

HISTORICAL AMNESIA, COLONIAL TRAUMA, AND SELF-IMMOLATION IN NINOTCHKA ROSCA'S *STATE OF WAR*

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PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES in 1988, just two years after the restoration of democracy in the Philippines, Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War* confronts the political implications of state-sanctioned violence during the Marcos years by contextualizing it within the nation's colonial legacy. The novel examines the many ways in which historical amnesia has prevented the Filipino nation from understanding its present, and how the traumas of the past remain unresolved. This essay will look at how Rosca illustrates how the nation's refusal to meaningfully confront its past, which manifests itself as historical amnesia, has resulted in the nation's failure to remove itself from patterns of oppression inherited from its colonial rulers. It will also examine how historical memory, which appears in the novel in the form of myths and dreams, is utilized by the nation's citizenry to subvert the official narratives of history. As Hamish Dalley has asserted in his book *The Postcolonial Historical Novel*, "Postcolonialism is . . . a discourse of and about the writing of history in multiple forms" (4), and here I will look at how the novel engages with the multiple forms of telling, and remembering, history, constructing a counter-memory that rebels against historical amnesia. Myths and dreams give voice to silenced memories, becoming forms of alternative history that become part of the nation's language and make resistance, and healing, a possibility.

ANNA: THE REPOSITORY OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

The novel opens with these three friends traveling to the island of K— to participate in the largest and oldest Festival in the Philippines. Anna Villaverde is the widow of a political dissident who has herself become involved in the Communist resistance after her arrest and torture by the military; Eliza Hansen, her university roommate, is the mistress of a high-ranking military official, a powerful woman whom politicians and businessmen approach when seeking an audience with the Commander; and Adrian Banyaga is the spoiled scion of a wealthy real-estate mogul, whose name, “Banyaga”, means “foreigner” in Tagalog, implying the foreignness of the Filipino elite within the imagined Filipino community.

It is Anna who comes to occupy a pivotal role in the novel, being the primary link between her own family’s forgotten past (with their own attendant memories of trauma, both physical and spiritual) and the violence inflicted by the novel’s present-day dictatorship upon its citizens (which impinges upon her private space as she is interrogated by Colonel Amor and raped by his men).

As a student and teacher of history, Anna possesses a knowledge as well as a spiritual connection to the nation’s history, pulling Adrian and Eliza into her orbit as their initial encounters with her prove to be, as Adrian describes them, “transcendental” (343, 344). Adrian’s first physical encounter with Anna is compared to a spiritual encounter with history, in which history is made flesh.

[H]is hands automatically taking her hot, dry hands while his mind, for some strange reason, instantly dredged up from his storehouse of memories his grandfather’s tale of Magellan crossing a nameless sea in a still young world. He had seen, as he looked into her eyes, the sea; depths beyond depths, and the tiny ships and white sails of grace moving along the rim of time. Almost without knowing it, without being aware that he was doing so, he kissed her fingertips one by one, as he told himself that this was what it meant, that to love was to regain the capacity to remember a world without names, to recall by virtue of the whorl above the beloved’s knucklebones and the blue of the veins beneath the skin the

unbearable fragility of mornings in this country, to find October odors trapped in the skinfolds between her toes along with the scent of talcum powder and soap and human sweat (32).

As Arong and Hempel write: "Falling in love with Anna, he realizes that he is able to remember 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" (63). It is an encounter that is both wordless and complete, showing us that what happens between Anna and Adrian is not only a passing on of knowledge, but perhaps Adrian's awakening (with Anna's help) to his own knowledge of his nation's history that has lain dormant within him until his encounter with Anna. This immediate transference of, or rather awakening to, historical knowledge through this physical encounter presupposes the idea that even those who are indifferent to the nation's past are heirs to its physical memories, which, in Adrian's case, manifests itself as a moment of spiritual transcendence resulting from a sexual encounter.

