies this past and becomes the vessel of the nation’s forgotten memories. When Adrian and Eliza love Anna they are, in effect, also imagining the past. We return to this notion of imagining the past in the discussion on dreaming.

Anna is initially presented as a simple yet mysterious character. In her short married life to Manolo, she desperately tries to keep it as trouble free as possible, by weaving “a story…for herself [with a] simple narrative—one which could not be found in her history books with their tales of epic battles and complex colonization” (62). Anna wants a simple, quiet existence. Prior to Manolo’s escape to the mountains, he tells her: “My Anna. My quiet Anna.” Anna, as the quiet woman, signifies silenced, forgotten memory. Ironically, it is Anna’s silence that draws both Eliza and Adrian to her. They are drawn to her, they fall in love with her, imagining the past that she represents.

After Manolo’s disappearance, Anna is taken into custody. This not only opens the possibility for a reunion with Eliza and Anna’s subsequent introduction to Adrian; it also enables Anna to meet Guevarra. Anna, post-festival implosion, learns from Guevarra’s tapes the story of how her father’s unconditional act of kindness saved Guevarra, “which [also] enabled them to survive, which in turn allowed the archipelago to keep on dreaming its history” (380-81). The use of the verb “dreaming” instead of “remembering” suggests that the rewriting of history does not result in a mere remembering or retelling of past events; it gives rise to a new story. Dreaming as opposed to remembering points to a renegotiation of meaning in the rewriting of Philippine national history. This is precisely what “The Book of Numbers” does: it dreams the past of the Trinity in relation to the nation’s own past. What is further suggested here is that despite the nation’s past, present, and even future state(s) of war, and despite its forgotten memories, the nation constantly reimagines itself and its history. This sort of dreaming undermines the solid ideological foundation of the nation state, because it challenges the ideological master discourse of History. What is more, its protean nature reflects the shifting, fluid space of the Transnation. As Ashcroft emphasizes, the Transnation’s dissolution of the nation state’s spatial boundaries parallels the dissolution of the “boundary between past and future through acts of memory” (“Transnation” 83-4).

Although the concept of dreaming as storytelling acts as a ground bass running through Rosca’s entire novel, it comes most clearly to the fore in its second section, “The Book of Numbers.” The collective flashback that unfolds in this section begins with the image of Anna and Adrian making love. The rest of the chapter traces the lives of their ancestors, and starts with the Capuchin Monk’s dalliances with several native women, including Anna’s great-grandmother Maya and a fourteen year old virgin, who would become Adrian’s great-great-grandmother. In the “The Book of Numbers,” the narrative repeatedly returns to the idea of forgetting and remembering. During Maya’s first city excursion, she ponders about the unnoticed changes in her former town. Maya’s observation about how people cannot seem to remember past landmarks is echoed by her husband, Carlos Lucas, who years later also walked the same path. The repetition of this observation from both Maya’s and Carlos Lucas’ point of view again highlights the notion of people missing fragments in their history. Maya adds:

It was a kind of sin, certainly, to forget—but it was not easy to remember, especially when names changed, languages changed. A century-old name held that century; when replaced, a hundred years were wiped out at one stroke. Amnesia set in; reality itself, being metamorphic, was affected. (186)

This observation reflects the failure of the people to notice changes because they remember so little of what was there, of what they had. That is why it is so easy for “things to happen without [the people] knowing” (233); people have a hard time connecting their present to a past that does not seem to exist because they cannot remember any of it. The passage suggests that “amnesia” is not only due to the people’s forgetfulness; rather, amnesia is a product of the presence of the colonial forces that prevent the people from remembering.

