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Apostolship and Transformation: Hybridity and Solidarity in Gina Apostol's Diasporic Novels

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ABSTRACT

The novels of Gina Apostol fall within the genre of postcolonial diasporic novels, which arise from a critical attitude of hope, and aspire to become sources of liberation, as discussed by Bill Ashcroft. They fall under Philippine-American literature as well, a literature that distinguishes itself from Asian-American literature because of its discussion of the Philippine colonial experience under the US, and thus lends itself to important reflections regarding hybridity, historiography, and solidarity. This article examines three novels of Apostol: *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*, and *Insurrecto*. In each of these works, Apostol explores the construction of the Filipina identity in relation to the Philippines, the United States, Philippine history, and Philippine-American relations. These novels illustrate the richness of Philippine-American literature, and its possibilities of liberating Philippine and American narratives, identities, and possibilities. They show the vibrant importance of literature in questioning history and show us how reading against the grain is a skill needed in unearthing narratives about US colonialism in the Philippines and the Philippine nation-state's oppressions of its own people. In the discussion of hybridity, this article employs the theories of Homi Bhabha and Gloria Anzaldua; in the discussion of historiography, it uses the theories of historiographic metafiction, as developed by Linda Hutcheon, as well as theories regarding counter-memory and suprahistorical history by Michel Foucault.

KEYWORDS: diasporic novel, Philippine-American literature, historiographic metafiction, hybridity, counter-memory, post-colonialism

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I. Introduction

In today's broken world, there is a need for solidarity among those who would speak for the silenced. Given the Philippine colonial experience and its modern-day realities, Gina Apostol towers among other writers in revealing the unspoken in Philippine-American history and Filipino state articulations. Her novels are transformative and important texts of counter-memory. Apostol is a Filipino-born writer based in the United States whose novels have reached critical acclaim in the US and the Philippines. Her subject-location as migrant helps her liberate Filipina identities, as "the public intellectual must be exiled to operate effective criticism, yet must journey to the center to make his criticism heard" (Ashcroft, "Exile" 76). In her negotiations with identities, histories, and lived realities, Apostol's novels are sources of liberation, fulfilling the potential of the diasporic novel (Ashcroft, "Diaspora Futures").

This paper problematizes how the novels explore the construction of the Filipina identity in relation to the Philippines, the United States, Philippine history, and Philippine-American relations. It looks closely at the themes of the novels, their central female characters, and the historiographic metafictional strategies employed. It pieces together Apostol's project of negotiating identities, boundaries, and memories between the US and the Philippines, using a postcolonial stance and the narrative strategy of historiographical metafiction and counter-memory. Postcolonial theories, diasporic studies, and postmodernist concepts may be pitted against each other at times, but this paper employs all of these theories in order to encapsulate the insights that Apostol's novels contain.

The novels, *Gun Dealers' Daughter* (2010), *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* (2009), and *Insurrecto* (2019), illustrate intersecting issues of female identity, history, and nation(s). The novels include not only women in the Philippines, but also women who consider themselves part of the Filipino community, despite differences in citizenship or location. Apostol's novels describe the hybridity of the Filipina and help transform notions of Philippine identity and history. As Stuart Hall has noted, postcolonial cultural identities are historical, not fixed or essential; they "undergo constant transformation" as they arise out of "the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past"; and they are "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth" (112-13). Homi Bhabha has

written that identities are no longer fixed on national cultural identities, but are hybrid and open to negotiation. He describes the liberating potential of cultural hybridity: "To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* . . . that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'" (Bhabha 209).

Gina Apostol's novels negotiate the identities of the Filipina and the American immigrant/Filipino migrant. The novels have won several literary awards. *Insurrecto* was a finalist for the 2019 Dayton Literary Peace Prize, *Gun Dealers' Daughter* won the 2013 OPEN/PEN Book Award in the US, and *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* won the Philippine National Book Award in 2010. Her novels write against the empire. They are illustrative of what Said described as literature that would "address the metropolis using the techniques, the discourses, the very weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved for the European, now adapted for insurgency or revisionism at the very heart of the Western centre" (qtd. in Smith 244).

II. Gina Apostol and Filipino-American Literature

Gina Apostol grew up in Tacloban, Philippines, moved to the US in her twenties, and currently resides in New York (Apostol qtd. in Manlapig; Apostol, "About"). She has received several international writing fellowships (Hagedorn 238). Despite her many literary awards, Apostol is not widely read in the academe, nor by mainstream readers in the Philippines and America; Milne observes: "Her relative obscurity falls in line with Martin Joseph Ponce's characterization of Filipino-American literature as 'diasporic' and 'queer' . . ." (109). Although Apostol is included in Asian-American literature anthologies, she is more correctly categorized under Filipino-American literature, which has been described as "a peripheral and marginalized literature in the US academy and in the wider reading public" (Ponce 2).

The difference between Filipino-American literature and Asian-American literature is that Filipino-American literature has been significantly affected by its colonial experiences (Ponce 6). This experience with colonization destroys the publishing ideal once encouraged in Asian-American literature, to "function as a 'cultural bridge' or a 'bridge between two worlds,' between 'here' and 'there,' between the United States and Asia . . . for the fundamental and self-

congratulatory supposition that the 'here' is always far better than the 'there'" (Kim xvi). As Martin Joseph Ponce observes, "Filipino literature in the United States is shaped by the overlapping forces of colonialism, imperialism, and migration" and thus "diasporic Filipino literature exceeds the boundaries of either national frame in both its representational strategies and its performative articulations" (2).