Like Adrian, Eliza also falls in love with Anna when they meet at their university dormitory, and remains loyal to her friend for years afterwards: "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). For Arong and Hempel "[t]he 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" (63). Eliza recognizes that there is something special about her friend, being baffled, at first, by Anna's quiet stoicism after speaking with unemotional clarity about her father's life and death: "It took a long while before I understood. . . . You would think she was indifferent. She'd stand there like a statue, her face a mask—but behind that, her mind was raging, pacing, tearing through one thought or another, calculating desperately" (46).

Arong and Hempel argue that "Anna, as the quiet woman, signifies silenced, forgotten memory. Ironically, Anna's silence draws both Eliza and Adrian to her" (64). Anna embodies the nation's historical memory, whose silence serves as a defense mechanism against colonial and authoritarian violence. When captured by Colonel Amor, she refuses

to give away her secrets to him, even if his men torture and rape her, since he will inevitably twist and reshape her memories in an effort to gain control over her, and over the nation whose historical memories are also hers. In contrast, Anna passes on the memories that she possesses within her physical body when she makes love with Adrian, who receives the gift of Anna's unconscious knowledge in the form of dreams. Eliza's experience with Anna is similar: through their silent friendship, Eliza realizes that Anna is in possession of a special kind of knowledge, and that her friend, as a bearer of historical memory, must be protected at all costs.

THE FESTIVAL: EMBODIMENT OF THE NATION AS CHARACTER

The festival (probably modelled after the famous Ati-Atihan festival in Aklan, perhaps the oldest festival in the Philippines) serves to gather disparate characters from all over the Philippines within a single space, presenting for the novel's readers a microcosm of Philippine society. The festival becomes an all-accepting space in which foreign tourists dance with locals, where men don women's clothing without being mocked or ostracized, where the rich rub shoulders with the poor, and where Communist rebels move in and out of the crowd, incognito, while the state constantly reinforces its presence amidst such chaos by posting soldiers at every street corner.

It is the festival's subversion of social norms that allows its participants to gain access to an idea of the nation's past that eludes state control (Mendible, "Literature as Activism" 358). Although posters of the Commander and his wife are scattered throughout the island of K—, these images slip in and out of the narrative, leaving faint impressions at best, suggesting that the state's propaganda has somehow lost its hold upon the festival's participants. Conversely, gossip, conversation, and spectacle play huge roles in carrying forth to the novel's main characters an alternative version of history that the state seeks to suppress. In their re-enactments of rebellion, for instance, the peasants costumed as ancient warriors stage an allegory of resistance against the state, representing characters from the nation's distant past that could

stand in for the state's repressive rulers and those who oppose them. Their return to the island of K— to take part in this festival may as well represent a collective return to the nation's origins:

The Philippines, with its seven thousand one hundred islands, held an uncountable number of festivals throughout the year. . . . But such was the power of the ceremonies at K—, on the windward side of the island, that whenever festivals were mentioned, K— sprang readily to the mind. Perhaps because the Festival here was a singular evocation of victory in a country of too many defeats. Or perhaps because the first celebration went beyond the memory of the grandfather of the grandfather of the oldest grandfather at K, which made it no one's and yet everyone's personal history. Perhaps—. No matter. (13)

Their purpose in coming to the island of K— is to simultaneously lose themselves in the festival's crowd while reclaiming their lost selves, to which they gain access by surrendering their individuality to an interlinking, communal self (Nguyen 8). It is also through their meetings with certain characters in the festival that Anna, Eliza, and Adrian gain access to the nation's complex history, as well as the roles they play in its history and the ways in which they are related to one another.

DREAMS: VISIONS OF REALITY

As we find out later in the book, Anna and Eliza are cousins, while Anna's and Adrian's family lines can be traced to two native women who were raped by the same Capuchin monk on separate occasions. Coming to this festival, and confronting emissaries of the state such as Colonel Amor who seek to gain control over their knowledge of the past, awaken in them a sense of their shared past which return to them in the form of dreams. The shape-shifting, guerrilla-like nature of their dreams, whether presenting themselves in the form of hallucinations (for Adrian), shared dreaming (for Eliza and Anna), fables (which slip in and out of festival participants' conversations), or spectacle (in the case of the staged re-enactments in the festival streets), allow these dreams to elude attempts by the nation-state to control their telling. According to

Along and Hempel: “Dreaming as opposed to remembering points to a renegotiation of Philippine national history. . . . 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” (64).

