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

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Abstract: This article explores how Filipina writer Ninotchka Rosca represents the complex, heterogeneous nature of Philippine identity in her novel *State of War*. Colonized by Spain for more than three hundred years and then sold to the United States to become its territory for another half century, the Philippines represents an intriguing tapestry of culture and history that tightly interweaves multiple ideological strands. Analyzing it with recourse to Bill Ashcroft's concept of the Transnation, this article demonstrates how Rosca's novel unravels this web of ideological relationships and showcases the heterogeneity of the Philippines. It argues that in the novel, the carnival of the Ati-Atihan serves Rosca as an allegorical representation of the Philippine Transnation. But since Rosca's Ati-Atihan collapses and dissolves in violence, it is ultimately in the smooth space of memory that she finds a second, more stable allegory for the cultural heterogeneity of the Philippine Transnation.

Keywords: postcolonial, Philippines, Transnation, Ninotchka Rosca, Filipino novel, carnivalesque, memory

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.
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> Resil Mojares, *Waiting for Mariang Makiling: Essays in Philippine Cultural History* 270

In the Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7100 islands, the exclusive, tyrannical nature of national history is all too readily apparent. Because the country was colonized by Spain for more than three hundred years and then became an American territory for another half century, its history is plagued with silences, gaps, and contradictions. Just consider that the words "Philippines," "Filipino," and "Filipina" 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 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 the place's history is thus encapsulated in the word "Philippines," which bears the traces of a foreign sovereign imprinting his claims on a distant land and people—a country whose identity and culture were reinvented but whose inhabitants were excluded from this act of reinvention. Inventing the Philippines for the Spanish empire meant creating new subjects, but it resulted in 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.

Unsurprisingly, the story of the Philippines is punctuated by moments of resistance. In 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 by the feminist activist, continues the tradition of resistance through alternative history writing, which the great

Filipino writer Jose Rizal initiated. In this article we investigate how Rosca's *State of War* problematizes the national history of the Philippines and particularly how it resists a simplified, homogenized interpretation of Philippine history and culture. The novel was published in 1988, just two years after Ferdinand Marcos' regime was overthrown by the People Power Revolution. Unquestionably, Marcos' dictatorship of over two decades 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 of those killed by the regime were considered lucky if they got a body back or at least saw photographs of a mangled one; to this day, most families have seen neither hide nor hair of their loved ones. Of those who survived, some were silenced, some went underground, and some, like Rosca, were forced into exile abroad. After the lifting of Martial Law in 1981, a deluge of novels—eighteen of the forty-one published between 1981 and 1992 (Pison, *Alternative Histories* 17; 183–86)—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 heterogeneity of Philippine history.

Rosca's novel 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, which had been 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 symbolic representation in the tumult of the festival. The novel's three sections have biblical titles: "The Book of Acts," "The Book of Numbers," and "The Book of Revelations." The story revolves around three protagonists: Anna Villaverde, the tortured and vengeful 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 trinitarian unity, each of them personifying a different aspect of Philippine culture and history, while the three together are emblematic of the heterogeneous totality that lies behind the signifier "Philippines." Couched between the first and the last section of the book, which are set at the festival, the central section is an imaginative retelling of various events in Philippine history; it takes the form of a collective flashback, a section of the narrative that traces the genealogy of the novel's three main characters through the interconnected stories of their mutual ancestors.

Rosca's novel claims that the current state of war is the net result of the complex, heterogeneous nature of Philippine identity. As Rocío G. Davis observes, 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' conflict- and war-ridden history is inscribed into the skin of the two female protagonists, Anna and Eliza, who 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 skin colour of the two female protagonists reflects the complex tapestry of Philippine history, in which the encounters and conflicts of native, Malay, Chinese, and Spanish people are tightly interwoven. 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: first, we will examine, with recourse to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and Bill 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. Second, we will discuss the importance of memory and remembering,

particularly for the flashback through which Rosca traces the genealogy of her three main characters and unravels the complexities of the signifier "Philippines."

I. The Festival of the Ati-Atihan as Carnival

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, "Ati-Atihan as Narrative Structure" 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 in many ways resembles the modern Western Mardi Gras carnival. In an illuminating article, William Peterson traces 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 emphasizes that the Ati-Atihan does not celebrate "a happy history of peaceful coexistence" between local and foreign influences (519): it pays tribute to the century-long subjugation of the Philippines' different cultures by dominant political powers.

The Ati-Atihan is best understood as a palimpsest in which conflicting ideological traces overlay each other and converge. Originally a celebration of local history, the Ati-Atihan experienced its first major reinterpretation when Spanish Catholicism mapped Christian iconography 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 acquired a variety of new elements and meanings. By virtue of these multiple inscriptions, the Ati-Atihan represents a cross section of the numerous layers of Philippine history. The festival provides a microscopic glimpse into the numerous cracks and fractures that traverse the cultural identity of the Philippines.