Apostol's subject-position as a Filipina writer in the diaspora informs the identities of her characters. For the Filipino, the diasporic journey to the United States involves a history of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and their economic implications. Because of this, Apostol is equipped to describe and subvert their effects. She creates a counter-discourse, which, like the "true speaking" mentioned by bell hooks, is "an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (qtd. in Ashcroft, "Exile" 86). These articulations show a solidarity with the issues and concerns of Filipinos, Filipino-Americans, and similarly silenced and oppressed peoples around the world.

III. Historiographic Metafiction and Counter-Memory

The strategy of historiographic metafiction contends that history should not be closed off as complete or conclusive, since history has silenced the narratives of the marginalized, and has confirmed the narratives of those in power as the true narratives. Linda Hutcheon writes that "storytellers can certainly silence, exclude, and absent certain past events—and people—but . . . historians have done the same" (107). Historiographic metafiction opens up what Michel Foucault would call "suprahistorical history"—a supposedly objective, neutral history—to critical interpretation by contemporary readers (86).

Historiographic metafiction interrogates histories, memories, narratives, myths, and identities. It questions history, as history is a discourse with an agenda. Linda Hutcheon explains that an event has no meaning, but a fact has been granted meaning by a historian. Using intertextuality, fragmentation and other techniques, historiographical metafiction upends received ideologies and identities traditionally portrayed by history and literature to construct narratives that play "upon the truth and lies of the historical record" (Hutcheon 114). These works may first install, "and then blur the line between fiction and

history" and create in the text (and the reader) an "intense self-consciousness about the way this is all done" (113).

Theories regarding historiographic metafiction are closely related to counter-memory. Michel Foucault discusses Nietzsche's criticism of suprahistorical history. Foucault writes that history should be understood as a slanted perspective of the dominant powers, instead of as something sacred, neutral, or closed off. He writes about counter-memory, which can confront suprahistorical history through parody (contesting its traditional identities), dissociation (contesting its seamless, traditional nature), and sacrifice (contesting its neutrality and truthfulness) (Foucault 93).

Apostol's novels use all of the Foucauldian strategies of counter-memory. Given the American reading audience of Apostol's novels, they reveal a sharply different and perhaps unfamiliar America; instead of describing the US as exceptional in its compassion towards other people, the novels show the horrors that the US has visited upon the Philippines, hence interrogating history through parody. They reveal the plight of the Filipino-American and argue for her inclusion in *both* American and Filipino narratives, interrogating history through dissociation. For the Philippine reading audience, her novels would go a long way towards bursting the "American Dream" that still has a powerful hold in the Philippines, as seen in the continued migration of its citizens to the USA. The novels would also help educate Filipinos on the dangers of imperialist and authoritarian regimes, thereby contesting the neutrality and truthfulness of history, and showing the agendas of US imperialism and state propaganda.

IV. Gun Dealers' Daughter

Gun Dealers' Daughter is told through a series of flashbacks that jump from 1980 to the present, tracing the life of Soledad Soliman, also known as Sol. The narrative is neither linear nor chronological; there is a narrative loop that envelopes the beginning with the end, so that the logical end is to read its beginning. The plot is anchored by her escape from Manila into a sanitarium in Nice and then to the US. However, her memories of Manila plague her, and she keeps reliving what happened to her when she was seventeen.

Sol relives a period of six months in 1980. In the beginning, she is a privileged teenager, the daughter of high society parents rubbing elbows with

the Marcoses in Malacañang. Her parents are gun dealers; they trade with an American supplier, "Uncle" Gianni, who supplies guns for the Marcos government under martial law.[1] The protagonist is the literal daughter and metaphorical *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, bringing together the arms dealers of the Philippines and the US.

Sol interrogates the American colonial history of the Philippines, and explores the complex relationship between the US and the Philippines. She questions Colonel Grier's interpretation of the Philippine-American War, which he insists was a minor skirmish in the Spanish-American War, informing him that from 1899 to 1902 that the Americans killed 600,000 Filipinos in "a war worse than Vietnam" (Apostol, *Gun Dealers' Daughter* 38). The novel shows us how history was manipulated to further colonial agendas, with the gun supplier, "Uncle" Gianni, confirming colonial hypocrisies in the Philippines:

> What I really mean—is that, as foreigners in the Philippines, we get deluded by our reasons for coming. The land is so welcoming, so generous. We lie to ourselves and imagine we are not only businessmen but also redeemers. . . . Unlike Magellan, or McKinley, or McArthur for that matter, I wouldn't have bothered with a grand scheme, benevolent assimilation, whatnot. Hogwash. Bullshit. Stick to business, I would have said to Magellan. (94)

The novel thus reveals the lies by American politicians and historians about the motives for colonizing the Philippines, exposing history as sacrifice.[2] There is also a reckoning with the role of America in supplying guns and enabling the Marcoses during martial law. As counter-memory, the novel is an indictment of American neo-colonial policies, and questions the "benevolent" stance that the United States supposedly had in foreign policy.

Sol enrolls at the University of the Philippines, where she becomes a communist. She is recruited by Soli into the revolutionary New People's Army (NPA), the underground movement that takes arms against the government. Sol and Soli are mirror images, their chief difference being that of social class; Sol comes from the upper class, while Soli comes from the lower class. Sol falls in

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[1] In Filipino custom, when a close family friend is not a relative one is called *Tito* or *Tita* (Uncle or Aunt).