What Colonel Amor seeks from Adrian, when injecting him with a truth serum, is a knowledge of the resistance movement that Anna may have shared with him, which Colonel Amor found himself unable to extract from Anna in his “Romance Room” in which his men repeatedly subjected Anna to torture and rape. While Adrian is able to access Anna’s knowledge despite her silence, by learning to commune, peacefully, with her silence, Colonel Amor sees Anna’s silence, when he first captures her, as a barrier to the truth that he must crack, and which he finds himself unable to breach, despite subjecting her to physical and spiritual rape—as Anna herself attests in the book, “It was exquisite rape, the colonel admitted... unlike his men, he preferred to fuck the soul” (67). His attempt to extract knowledge through torture and control is a parody of Adrian’s easy awakening to Anna’s knowledge (that takes place through a silent and loving communication).

TRAUMA AND AMNESIA

The first section of the novel, entitled “The Book of Acts”, sets the festival’s stage. It ends with Adrian’s disjointed and fragmented recollections of his grandfather’s stories about the past after Colonel Amor injects him with a truth serum. Amor’s attempt to extract knowledge through torture and control is a parody of Adrian’s easy awakening to Anna’s knowledge (that takes place through a silent and loving communication), and Adrian’s induced memories, under Amor’s watch, are discontinuous, incoherent, and nightmarish. While Adrian is in the midst of his hallucinations, Anna and Eliza find each other amidst the festivities and rest beneath a tree at the edge of the town plaza. Here, Anna recalls finding an emerald-and-diamond earring in her childhood room, and talks about how its mere touch gave her the feeling

of a story that it seemed to embody: "I was just wondering where it came from, what it was doing there among the relics in my aunt's house. We never had money, were never rich—and yet there it was. I knew it was real the minute I saw it—half of a pair, the other one missing. And when I took it, not telling anyone, hiding it in the toe end of my shoe—why did I do that?—I had the strangest feeling. A touch, a memory of a story, not even a story, just the breath of one." Upon Eliza's prodding, she laments the impossibility of shoring up the story of the earring: "They monkeyed around the with the language, Eliza, while we were growing up. Monkeyed around with names. Of people, of places. With dates. And now, I can't remember. No one remembers. And even this'—she waved a hand toward the Festival—'even this will be forgotten. They will hide it under another name. No one will remember'" (149). Indeed, as we find out later in the book, the nation's foreign colonizers have succeeded in manipulating and erasing the memories of Eliza and Anna's past, changing the names of streets and towns, changing the language they spoke even, thus succeeding in controlling (and erasing) the community's memories of itself. Thus members of the community like Anna, Eliza, and Adrian find themselves lost and unmoored, not knowing who they truly are, and seeking their true identities by engaging in festivals that become meaningless over time due to their increasing detachment from their origins in history.

However, what Anna and Eliza cannot access through memory, they gain access to through the act of dreaming. Eliza takes Anna's hand, and this moment of physical contact transports them to what turns out to be their shared past, as narrated in "The Book of Numbers". Arong and Hempel call this section a "collective flashback", in which "it dreams the past of the trinity (Anna, Eliza, Adrian) in order to tell an alternative story about the nation's own past" (64). We are first shown, in "The Book of Numbers," how foreign colonizers employed violence in order to exert control over the islands, and how this violence spilled into the private lives of Anna's, Eliza's, and Adrian's ancestors.