Rosca's novel capitalizes on the Ati-Atihan's mnemonic function. The book repeatedly describes its fictional rendition of the Ati-Atihan as a "festival of memories" (46) and a "[f]estival of commemoration" (337).

Yet the festival is far from a harmonious and peaceful celebration of cultural memory. For one thing, Rosca repeatedly 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 not only represents a symbolic arena in which religion, indigenous tradition, and consumerism vie for cultural dominance; it is 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.

In other words, the festival negotiates Philippine identity. 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 subjectivity. As Myra Mendible describes, while the people thus attempt to claim and maintain their forms of identity, they turn the site of the festival into a stage that dramatizes the heterogeneity of the Philippines' cultural heritage:

> 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)

This performance of cultural struggle on the site of the Ati-Atihan disentangles the conflicting histories and divided memories that are bundled together within the problematic signifier of the "Philippines."

As a consequence, Rosca's Ati-Atihan displays much of the subversive potential that Bakhtin ascribes to carnival.[1] Bakhtin argues that the 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). This spirit of liberation and the temporal suspension of social hierarchy define Rosca's Ati-Atihan, in which the normal social order with its assigned positions according to 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 into 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 crowd that suspends not only social hierarchies but also official historical and cultural discourses.

As Bakhtin emphasizes, the carnival 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—— subject positions that are excluded from the official conception of national identity can thrive in the parallel world of the festival. In the dramatic space of Rosca's Ati-Atihan, sub-

jectivities and discourses that were marginalized if not suppressed and displaced during the Martial Law period take centre stage. Because it dramatizes the heterogeneity of Philippine history and identity, Rosca's festival foregrounds an issue that is crucial to most postcolonial societies: a problematic insistence on a homogeneous and unified national identity.

However, as Mendible notes, the subversive, revolutionary dimension of the Ati-Atihan is seriously challenged by the fact that the state authorizes its transgression ("Literature as Activism" 361). At the governor's dinner party in Rosca's novel, an affluent elite discusses how the Festival of K—— could be turned into a "true cash economy for the island" (37). 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" (37). However, even though the Ati-Atihan may be initiated and endorsed by official state structures, 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 experiences it directly: "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). However, the transgressive, revolutionary dimension of Rosca's festival becomes most 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 clear the festival site of the official structures of state ideology. N. V. M. Gonzales and Oscar V. Campomanes rightly 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 Ashcroft explains, the Transnation is

characterized by "the exorbitant proliferation of actual subject positions within the state" ("*Australian*" 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 also unrelated to the adjective "transnational," which 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; emphasis in original). The Festival of K—— captures precisely such a proliferation of subject positions beyond an essentializing national identity. Just as it showcases the heterogeneous constitution of Philippine society, Rosca's Ati-Atihan provides a stage on which the Philippine Transnation finds expression. The carnival of the Ati-Atihan provides, to borrow Ashcroft's words, a space for "the possibility of ordinary people avoiding, dodging, circumventing the inevitable claims of the state upon them" ("Globalization" 13). In this way, we should read Rosca's Ati-Atihan as a protest against the tendency to nationalize Philippine history and reduce the complex, archipelagic culture of the Philippines into a single hegemonic identity.

However, 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" approaches a critical mass, about to break out into violence at any moment. The Philippine Transnation is in a constant "state of war," and this internal conflict inevitably surfaces during the Ati-Atihan. Unable to contain this pressure, 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 mentioned above, the heterogeneity that lies at the core of Filipino identity is not only enacted on the stage of the Ati-Atihan but it is also

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 engaged in an ongoing struggle. As becomes apparent in the novel's second section, the "Book of Numbers," the protagonists' family trees do not consist of smooth and continuous bloodlines that give rise to straightforward positions that would allow simple binary oppositions between victim and aggressor. Instead, they 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.

II. A Recuperation of the Fragments of Philippine History

We 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 characters' memories. Resil Mojares reminds us that "[h]ow 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). In "The Book of Numbers," Rosca reimagines the Philippines' present, past, and future. She deploys a collective flashback in her retelling of the lives of the ancestors of Anna, Adrian, and Eliza. We argue that it is in 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 abduction, where he is forcibly given a truth serum (121–25)—a reference to the interrogation tactics used by the Philippine Constabulary under Marcos—and the two women's musings on how anyone could forget their own language (143–49), trigger the retelling of their ancestry in the section that follows, "The Book of Numbers," in which, out of the ashes of these mem-

ories, a much clearer picture of the protagonists' complex connections emerge: 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 attempt to assassinate Colonel Amor, who, ironically, puts into motion Anna and Adrian's first meeting. All these events take place without the others knowing of their respective involvement. But their deceptively separate internal states of war all lead to a collective state of war, at the forefront of which is Anna Villaverde. It is from within this rhizomatic network of personal battles that Rosca's vision of the Philippine Transnation gradually emerges.