[2] For further understanding regarding the use of "sacrifice" please refer to Foucault.

love with Soli's boyfriend, Jed de Rivera Morga. Although Jed and Sol came from the same social class, he was recruited into the movement earlier, and fell in love with the communist movement and Soli. But Jed notices Sol, and has sex with her in campus one evening. Sol and Jed then regularly have sex in the evenings, while Jed continues his romance with Soli in the day. They are discovered, and Sol is expelled from the movement. The doubled images of Sol and Soli expose the violence from the elite and the grassroots, a violence that haunts them both.

On the last day of school, Sol's parents pick her up, and they make her tag along to a meeting with Colonel Grier and Uncle Gianni for an ammunitions contract. Eventually, Sol is contacted by Jed again, saying that the group wants to meet with her. By this time, the group has found out that she is the daughter of gun dealers and wants to have access to her parents' guns. Jed and Sol resume their relationship and they steal the guns from her parents' warehouse. Jed plans to assassinate a key government official, but Sol persuades him to assassinate Colonel Grier instead. Jed and two accomplices kill Colonel Grier, and the murder is covered by the newspapers. The newspapers dub the group the Urban Sparrow Unit, and what comes out is a combination of propaganda and lies. Jed's name gets relegated to the background, while Soli's name comes to the fore. The newspapers call her the Sparrow Queen and the Teenage Rebel, and they cover a supposed shootout between an urban sparrow unit and the government, wherein Soli was supposedly killed. However, Sol finds out that Soli was picked up, tortured, and executed by the government. This is a clear example of how official accounts of events can be manipulated and revised by the government, and how historical narratives, as well as current events, can be convenient political fictions.

After learning the truth, Sol attempts to commit suicide. She is then brought out of the country, and the narrative loops back to the initial New York setting, where she has been diagnosed with anterograde amnesia. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology this is, "[a] disturbance in memory marked by inability to learn new information" ("Amnesia"). She does not remember the 1986 Revolution that toppled the Marcos government. Sol's identity at the beginning and the end is important, as she is dismissed because of her mental state. She is marginalized, and her articulations of truth invalidated. However, the fact that she is the narrator of the novel gives her agency, and her alternative view of history is voiced despite protests regarding its validity.

Sol's doctor tells her that her disease is "a mental self-punishment that has enriched your memory of the event. . . . Only your past tense has meaning . . ." (Apostol, *Gun Dealers' Daughter* 264). Sol's mode of amnesia is the opposite of the Philippines' cultural amnesia, where people forget the past and only remember current events. This is seen in Sally Vega's letter to Sol about Soli, "[i]t's horrible how we forget the past, just like that—we forget how war has killed the best of us. People barely remember her name, the names of those who fell to the dictatorship. . . . And it is the cockroaches who survive . . . somehow, it seems to me, we are all guilty of a failure of memory" (264).

With the subject position of Sol, an anterograde amnesiac, the novel's point is remembering the past. It is a counter-memory to 1980s martial law, and we discover that the narrative is her *talambuhay*, asked of her by the NPA. When she was expelled, she was asked to write it, "I was told I was no comrade until I handed in the T.B., the *talambuhay*: my reckoning of my life. . . . You have not written your *talambuhay*. You have not done your class analysis. You cannot express your class relation to the masses" (Apostol, *Gun Dealers' Daughter* 122). She writes it, but not in the way the NPA would have wanted her to, since Sol's *talambuhay* is a denunciation of the elite, the NPA, and America.

In the end, after being expelled by the NPA, she writes a reckoning of history that is a testimony critical of the machinations of the NPA, the greed of Uncle Gianni (and America), and the heartless manipulations of the elites. All of them manipulated and used Sol; she became everyone's "useful fool." Through her *talambuhay*, she discloses the violence that each has done and disputes the romantic notions people might have about the NPA, martial law, or America. Her *talambuhay*, or autobiography, is an example of mimicry, which Bhabha describes as an anti-colonial strategy that can be used to "elude control" (qtd. in Loomba 98). One is able to open spaces to subvert the master discourse—and Sol does this with the discourses of the NPA, the national government, and US colonial history.

Sol's psychological space is different from her physical space; her preoccupations concern a space mired in the past. She does not pay attention to her present circumstances, but is haunted by her place of origin. Sol does not heal the way her contemporaries do; she becomes a living wound. She picks out inconsistencies, and questions received versions of history. The breaking/dislocation of identity is produced through narrativity. In the plot of

the novel, Sol knows only what is told to her, and is subject to everyone's lies. Their representations of themselves are false; hence, Sol's mental state gives way. Her identity is constructed *by* narrative and when the narratives turn out to be false, she becomes suicidal. As she uncovers the lies of the NPA, America, and the official discourse(s) of the nation, she becomes broken.

With Sol's autobiography, the class analysis of the *talambuhay* has been written, juxtaposing the tortured psychology of the Filipino upper class with the tortures and deaths of the Filipino masses. Sol is a protagonist who embodies the brokenness of the Philippine elite. Although Sol does not represent the worst of that class, survival and knowledge of her family's corruption makes her feel guilty. Although her exile is necessary in order to survive, it has become a way to punish herself. The writing of the autobiography becomes a way to escape her habitus, as she is able to unveil secrets from her social class and enunciate its horrible treachery.

In this novel of reckoning, Apostol employs the strategies of historiographic metafiction: first, through the protagonist's *talambuhay* and her unreliable memory; and second, through the protagonist's questioning of American colonial history in the Philippines and the complex relationship between the US and the Philippines. The novel implies that all official discourses are political fantasies created to suit those in power, and that they must be confronted by alternative discourses and counter-memory. This is systematically accomplished in the interrogation of the American version of Philippine history, and in the subversion of the Marcos government's representations that Apostol unfolds through Sol's recursive episodic narrative of remembering.