The section opens with Adrian and Anna meeting and falling in love, and describes how their meeting, for Anna at least, awakens in her the sense that history, somehow, has come full circle within the confines of Anna's apartment room: "In that clarity that came from the first touch

of health, seeing past, present, and future laid out within the small boundaries of her lodgings” (154). Anna has just been rescued from her interrogators by Eliza, and Adrian, who is ministering to her fever, has been living a comfortable but aimless life, not having the backbone, or the self-awareness, to assert his will with relatives who make important life choices on his behalf. Their coming together presupposes a moment of healing and completion. What they both experience is described by a Rosca as a “shock of awareness”, which, unknown to both of them, “was merely an echo, a duplication of a morning shrouded by antiquity, when a middle-aged friar, condemned by his melancholia to service in the heathen lands of the Far East, rose at dawn from an insomnia made worse by the sultry heat . . . and gone out of the monastery for a walk by the river” (154). This Capuchin monk, who turns out to be Anna and Adrian’s common ancestor, then spots a young native girl bathing in the river, and proceeds to rape her (the girl, as it turns out, is Adrian’s great-grandmother). Although the personal, private narrative of Anna and Adrian’s family lines comes full circle with their lovemaking, this narrative in which they unconsciously position themselves begins with an act of violence, which marks the beginning of their shared histories.

Although their lovemaking is nothing like what the Capuchin monk inflicted upon their two great-grandmothers (the monk will also go on to rape Anna’s great-grandmother, Maya, as he had raped Adrian’s great-grandmother), their coupling is a kinder reflection of this act of violence, hinting that their coming together actually links them to a violent past. Sex, which enables their loving communion, can also be wielded as a tool of violence. As we see in Anna’s “musical chair rapes” under Colonel Amor’s watch prior to her meeting with Adrian, sexual violence is very much a part of the nation’s present, a repetition of the sexual subjugation of women that was used as a tool for conquest during Spanish colonial times. The nation’s history, in this case, must not be mistaken with the nation’s “past”, since the nation has never truly left its history behind.

VIOLATION AND RESISTANCE

Again, as so frequently in the novel, colonial subjugation is made manifest through acts of sexual violation, making colonialism a physical

trauma whose memories are preserved within the body. The friar's victim does not resist, having been indoctrinated, like many Filipino subjects of Spanish colonial rule, with the idea that the emissaries of the colonial state are entitled to her body as much as they are entitled to the bounties of the conquered land: "The girl, who was fourteen years old, knew enough not to resist the priest, having grown up surrounded by the gossip of elders and taken to heart the admonition that the tenderest of thighs, whether of chicken or of women, belonged to the friars" (155). However, even as she submits to this act of physical subjugation, she silently asserts her individual subjectivity just as she is being dehumanized: "She yielded her virginity on a bed of pebbles and curled arms and legs tightly about the pain of the unholy entrance, bit her lower lip, and thought of how much all this silliness should cost the stupid priest". She may yield her body in order to survive this ordeal, like many Filipinos of her time who chose to surrender to their colonizers, but one must note that she also asserts her individuality, and therefore her humanity, by choosing not yield her mind to his whims.

It is an act of self-preservation which, while being the only form of resistance that she can offer to this priest, also employs patterns of amnesia in its processing of trauma. To survive the rape, she must put her physical subjugation, and its attendant pain, at the back of her mind. To preserve her spirit, she must dissociate herself from this physical experience of dehumanization.

This is not the only native girl whom the same monk first rapes and then employs on a regular basis to satisfy his sexual needs. Fifteen years later, in the monastery kitchen, he encounters Anna's great-grandmother, Maya, who comes to be his favorite mistress and bears him seven sons. She is a married woman when they meet, and her relationship with the monk makes her an outcast in her community. However, she fights back against the ostracism by using her alliance with the church as a source of power within the community. Those who chase after her as she drives her *caleche* around the town of Malolos call her "witch, whore, saint, patroness, insane" (156) while also handing her rolled petitions to bring to the saints, the statues of which she prods with whip lashes until her requests are granted. Her efforts to harness the church's power to raise herself in the eyes of her community becomes