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 other characters. Anna provides Adrian and Eliza with a glimpse of the archipelago's complicated past. Adrian is initially described as a man who "never worries," but his encounter with Anna awakens something deeper, something "transcendental" (27), in him. The mere touch of Anna's hands opens a storehouse of memories in Adrian. Falling in love with Anna, he realizes that he is able "to remember" (31) not only the stories his grandfather told him about the pre-colonial times but even those memories only a person who was alive in the past could remember. Eliza has also fallen in love with Anna: "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). The novel equates falling in love with imagining their 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.

Anna is initially presented as a simple yet mysterious character. She desperately tries to keep her short married life to Manolo, an activist she met in college, 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" (65). Anna, as the quiet woman, signifies silenced, forgotten memory. Ironically, Anna's silence draws both Eliza and Adrian to her.

After Manolo's disappearance, Anna is taken into custody. This opens the possibility for a reunion with Eliza and Anna's subsequent introduction to Adrian and enables Anna to meet Guevarra. After the festival's explosion, Anna learns from Guevarra's tapes the story of how her father's unconditional act of kindness saved Guevarra and "enabled them [Anna and Gueverra] 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 of past events; it gives rise to an alternative 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 order to tell an alternative story about the nation's own past. 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, the protean nature of this dreaming 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" 83–84).

Although the motif of dreaming as storytelling runs through the entire novel, it comes most clearly to the fore in the second section, "The Book of Numbers." The collective flashback that unfolds in this section begins with an image of Anna and Adrian making love. The rest of the chapter traces the lives of their ancestors, starting 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. "The Book of Numbers" repeatedly returns to the idea of forgetting and remembering. During Maya's first excursion "outside the Binondo house after more than a decade of iso-

lation" (Rosca 179), she ponders the unnoticed changes in her former town. Maya's observation that people cannot seem to remember past landmarks is echoed by her husband, Carlos Lucas, who years later walks the same path. The repetition of this observation from both Maya and Carlos Lucas 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 Filipinos' failure 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 due not only to the people's forgetfulness; rather, amnesia is a product of the presence of the colonial forces that prevent Filipinos from remembering.

The repetitive nature of this forgetfulness, of this "sin," echoes Milan Kundera's concept of "the struggle of memory against forgetting" (3) by not only the characters in the past but also the characters of the Trinity. "The Book of Numbers" ends with Anna's emerging from her "forgotten" (327) existence in the basement of her aunt's house. Her first words are "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, while also pointing to a more powerful kind of remembering in the form of dreaming. The end of the novel 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)

The son remembers, but it seems to be a remembering that involves dreaming and encompasses legends and stories as well as history. The son appears as a cure to the amnesia that has afflicted the Philippines.

III. 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 her grandfather, Chris Hansen, had made to Anna's grandmother: "[H]e 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 present 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 Anna, Eliza, and Adrian's relationship is 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 to Anna.[2] But ultimately

the revelation of Anna's pregnancy in the final scene 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 follows the festival, Anna's unborn child signifies a new beginning. But this new beginning differs crucially from the previous ones, which turn the Philippines into a "country of beginnings." The beginning signified by Anna's pregnancy does not carry on this discontinuous history, this state of oblivion and disconnection to the past which Maya has so fittingly called amnesia; Anna's son will 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).

The conflicting nature of the word "Philippines" is taken up again in the name of Anna's unborn son. Just as the signifier "Philippines" initially represented an empty, unknown signified, so does the name of Anna's unborn son, for the child points toward a future to come, it delineates a not-yet realized potentiality. But more importantly, the socio-cultural heterogeneity that is signified by the word "Philippines" finds concrete manifestation in the child's name. 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 to the brutal Capuchin Monk who was Anna and Adrian's mutual ancestor; finally, as Manuel notes, 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 a symbol of Philippine resistance (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 homogenizing structures of the nation state.

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 disavowal of 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," though not 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 claims, 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. ("Globalization" 28)

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, dialectically sublates 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, the name of Anna's child represents the social, cultural, and historical heterogeneity that characterizes the Philippines without smoothing over or hiding its differences and tensions. As such, the Philippine Transnation finds a more

suitable 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. But as the child is bound to an imagined future, this promise remains utopian in nature.

Indeed, the current political situation of the Philippines as existing in a permanent 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 sixteenth 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 on the southern island of Mindanao, is considered a political outsider in national politics, which is dominated by politicians based in the 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 and 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 makes this imagined future envisioned by Rosca's novel just that—an imagined and utopian one.

Notes

1 Mendible also notes this affinity between Rosca's festival and Bakhtin's conception of carnival ("Politics and Poetics"); Pison further connects Rosca's *State of War* to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic text and highlights the subversiveness of the Ati-Atihan ("Ati-Atihan" 42–43).

2 This happens both figuratively and literally. Figuratively, this refers to Anna as the vessel of memories, which we explain in the essay. Also, when Anna is discovered by her Aunt Clarissa after years of neglect (Rosca 328–29), she finds family memorabilia and learns the family history (which makes up the Book of Numbers). Her first words are "It was morning when the Spanish long boats sailed from Cebu to Mactan" (328).

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