V. The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata

The second novel written by Apostol is *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*. It is a novel masquerading as a historical memoir of a member of the Katipunan.[3] It unmasks itself as a hoax by the "translator" of the history. It begins with the prefaces and commentaries of historians, in this case, three women. In the course of the novel, these women correspond with each other

[3] The Katipunan was the revolutionary group that took arms against the Spaniards when the Philippines was still a Spanish colony.

regarding matters of historical detail and are seen as footnotes in the novel. There is the nationalist, Estrella Espejo of Diliman; the Filipino-American historian, Dr. Diwata Drake; and the "translator," Mimi C. Magsalin. The most intriguing character is Mimi, who has a pseudonym: "The name Magsalin is a pun. It means . . . 'to translate' as well as 'to transfuse,' as in blood . . ." (Apostol, *Revolution* 17). The novel's theme is all about disputing history's sanctity. In its subversion of stereotypes in Philippine literature and history, the novel functions as a counter-memory to male-oriented histories of the Philippines.

The original manuscript was supposedly discovered by Mimi C. Magsalin, who translated it into English. In the beginning, Estrella Espejo was the manuscript's editor. Estrella went to the United States for an academic conference, where she met Dr. Diwata Drake. During the conference, Drake invited Estrella to her apartment, where Estrella fell asleep. Drake read the manuscript, then, discovering that Estrella had a high fever, called 911 for an ambulance. Drake kept the manuscript and immediately published a monograph based on her first reading. Magsalin called this text the "justly celebrated [criminal] monograph on the [purloined] Mata papers" (Apostol, *Revolution* 4).

Estrella is corresponding with the publisher from a sanitarium in Tacloban; Drake corresponds from several areas of the globe; and Magsalin gives commentary from an undisclosed location. Estrella and Drake seem to be peer reviewing the text. Via the footnotes, all three women are able to correspond with each other about the memoir. In the footnotes of the history/memoir, Drake and Espejo continually spar, which makes for lively reading; in the early parts of the novel, these footnotes are more interesting than the memoir.

The retrieval of marginal voices in the footnotes reveal the politics of historiography. It is seen in the characters of these women from different subject locations. Estrella, the Filipina historian, is accused of being sentimental and naïve; she is dismissed as a mental case and is considered less credible than the other two. Drake is accused of the crime of stealing the memoir and is called an American outsider. Mimi is accused of creating a hoax and cannot be pinned down to one location; her movement shifts, and she basically resides in the Third Space. The women attack each other's subject-position, citizenship, and location, as they compete for positions from which Philippine history can be narrated—whether from a nationalist, Filipino-American, or postcolonial perspective.

Drake is the Filipino-American capitalist who jumps the gun by publishing a monograph immediately upon first reading. Given that the memoir is a hoax, which she discovers too late, she becomes the victim of her own greed in attempting to plunder the memories of the Philippines. This illustrates the friction between Philippine and American history (and their historians) as being a competition between narratives in the battleground of collective memory. Meanwhile, Estrella is imprisoned in the mental asylum, and her nationalist utterances are appreciated by no one.

The actual history is the memoir of Raymundo Mata, a near-blind Katipunan man who accompanied Dr. Valenzuela in a journey to Dapitan to ask the detained novelist and eventual hero, Jose Rizal, about his views regarding the revolution.[4] This is based on historic accounts of the Philippine revolution against Spain. The "memoir" begins with his mundane childhood, while the historians bicker in the footnotes. There are parts that are gibberish, with lengthy footnotes providing historical context. Thus, there are two competing narratives: the primary material of the novel (the memoir) and the footnotes. This is the same strategy that Jose Rizal employed with his annotations of the history of the Philippines by Antonio de Morga—Rizal's footnotes interpellated, rebutted, and disputed the history that was written by the Spanish colonizer (Ocampo 184).

According to Ambeth Ocampo, "[t]he historiographical importance of this little-read scholarly work by Rizal is that it was the first historical work on the Philippines by a Filipino. It is the first history written from the point of view of the colonized, not the colonizer" (186). The use of footnotes in *The Revolution* alludes to Rizal's scholarly strategies in revising history, and calls attention to the novel's ambitions of revising history and collective memory. It is also a way for the margins to attack and negate the center, whether one is discussing the spaces in the page or the socio-political spaces of collective memory.

In the early part of the novel, the footnotes are more important and enlightening than the translation/memoir; the women's voices create meaning and significance. Whereas women are usually the object of the male gaze and male historiography, the tables are turned in the novel; the male is the object of the female gaze and female historiography. The strategy highlights the need for

[4] Jose Rizal is important to the Katipunan, because his novels inspired its formation.

multiple interpretations of history. The margins can neither be repressed nor ignored and emerge to be more revealing than the central text.

Raymundo leaves his hometown of Cavite to study in the Ateneo de Manila. While studying, he notices that "there were forces of distemper. . . . My classmates at the Ateneo huddled in Satanic consort over pamphlets . . . but the minute you approached they began talking about chess and boxing . . ." (Apostol, *Revolution* 119). Raymundo finally reads Rizal's first novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, and writes about how the book captured the popular imagination of the Filipino reading public. After high school, Raymundo works in a printing press. His friend, Emilio Aguinaldo, takes him to a gathering of the Katipunan, where they are initiated into the secret society by Andres Bonifacio. Raymundo is then volunteered by Aguinaldo to be part of a group of *Katipuneros* going to Dapitan to know what Jose Rizal thinks of their revolution.