increasingly absurd as she bedecks herself in the monastery's jewels and fashions herself as a version of the Virgin Mary. As Shu Ching-Chen writes, "As a matriarch, Maya serves the community by becoming the surrogate Virgin Mary for the people. Therefore her role as the matriarch of the family is complex and conflicting. Maya's assuming the guise of the Virgin Mary is a display of the colonial violence upon her body. . . . The power she acquires by dressing and performing like the Virgin Mary is therefore a sign of her fall from her ancestors' indigenous culture" (16). It is the erasure of the community's memories of their ancestors' indigenous culture which makes the community shun Maya, even as they grudgingly acknowledge her power. In pre-colonial times she may have served as a *babaylan*, or female shaman, due to her ability to minister to the community's spiritual needs, but due to patriarchal systems of subjugation that are employed to diminish the status of women within colonial society, she is shunned and slut-shamed. Dolores de Manuel argues: "The dimension of male dominance becomes a central issue in the experience of colonialism, as the friars' usurpation of power and supplanting the priestesses is responsible for cutting off the nation from its roots in the bountiful, motherly earth" (105). The community's shaming of Maya is part of a process of mental colonialization in which the community's symbols and systems of meaning are replaced with those of the colonizer, leading the colonized to accept their diminished place within the social hierarchy of colonial society. In allowing themselves to forget their pre-colonial past, the colonized allow themselves to be shamed by their foreign rulers. Historical erasure, then, becomes the ultimate act of violation.

Maya could be seen either as a victim of the colonial system, or as a cunning manipulator of its systems of power (Chen 13). She elevates her status within the colonized community by manipulating the Capuchin monk who has come to depend on her, employing his power within the community for her own benefit. Like Adrian Banyaga's great-grandmother who returns to the sacristy after her rape to serve the Capuchin monk in exchange for financial support, Maya, who is raped in the sacristy's kitchen by the same monk years later, makes the most out of his patronage by appropriating the symbolic power of the Catholic Church to regain her people's respect, and by reaping a certain amount

of financial security for herself and her sons. The monk comes to depend on her, allowing her to exert a certain amount of power over him: "She lived with him openly, supervising the servants in the monastery, taking care of his mass vestments, fixing herbal potions to ease his dyspepsia, holding his hand as he lay in bed assaulted by heat or rain or other unspeakable climactic tribulations this land brought him" (156). Later, when the Capuchin monk dies comically, after falling through the belfry's trapdoor upon spotting his son with Maya masturbating on a hill (158), Maya and Carlos Lucas, the only one of her sons with the Capuchin monk who has not sailed away from the Philippines (and who inadvertently caused his father's death) are evicted from the monastery, but they do not leave without taking with them a pirate's chest full of gold from the monastery and an emerald necklace Maya has stolen from the Capuchin order's statue of the Virgin Mary. They move to Manila, where they buy themselves a house in the booming district of Binondo and re-establish themselves as a respectable family (taking on the last name "Villaverde") in a neighborhood that has no knowledge of their past.

Nearly a century later, Eliza, the cousin of Maya's great-granddaughter Anna (and a descendant of her son's business partner, Hans Zangroniz, who has an affair with Mayang, her son's wife) employs the same methods of manipulation to secure a position of power within the dictatorship, latching onto a powerful military official who repays her sexual favors with a house, financial security, and access to the dictatorship's business dealings, turning herself into a conduit for businessmen seeking favors with the Commander. Although one may think of Maya and Eliza as subversive in their exploitation of the patriarchy, one must also note that the patriarchal systems of power that Maya sought to exploit are still in place a century later, by the time Eliza comes into her own as a woman who instinctively understands the system and learns how to play it. One must also note that Maya's and Eliza's manipulation of the system also contributes to its preservation. Eliza confronts this reality when Colonel Amor forces her to witness Anna's rape through a one-way window into the Romance Room. Decades after colonialization has come to its "official" end in the Philippines, its mechanisms remain.

LANGUAGE AND MEMORY

The Americans chose the path of “benevolent assimilation” by making the use of their language widespread and establishing schools throughout the archipelago. The English language served as a tool of indoctrination for the American colonial government, reshaping the values of Filipinos to reflect the values of their colonizers. Language, when employed by the colonizer, is employed as a tool of erasure, in which the identities of the colonized are changed during the process of renaming, and their ties to their past, which were once preserved by their language, are severed once their former language is erased and replaced with another.