The very nature of this forgetfulness, of the repetitive nature of this “sin,” echoes Milan Kundera’s concept of “the struggle of memory against forgetting,” not only by the characters in the past, but by the Trinity themselves. “The Book of Numbers” ends with Anna emerging from her “forgotten” (327) existence in the basement of her aunt’s house. Her first words were: “Everything in this country happens in the morning. … Because we are a country of beginnings” (328). Rosca’s recurring images of forgetting and remembering in “The Book of Numbers” underscore the almost inescapable nature of colonial forgetfulness, but as we indicated earlier, she also points to a more powerful kind of remembering in the form of dreaming. In closing her novel, Rosca echoes another biblical concept, that of the word becoming flesh, in this case the dreaming of a new story made possible through Anna and Adrian’s unborn son:

And she knew. Instantly. She was pregnant, the child was male, and he would be born here, with the *labuyo*—consort of mediums and priestesses—in attendance. He would be nurtured as much by her milk as by the archipelago’s legends—already, she was tucking Guevarra’s voice among other voices in her mind—and he would be the first of the Capuchin monk’s descendants to be born innocent, without fate…She knew all that instantly, with great certainty, just as she knew that her son would be a great storyteller, in the tradition of the children of priestesses. He would remember, his name being a history unto itself, for he would be known as Ismael Villaverde Banyaga. Time passes. (382)

**A Glimpse of the Philippine Transnation**

Rosca’s *State of War* closes with several deaths and one birth. In many ways, the ending responds to the fateful and often fatal encounters of the ancestors of Anna, Eliza, and Adrian, and thus resolves the complicated genealogical network behind the Trinity. Eliza’s death, for instance, fulfils the promise which her grandfather Chris Hansen had made to Anna’s grandmother: “he swore that if there were any chance at all, any opportunity, for him or his descendants to do something for Mayang and her family, it would be done at whatever cost” (208). The death of Manolo, Anna’s husband, likewise compensates for his father’s betrayal of Anna’s father: “Jake’s debt would be settled, if not on him then on his brood” (306). However, while the final chapter draws together the novel’s various narrative strands, it does not bring about a simple denouement. Instead, the bomb’s explosion on the festival site, resulting in Eliza’s death and Adrian’s withdrawal into melancholia after being severely handicapped, puts an abrupt end to the Trinity, and thus leaves a fissure in the novel’s narrative fabric.

Yet although the trinitarian dynamic that characterizes the relationship of Anna, Eliza, and Adrian appears now lost, it has left certain indelible traces. In the first place, the protagonists’ imaginative exploration of the nation’s past through their collective flashback has made a storehouse of memories available for Anna. But it is ultimately the revelation of Anna’s pregnancy in the final scene that casts a different light on the Ati-Atihan’s tragic ending, and opens up a broader perspective that reaches beyond the violent struggle of the festival.

In the wake of destruction and death that followed the festival, Anna’s unborn child signifies a new beginning. But this new beginning differs crucially from the recurring ones, which, as mentioned earlier, turn the Philippines into a “country of beginnings.” The beginning signified by Anna’s pregnancy does not continue this discontinuous history, this state of oblivion and disconnection to the past which Maya has so fittingly called amnesia; for Anna’s son is supposed to keep alive the memories of the Trinity, and indeed, of all his ancestors. Therefore, we might say that in Anna’s son the memories of the past will find resurrection and the Trinity itself will become incarnated again. Anna’s child marks the beginning of the Philippines as a country of “mournings,” as a country of remembering, because, as she claims, her son will “remember, his name being a history unto itself, for he would be known as Ismael Villaverde Banyaga” (382).

It should be noted that the conflicting nature of the word “Philippines” is taken up again in the name of Anna’s unborn son. Just as the signifier “Philippines” represented initially an empty, unknown signified, so does the name of Anna’s unborn son, for the child points towards a future to come, it delineates a not-yet realized potentiality. But more importantly, precisely the socio-cultural heterogeneity that is signified by the word “Philippines” finds concrete manifestation in the child’s name. Again in a trinitarian structure, it epitomizes the different historical and ideological constituents of the Philippine Transnation: the child’s last name, Banyaga, which is Tagalog for foreigner, signifies its alienation from, yet also its return to, its native heritage; the name Villaverde asserts the problematic colonial ancestry of the child, as it points back to the brutal Capuchin Monk who was Anna and Adrian’s mutual ancestor; finally, the name Ismael alludes not only to the Biblical wanderer but also to Guevarra, the guerrilla fighter who combated the Commander and who stands as an symbol of Philippine resistance (de Manuel 109-10). Thus personified in Anna’s unborn child, this rhizomatic network of relationships presents a clear example of how the Transnation circumvents and subverts the essentializing structures of the nation state.