Raymundo meets Josephine Bracken, the lover of Rizal, on the ship to Dapitan. Once there, he asks Rizal if he is writing another novel. Told by Dr. Valenzuela to retire to his room, Raymundo goes out walking, and overhears their conversation. He finds out that Rizal does not sympathize with their cause. The next day, Mata is inconsolable, and he finds his way towards the nipa hut where Rizal writes. He discovers the draft of Rizal's unpublished third novel, *Makamisa*, which he steals. As he leaves, he sees Bracken crying and burning *lanzones* leaves at the foot of the hut. He figures out that she was grieving over the loss of their stillborn child. Raymundo leaves Dapitan and goes back to Manila. In the printing press, there is a labor dispute, and the owner discovers that the laborers have printed seditious pamphlets. The Katipunan are discovered by the Spanish government and revolution breaks out. Raymundo then sees his friend, Father Gaspar, in a cafe, and his memories go haywire, conflating this meeting with the priest with a musical segue.

By this time, the reader suspects what Drake hints at in her footnotes. She writes that there are events in the memoir that seem suspicious, like the musical segue. Other points that raise her suspicions are the parts at the end of the memoir that are mostly written in English instead of Filipino, and the verbal tics of Raymundo that are similar to the verbal tics of Magsalin. The last part of the memoir is Rizal's supposedly unpublished novel, *Makamisa*, interspersed with Mata's contributions to the work. Rizal/Raymundo's protagonist, Ysagani, has the same visual impairment that Raymundo has. By the end of *Makamisa*, Rizal's violated novel loops into the beginning of the memoir, its text the same

gibberish found in the earlier parts of Mata's memoir. In the footnotes, you have Estrella Espejo cursing Raymundo for being a kleptomaniac.

The last part of the novel is Drake's realization that the memoir is a hoax. Drake accuses Magsalin, writing: "The translator's hoax—yes, I use the word boldly, Mimi C. wherever you are . . . . Or is it possible that the Translator, the pseudonymous *Mimic*, has had us in the trap of her infernal arts all along, and history is only a blind alley of her imagination?" (Apostol, *Revolution* 278). In answering Drake's accusation, Magsalin mails her a postcard with the cryptic message, "*Mi noamla: ra puada vimgoes am at*" (279), which is a loop to the novel's frontispiece with two quotes, one from Jose Rizal, and one from the gospel of John.

The quote from Rizal is, "*Noamla berlemla, mi ra puada vingoes am at*" (Apostol, *Revolution* ix). Apostol explains the quote in an interview, "[t]he phrase . . . is in Rizal's *Miscellanous Writings*, part of which is really in some kind of codigo, a secret code—he's making sarcastic comments about a lying friend of his, etc., and he hides his *chismis* [gossip] in code" (qtd. in Delgado 289). The decrypted code translates to, "[h]e lies easily, you cannot trust him" (de Guzman 277).

"He" could be history or his/story. The character of Mata shifts constantly in the novel. First, he is the stereotype of the male revolutionary hero, a member of the Katipunan, as set up by the three female historians. He is revealed as a shallow boy who delights in puns; then a reader moved to revolution. He turns into a thief; he steals Rizal's unpublished novel and rewrites it. The last shift is when the protagonist turns out to be a hoax—he is *not a male historic figure* penning his memoir, *but a fictional character* penned by a female "translator." Raymundo Mata is the false "eye" witness of Mimic.[5] The name Mimic inevitably leads towards mimicry again, but this time, mimicry subverts the master discourse of patriarchal history (Loomba 98). Julie Mullaney writes that mimicry can be both "transformative and disruptive" (31), and this is seen very clearly in the mimicry employed in the novel.

Mata is the construction of the female imagination, in the guise of Mimic, who is transformed from translator to fictionist/historian. In the final revelation of Mata's identity, we witness the power of the female storyteller. We see the memoir differently, because the point of view is no longer male; the point of

[5] "Mata" is a pun, since it means "eye" in Filipino.

view is *female*—and this radical shift opens spaces for the female voice to narrate history, challenging the received versions of male literature and history. Mimic creates space for a female interpretation of Philippine history.

This revelation mirrors the quotation at the beginning of the novel. The quote from John 20.17-18 is this:

> Jesus said unto her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God." Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples: I have seen the Lord and he told these things unto me. (qtd. in Apostol, *Revolution* ix)

In the same way that Mary Magdalene relays the good news to the disciples, Mimic reveals Philippine history to the reader. This is revolutionary, when you think of Philippine history, which gives a wide space to a pantheon of male heroes and historians and very little space reserved for female heroines and historians.

The character of Mata is marginal, as he has a sight impediment and is alluded to only once in the history books. But Mimic uses him to resurrect female identities. The interweaving of fact and fiction shows how both memory and fantasy play in the reconstruction of different identities. This becomes a way for Mimic to create a psychological space for women, interpreting women in Philippine history from a female perspective. For example, Philippine history books depict Josephine Bracken as just one of the lovers of Jose Rizal, as if she were of no real importance. However, as Bracken emerges in the novel, she is not merely a lover of Rizal, but the mother of his unborn child. Historians often argue about whether Josephine was Rizal's wife. But in the collective memory of the Filipino people, and the history lessons taught in school, she is not given this kind of regard, despite having fought for the Katipunan and being recognized as Rizal's wife by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (de Viana).[6] With Mimic's portrayal of Josephine Bracken, and the rendering of her miscarriage, Mimic creates a psychological space for Bracken in Philippine history that recognizes her importance to Rizal and to the nation.

[6] They were married in wedding rites by Father Balaguer before Rizal was executed.