Even Colonel Amor understands how his power rests in controlling the nation’s language, and how severing the ties between language and memory results in the disempowerment of those who speak the language, who lose control over its meaning: “Language had to be changed; names had to be changed; places had to be re-baptized; all moral and ethical signposts eradicated. Call the sun, the moon; the moon, the sun and no one would be able to find his way out of confusion’s labyrinth without guidance. He, Colonel Urbano Amor, shall guide the way. He would be the truth, the way, the life” (349). This change in language severs the community from the historical knowledge that their old language once possessed for them.

When Maya, for instance, ventures outside her Binondo mansion for the first time in ten years, she sees that the landmarks of her youth have been erased, and that place names have been replaced since the coming of Americans, she begins to feel her own memories fading: “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 it; reality itself, being metamorphic, was affected. ‘Soon we will forget everything,’ she told the maid, ‘and if we forget, how are we to proceed?’” (186). With the monastery gone, and the only trace left by her beloved Capuchin monk a slab of black marble to mark his grave, she feels helpless, as though in history’s erasure from the landscape, she herself has been erased.

However, even as Maya's memories of the past begin to slip away as Spanish is slowly replaced by English in the streets, her personal history is nonetheless stored in her subconscious, which comes back to her in full force the night when she is supposed to hand down her wisdom to Mayang, her maid's daughter and Carlos Lucas's future wife. In an age-old ritual in which a girl receives knowledge about how to be a good wife from her future mother-in-law, Maya and Mayang lie in the same bed for the duration of a single night. After feeling Mayang's body, "testing flesh and bones," Maya proceeds to tell Mayang all about Carlos Lucas's likes and dislikes before realizing "this wasn't the lesson at all, not at all" (190). Then, in a strange gesture unforeseen by Maya (which, as she remembers in retrospect, was also performed between her and her mother when she herself was a bride-to-be), Mayang presses herself against Maya, "opening a channel to the past" through physical contact in a scene reminiscent of Anna's silent transmission of history through her physical communion with Adrian:

[T]he girl loomed over her, stooped, and pressed her body against the length of Maya's body, her hands on Maya's hands, palm to palm, pinning them to the pillow. The weight, the glint in the girl's eyes only two inches away from her own threw her into confusion and, before she could stop herself, she was back within the monastery, deep in the cellar, where among casks of Benedictine wine she and her monk had celebrated their alliance... Her memories vomited her shame—both public and private; the shame that had driven her to lash saints and horses with equal cruelty and that which had driven her to embrace the priest's corruption until she found herself unable to live without her contempt. She felt the pain of all her childbirths, equal to the pain of watching her six sons walk away from the monastery... on their way to unspeakable voyages so they could escape the recurrent sermons of their own father who, insidiously, condemned his own brood by repeating over and over again that the sins of fathers were visited upon their descendants (191).

Not only does this act of physical communion with her son's bride-to-be unleash a torrent of memories; it also allows her to gain cognizance of her own exploitation and subjugation in the hands of her beloved monk, and to acknowledge her own shame borne out of her exploitation

which she has kept hidden from herself throughout her life. If, during waking hours, she has constructed a narrative for herself that erased the priest's violation of her body, framing her own compliance and subservience as love, her silent transmission of memories to Mayang allows her to gain access to her subconscious, and to her buried memories of shame. Here we see how a complete understanding of one's history gives its owner the power to understand her motivations and anxieties, and how the gaps and fragmentations of one's memories are symptoms of an inability to come to terms with one's trauma. When Maya is able to confront the traumas she has suffered in the past, she becomes capable of understanding her own shame, which allows her to forgive herself and commence the process of healing.