All the conflict-laden historical memories that destabilize the signifier “Philippines”—the suffering and pain of the Spanish colonial period, the struggles of the neocolonial period, and the detachment from an indigenous origin—are incorporated into, and made present by, the name of Anna’s unborn son. As Anna says, his name will be a “history unto itself,” but a history unlike an exclusive, reductive national history; it is a history nurtured by the archipelago’s legends, and by the memories the Trinity unlocked in their collective flashback. In other words, it is the personal and open-ended history of storytelling, for Anna knows her son will be a “great storyteller” (Mendible “Politics and Poetics” 36). Moreover, past and present are not just commemorated in the name of Anna’s unborn son, they are remembered from a positive, forward-looking perspective. It is this utopian outlook that makes the (hi)story told by the child’s name overcome any form of national history, because, as Ashcroft reminds us, the transformative power of memory resides in its utopian, anticipatory dimension:

Memory is the smooth space that flows through and around the striated space of history, the space of the nation state and all structures of fixed identity. Ironically, memory, through the medium of literature, becomes the vehicle of potentiality rather than stasis. This is the potentiality of return, when the past adumbrates a future that transforms the present. This space of transformation, this space of literature, is the smooth space of the transnation. (“Transnation and Utopia” 28)

In the end, what could be called the religious undercurrent of Rosca’s novel resurfaces and finds fulfilment in the name of Anna’s child. The name, and the messianic promise it holds, sublates dialectically the heterogeneity of the Philippines—and dialectics must be understood here in a properly Hegelian sense, as a form of knowledge which, as Slavoj Žižek succinctly puts it, “finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity” (xxix). In other words, it is in the name of Anna’s child that the social, cultural and historical heterogeneity that characterizes the Philippines is taken up and represented without smoothing over or hiding its inherent differences and tensions. As such, the Philippine transnation finds a more stable representation in the child’s name than in the Ati-Atihan. We thus catch a glimpse of the Philippine Transnation without the violent collapse of the Ati-Atihan in the promise of Anna and Adrian’s child, which, by extension, becomes the promise of Rosca’s novel as a whole. But as the child is bound to an imagined future, this promise remains utopian in nature.

Indeed, if one looks at the current political situation in the Philippines, it can be gleaned that the nation’s state of war, which Rosca problematizes in her novel, continues to haunt the nation. Interestingly, this current “state of war” has come at a peculiar juncture in Philippine history. On the one hand, the victory of the 16th Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte, in the May 2016 elections suggests an upheaval in national politics. Duterte, who was the sitting mayor of Davao, a city in the southern island of Mindanao, is characterized as a political outsider in national politics, which is dominated by politicians based in the hegemonic capital of Manila. As a Visayan-speaking President, Duterte’s presence in the capital upsets the traditional discourse of nation and state as a unified identity, one that is shaped by Tagalog-speaking politicians. In fact, one of Duterte’s election “promises” included the country’s transition to a federal form of government, which emphasizes the notion of *multiple* states rather than one, of *multiple* Filipino identities rather than an artificially unified one. On the other hand, his sudden rise to power also marks the breaking of the last taboo regarding Marcos, that is, Duterte’s other election promise to allow the dictator’s burial in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Heroes Cemetery). So while Duterte may be seen by an overwhelming number of Filipinos as the *pag-asa ng bayan* (hope of the nation), his failure to recognize that the wounds inflicted by the Marcos regime on the nation’s psyche have yet to heal, this imagined future envisioned by Rosca’s novel continues to be just that, an *imagined* and *utopian* one.

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