The loss of the child might have been one of the reasons Rizal rejected the Katipunan, and his hope for the future may have died along with his child.

Mimic walks from the edges of history to become the voice of history with Mata. By virtue of this hoax, the readers accept as true what would have been rejected. The indeterminate locations of Mimic allow her to reopen history, as a space that allows the marginalized to speak. She is given the power to interpolate the social landscape in which she moves, transforming the structures, discourses, and institutions of history and literature. Memory is breached through fantasy and becomes a female intervention in the male-oriented spaces of Philippine history and literature. In the end, it does not matter where she is physically, but where she is psychologically. Her chief preoccupation is in the translation, documentation, and creation of Philippine history—and she is found in the spaces of Philippine memory and imagination. The novel seems to tell us that for certain Filipinos who live and work outside of the Philippines, they still, arguably, reside in the psychological space of the Philippines.

In creating these alternative events and identities, fact and fiction coalesce as a narrative manipulated by the female storyteller. There is a confrontation with the official memories of the nation and received versions of history, and a new psychological space is opened up for women. This clearly shows us history as sacrifice—and how it is possible to subvert this through counter-memory.[7]

VI. Insurrecto

The last novel, *Insurrecto*, has been described as the twin novel of *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata* (Apostol qtd. in Manlapig). The protagonist is again Mimi C. Magsalin. Upon reading *Insurrecto*, the use of the punning name Mimi in *The Revolution* leads the reader to conclude that the protagonist is a stand-in for the author, since the protagonist's circumstances are similar to those of Apostol herself. In *Insurrecto*, the narratives of the female characters are told in a disjointed manner, with constant juxtapositions of

[7] From Michel Foucault's essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," he writes, "[t]he historical sense gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history. The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge" (93).

competing narratives. As the writer Viet Thanh Nguyen notes on the back cover of the novel, "*Insurrecto* is a meta-fictional, meta-cinematic, even meta-meta, plunging us into the vortex of memory, history, and war . . . ."

The key to the novel's plot is explained in the *first* chapter 1: "The story Magsalin wishes to tell is about loss. . . . An abaca weave, a warp and weft of numbers, is measured but invisible in the plot. Chapter numbers double up. Puzzle pieces scramble. Points of view will multiply" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 107). The doubling that took place in the earlier novel, *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, is multiplied in *Insurrecto*. In the first actual chapter in the novel, entitled chapter 20, Magsalin is grieving. She is a mystery writer who creates the character of Chiara. Afterwards, Chiara becomes a fully-formed character in the novel, but is only a creation of Magsalin's imagination. She is Magsalin's American double, a colonizer self that is created but treated as a real person in the novel. In the course of reading the novel, this construction is forgotten, as Chiara seems to be a real character. The only way to remember that she isn't a real character in the novel is to read the beginning again, with Magsalin trying to imagine what would be a good name for a protagonist, and discussing the process of choosing the name Chiara. As the novel develops, the two central characters are Magsalin and Chiara. Magsalin is a writer from the Philippines who lives in the US, while Chiara is an American filmmaker whose father killed himself in the Philippines. They meet and have a loose work agreement, where they travel towards Samar to do research for a movie. In their heads, they create two competing narratives, "Duel Scripts," which eventually merge into one (100).

The central theme seems to be that the colonized and the colonizer are the same. Aside from the creation of Chiara, this can be seen in the psychology of Magsalin. Upon describing herself, Magsalin writes about how she is both: "One is in the Other and the other is in the one" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 125). When she describes herself to her friends, she says, "[s]he has no childhood trauma, she likes to tell her friends—just a willful desire to be herself, in a way that home does not provide. The immigrant's tale is also one of agency, you know, not just misery" (116). This reminds us of Sarita See's discussion of the hyphen in Filipino-American literature, which is symbolic of Filipinos in America and US imperialism in the Philippines (qtd. in Ponce 12).

This is reiterated at the end of the novel, as they sing Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds" in a karaoke session: on one hand, they sing his lyrics,

"*[w]e can't go on together—with suspicious minds!*"; and on the other hand, Magsalin repeats Chiara's statement about Elvis, "[w]hat do you mean he said everything already . . . . Do you mean—to both colonizer and colonized?" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 297). In Magsalin's analysis of Elvis, she writes, "Elvis in his stills expresses a double consciousness. He is both the woman seduced and the seducer . . ." (84), and this is perhaps one aspect of the colonizer/colonized relationship that Apostol explores.

As Andrew Smith notes, this is a revelatory insight that hinges on discussions of identity and hybridity:

> What interests Bhabha about this is not the existence of dialectical pairs which appear to confirm each other in distinct, separate identities—colonialist/colonized, for example, or local/immigrant. Such pairings are usually, he argues, ruses of the powerful, attempts to create unequal structures of order. (248)

In recognizing the colonizer in the colonized, and the colonized in the colonizer, and the recognition that most identities are hybrid, it signals a breaking down of walls and a liberation of identities. The emergence of diasporic literature is not the bastard fruit of two nations, but fruit made between them. It reminds us of Gloria Anzaldua's articulations about the hybrid potential of the New Mestiza, wherein the in-between nature of the hybrid equips them with the eyes of the colonizer and the eyes of the colonized, and hence, accesses the wounds and the powers of *both* (79).