And while Mayang betrays an understanding of the knowledge transmitted to her by her mother-in-law by predicting the hour of her mother-in-law's death after this act of shared dreaming, it seems as though she is unable to harness her newly acquired unconscious knowledge within her conscious life. Neglected as a wife by Carlos Lucas and feeling lonely in the Villaverde household, Mayang embarks on an affair with Hans Zangroniz, a German alchemist and quack whom Carlos Lucas employs on the assumption that he will brew a beer that will outshine that of the Capuchin monks, Carlos Lucas's arch-enemies in business. Little does anyone in the Villaverde family know that Hans is making a deal with the Capuchin monks to steal Carlos Lucas's ideas, and he persuades Mayang to hand Carlos Lucas's notebooks, containing Carlos Lucas's gin formulations, to him. In a gesture that privileges her own desires over the welfare of her family, she steals the notebooks from Maya's pirate chest and hands them over to Hans. As she leaves the Villaverde mansion with Carlos Lucas's notebooks, she has a vision of the house vanishing, a presentiment, perhaps, of how her betrayal will lead to the Villaverde family's downfall and their erasure from the community's memories: "Standing at the trolley stop, she had the disquieting conviction that the house was vanishing, had vanished even as she waited there, and when she returned it would be to a strange neighborhood where no one would know or even remember her" (211). By betraying the Villaverdes she is also betraying herself, since she is also ensuring her own self-erasure with the destruction of the clan.

PHILIPPINE HISTORY: A CYCLE OF FORGETTING

As Anna repeats throughout her childhood, “Everything in this country happens in the morning. . . .Because it is a country of beginnings” (328). The numerous historical discontinuities that take place throughout the novel result in a historical amnesia that forces Filipinos into a perpetual state of beginning, in which they end up mirroring the lives of their ancestors (and repeating their mistakes) due to their inability to learn from a forgotten past. Much earlier in the novel, Elizagains insight into this when she realizes that like the men and women she meets at this festival, she is caught in a loop, unable to find an end to a story that demands completion. Like Anna, who seeks from this festival “an end to a story” which can only happen if Anna can finally find the body of her husband, who was supposedly tortured and killed by the dictatorship, and give him a proper burial, the rest of the nation, which has come together in this festival, seeks a sense of resolution from the traumas that it has suffered from. Eliza realizes that she, too, is trapped in a cycle of neverending beginnings, from which she, like the nation itself, cannot move forward from: “Eliza’s heart contracted with foreboding. *She saw herself caught like her friend, dancing in circles without beginning, without end.* As she danced, the drums intoned: *four hundred years of action without achievement; of movement without distance*” (146-147, italics mine). Much has happened throughout their nation’s history, as shown by the complicated histories of Anna’s and Eliza’s ancestors, and yet even their ancestors have been caught within the same cycle, finding themselves at the mercy of foreign and native oppressors whose subjugation they can never quite escape.

THE HEALING AND REBIRTH OF THE NATION-STATE

It is implied that the dictatorship persists despite the detonation of Guevarra’s bomb, as is shown by Colonel Amor’s survival and installation as Chancellor of “the Academy of Man” (378) where he develops a reputation for being a scholar of “great erudition”. But Anna survives, and carries with her a newfound awareness of her role as a *babaylan*, a gift she has inherited from her female ancestors which often manifests

in her dreams, and which the festival, in its evocations of history, connect her with: “She remembered: visions given to her by printed words, by sensuous chants, women’s voices wailing in her sleep to the tinkling of gold anklets” (336). It is her gift for gaining access to an invisible, forgotten past, which Adrian recognizes in both her and Eliza when saying “The women were the intermediaries then. The—priestesses” (358) which she carries with her as the rebels take her to a small village in Laguna. Here, she is able to marry her scholarly interest in history with her priestess-like ability to share its emancipatory spirit with the children whose education she is entrusted with.