It brings us back to the conversation between the colonizer within Magsalin (Chiara) and the colonized (Magsalin herself):

> "How do you know that your perspective does not distort the story?" asks Chiara.
>
> "How do you know that yours has not?"
>
> "No filmmaker would accept such a demand," says Chiara, "You are replacing the story. It's not a version. It's an invasion.
>
> "Oh no. That is not my intention. A mirror, perhaps?" asks Magsalin. (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 97)

Cassandra Chase and Casiana Nacionales are, respectively, protagonists of the competing narratives of Chiara and Magsalin. Cassandra is an American photographer who took photos of the Philippine-American War and published them in the US. Casiana Nacionales is a real-life Filipina heroine, often praised as the "Geronima of Balangiga," who went against American soldiers in the Balangiga Massacre (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 312). In the narratives of dueling scripts, Chase is an American photographer, and Nacionales is a heroine. Nacionales seduces an American soldier and steals his keys, which free the Filipino prisoners that would eventually kill them, dressed in women's clothing, as the US soldiers ate their breakfast.

The Balangiga Massacre, as it is referred to in American history, is considered in the US as "their 'worst single defeat' in the history of the three-year war from 1899 to 1902," according to Alex Evangelista. In the morning of September 28, 1901, Filipino fighters disguised themselves as women and were able to ambush and kill forty-eight out of the seventy-two soldiers of C Company, with the bells of Balangiga signaling the beginning of the attack. Afterwards, American troops retaliated. General Jacob Smith vowed he would turn Balangiga into a "howling wilderness" and ordered: "No prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn the better it will please me. I want all persons killed who are capable of bearing arms in actual hostilities against the United States" (qtd. in Evangelista). Smith instructed his soldiers to "kill everyone over ten." After their retaliation, the US retained a "scorched earth policy" until the end of the war in 1902. The numbers of how many Filipinos died are uncertain, though there have been some estimates of 2,500 deaths upwards (Evangelista). The discussion of the Balangiga Massacre is important, especially given the American reading audience, as this is not discussed in American textbooks—and is important for Filipino readers as well, as this is not covered in the Philippine educational system, which would only summarize the "Benevolent Assimilation" policy of the US without analysis or criticism.

In Cassandra Chase's narrative, "[t]he tropics have the mystifying effects of making memory insufferable" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 135). Chase tells us that Mark Twain is the only American intellectual to be relied on when it comes to US-Philippine relations. She states, "Twain holds a mirror up to our nature" (140). There are constant allusions to Mark Twain's anti-imperialist essays in the text and his confrontation with American hypocrisies in its imperialist wars,

including the one in the Philippines. This seems to be the rationale of the novel when it comes to exposing the horrors of the colonial past, as seen in the Philippine-American War, and the horrors of the authoritarian present, in President Duterte's Drug War. The parallel between both suggests that the colonial violence of the US shares common attributes with the state violence by the Filipino nation.

Magsalin discusses how it was the photographs that captured the Philippine-American War that horrified America during the court martial cases after Balangiga:

> America is riveted, as pictures of the Filipino dead in the coconut fields of Samar are described in smuggled letters to the *New York Herald* and the *Springfield Republican*. They are like bodies in mud dragged to death by a typhoon, landing far away from home. . . . *Women cradling their naked babies at their breasts. A woman's thighs spread open on a blanket, her baby's head thrust against her vagina. A dead child sprawled in the middle of the road.* . . . The congressional hearings on the affairs of the Philippine islands, organized in January 1902 in the aftermath of the scandal, hold a moment of silence. (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 282)

In the congressional hearings after the massacre, Chase is accused of being complicit with the Filipino fighters, because she rented a hut near Nacionales, "the vanished rosary bead rebel, that *insurrecto*"—"and Cassandra tells them Casiana 'is no *insurrecto*. She is a revolutionary'" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 278, 280). Chase's prepared testimony is read in the congressional hearings: "We told them we would free them from Spain. We lied. We took the islands for ourselves. We commit the crimes we say we abhor. We outdid the savagery for which we claim a just war . . ." (280). Her testimony and photographs are redacted from the records, and, "[a]fter the hearings, history does not hear much from Cassandra Chase. Who knows if her story is also a mirage. Is it not wishful thinking that the enemy might be a reliable witness?" (284).

Nacionales, however, is remembered in Philippine history:

> Geronima of Balangiga is the historic term of praise for Casiana Nacionales, whose life is chronicled by the Leyte-Samar

> Historical Society. . . . On the plaque of the plaza in Balangiga registering revolutionary names, Casiana's feminine struggle stands alone. However, the ghosts of the washing women, cooks, gihay sweepers, water carriers, bolo women, female warriors, and so on who were part of the Philippine revolution also lie behind her august name. Women of war salute you with tears in their eyes, Geronimas of Balangiga! (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 312)

The narratives by Chiara and Magsalin recognize the role of women in their revolutions. They are almost all *insurrectos*, except for Chiara, in the sense that they are waging an underground war against the governing body. Chase's war is made up of propaganda, while Nacionales' war is revolution. Magsalin's war is seen in her art and her scholarship, and Apostol's war is seen in her novels; it is an underground narrative war against forgetting the American past and opposing indifference to the Filipino present.

Magsalin quotes Senator Hoar's accusations in the proceedings:

> You have devastated provinces. You have slain uncounted thousands of the people you desire to benefit. You have established reconcentration camps. Your generals are coming home from their harvest bringing sheaves with them, in the shape of other thousands of sick and wounded and insane to drag out miserable lives, wrecked in body and mind. You make the American flag in the eyes of the numerous people the emblem of sacrilege in Christian churches, and of the burning of human dwellings, and of the horror of water torture.
> (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 90)

This resounding condemnation reaches the reader from the echoes of time and shakes him into understanding the devastation that the US brought to the Philippines.