Like her female ancestors, she carries an unconscious, spiritual connection with the nation’s history. But Anna’s knowledge of history is not just an unconscious feeling of kinship with the past, but are facts learned and conclusions gleaned from books, applied to the realities of the present day. She is thus able to harness her spiritual, “babaylanic” connections to the nation’s history during her waking life, making her pupils more consciously aware of their nation’s history which would finally allow them, as the nation’s future, to move the nation forward in time. The novel ends with her awakening to the knowledge that she is heavy with Adrian’s child, and the name she gives to the unborn child speaks of her duty, both as a mother and as a *babaylan* with healing powers, to heal the divisions within the Filipino nation-state (Chen 33). She chooses the name “Ismael Villaverde Banyaga”, “Ismael” being the first name of Guevarra, representing the nation’s quest for freedom, “Villaverde” being the name Maya gives to the family line (representing the nation’s resilience), and “Banyaga”, in acknowledgement of Adrian’s paternity of the child, and also perhaps in fulfilment of the Filipino elite’s wish to find acceptance within the nation state (despite having exploited their own fellowmen for economic gain, turning them into “Banyagas” or “foreigners” in their own country). These feuding elements in Philippine society must be brought together in order to begin the process of reconciliation and healing that the nation must undergo in order to liberate itself from the cycle of self-immolation that the novel more aptly calls a “state of war”. Although the unborn child bears the histories of the names he carries, “he would be the first of the Capuchin monk’s descendants to be born innocent, without fate” (382), and it is perhaps

his capacity for narrative and understanding that will liberate him from the mistakes of his ancestors—Anna knows that “her son would be a great storyteller, in the tradition of the children of priestesses” (382).

CONCLUSION

I have discussed how *State of War* validates the importance of historical memory in translating a shared experience of oppression into meaningful narrative, and therefore, into concrete political action. While Anna's politicization and subsequent activism is the clearest among these three characters, Eliza's and Adrian's political awakening must not be denied: Eliza decides that she must kill Colonel Amor upon learning of Anna's torture, while Adrian finds the strength to reject his family's plans for him to participate in the enabling of the dictatorship after receiving an inherited understanding of history through his physical contact with Anna. While tragedy befalls Adrian and Eliza at the end of the festival (Adrian is seriously injured by the bomb's detonation, and is paralyzed for life, while Eliza is murdered by soldiers), Anna survives to pass on her knowledge to her child and the children she teaches. Thus the novel ends on a hopeful note, with the promise that meaningful political action against the nation's oppressors can be undertaken once the new generation gains a thorough knowledge of the nation's history of which they are part.

Native oppressors, such as the Commander and Colonel Amor, have employed historical erasure, as well as sexual and bodily violence, to inflict trauma upon their citizenry and terrorize them into submission. Amnesia becomes a tool that the oppressed employ to cope with their trauma, which further prevents them from contextualizing their trauma within a larger narrative of historical oppression. All this results in their disempowerment, and in a never-ending cycle of oppression in which the nation's inability to translate historical truth into meaningful and coherent action results in repeated self-harm.

Despite the efforts of foreign and native oppressors to silence dissent through the erasure of historical markers and written narratives, the novel suggests the possibility of historical memory's resilience through dreams and oral history. Anna and her ancestors also possess memories

that are stored within their bodies, which they are capable of sharing with others through acts of love, such as childbirth and sexual congress. These modes of remembering and transferring knowledge are subversive in their resistance of authoritarian control, and can also be traced to a precolonial, “babaylanic” tradition of enlightenment that eludes western and colonial traditions of knowing. The novel thus suggests that to resist oppression, Filipinos must also return to precolonial traditions of knowing and seeing, perhaps even rediscovering ancient babaylanic traditions that privileged the life-giving knowledge of the female shaman (which colonialism sought to silence, by violating and humiliating these female shamans).

This novel also demonstrates how a nation forms its identity by being able to tell a clear and coherent narrative of its collective history. It is the shared experience of oppression that has formed this narrative for postcolonial nations such as the Philippines, and which has allowed it to resist foreign oppression while claiming an identity that is coherent and discernible to itself, and to its former colonizers. The novel also shows how new colonizers, and native oppressors, seek to undermine the nation’s newfound sense of identity through historical erasure, forcing the colonized and oppressed to forget their histories and therefore, lose their hard-won sense of self that has enabled them to resist oppression. It is in Rosca’s view that Filipinos must regain their sense of history, and combat the psychological forces behind historical amnesia, if they are to resist dehumanisation in the hands of foreign and native oppressors.

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