Among the descriptions of the Filipinos dead in the Philippine-American War is an allusion to Duterte's Drug War, where Magsalin describes "*[a] woman holding the body of her dead husband, in the pose of the Pietà*" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 282). This description is repeated all throughout the text of the novel, and it recalls Raffy Lerma's award-winning and viral photograph

taken during Duterte's Drug War, which was likened to the Pietà. It creates a visual counter-memory that fills in the gaps of suprahistorical history and state propaganda, and exposes truths that have been silenced by textbooks or mass media resources, while indicating that modes of violence visited upon the Philippines by the US are now executed by national state forces against Filipinos themselves.

Both Chiara and Magsalin are aware of the Philippine Drug War. Chiara describes the Philippines as "an icon of extrajudicial horror, a dystopia of brazen exterminations even in broad daylight, an international emblem of criminal slaughter by fascist police" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 67), indicative of the American public's awareness of it. For Magsalin, it is: "Toktok-hangyo: knock-knock, plead-plead, or so Magsalin translates the glib coinage of this new regime—the drug-war policeman will knock on your door, and whether you open or do not open, you are doomed" (95). Magsalin describes how the Filipinos condone it, as she describes her uncles who voted for Duterte:

> "Only addicts are harmed, don't you worry *inday*," Tio Ambrosio tells Magsalin as once again they watch more news of the dead bodies after dinner, piling up at the garbage dumps, in the slums, near schoolyards, and on all the monotonous commercial streets of the country—bodies upon bodies. "Are you a criminal? A drug lord?"
>
> "No," she says.
>
> "Then nothing to fear, *inday*! He is doing it to keep us all safe!" crows Tio Exequiel. (113)

This is an indictment against Filipinos. Magsalin discusses how her uncles "keep explaining the country to her as if she does not know it. . . . they make her stay at home because they believe she is stupid, an alien, having been abroad for too long . . ." (114). This describes the frustration of many migrant Filipinos, who know their country but are left aghast at the extrajudicial killings and its popular support. This is not a realization reached by migrant Filipinos alone. Many Filipinos have discovered that the Philippine psychology of violence, as seen in the Duterte Drug War and its massive popular support, is alien to their understanding of their homeland as well.

The author's discussion of historical sins is done to challenge and question romantic notions Americans might have of their own country, and the romantic notions Filipinos might have of theirs. The novel is a mirror that does not flinch at describing the horrific acts that people do to each other, whether for misguided patriotism or hatred of the Other. It is interesting that in the portrayal of history, as seen in the conversation between Chiara and Magsalin discussing their scripts, both the colonizer and the colonized are part of the equation. Chiara tells her, "[c]o-authorship of my script . . . Unacceptable. How dare you even imagine," to which Magsalin replies, "[y]ou will admit though. My perspective offers an advantage" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 96-97). This is the only way forward, to admit the limitations of each perspective, but to ensure that what is marginalized is given space in the mainstream. In the push and pull of power dynamics between locations, the only way forward is to keep opening up different interpretations of identities, histories, and lived realities. This reveals history as parody and transforms traditional notions of identity into new possibilities that open possibilities for solidarity.

Historiographic metafiction allows writers to confront the whitewashing of history. In this novel, Apostol confronts the whitewashing of history and current events. As the eternal outsider looking in, her diasporic perspective is one that brings forward events, ideologies, and psychologies that most people would rather forget. One line seems to echo this in her novel: "Readers who ask, Why do you always bring up history that no one knows about?" (Apostol, *Insurrecto* 104). And the answer is: "A film exists only when it has an observer" (52). This is true whether one confronts inconvenient truths found in Philippine-American history or in Filipino narratives of current events. As truths that are often forgotten or ignored, this counter-memory reveals history as sacrifice—and upends traditional notions of US colonial history, or today's articulations coming from the Philippine nation-state.

What is at stake here is not limited to the rewriting of the identities of the Filipina. What is at stake is the rewriting and remembering of Philippine and American history, and the inclusion of marginal voices. In Apostol's novels, the silenced that are given voice are the Filipinas, the women, the migrants, the immigrants, the "useful fools," the colonizer, and the colonized. This inclusion and solidarity unite disparate voices, transforming old enemies into allies, and creating a solidarity against all those who would silence or oppress one's narratives.

VII. Conclusion

With Apostol's construction and deconstruction of narrative, history, and literature, it is the puzzle pieces themselves that create counter-memories. It is important to bring together official histories and marginalized histories. It is imperative to bring together the accounts of the colonizer/state and the accounts of the colonized/marginalized. One is not complete without the other. Given the dangers of today's revisionist histories in the Philippines, one cannot give space to alternative histories and ignore the official versions, whether from the colonizer or the state.[8] In most cases, one simply cannot avoid them. The novels become an important lesson to the reader that history is not one-sided, and that in order to get at the truth, one must read and appreciate multiple perspectives.

In the Philippine perspective, the intellectual exercise of questioning history and the narrative of current events is one that is sorely needed by the reading public. Many people have been misled by the revisionist histories extolling Marcos and martial law found in social media and from various organizations, which has led to the election of President Rodrigo Duterte. In the Philippines, the sites of memory are not moot and academic; they have real world consequences, amounting to votes and public perception of public policy. It is for this reason that there is a government institution tasked with churning out propaganda and why journalists and civil society groups are up in arms about the red-tagging, silencing, and killing of media practitioners, activists, government officials, and NGO workers.

Bhabha wrote, "[i]t is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate *the differences between them* into a kind of solidarity" (qtd. in Smith 250). In the culture wars that have erupted in contemporary times, it seems that the only way out of them is *through*. The novels ask readers to leap into conclusions that are very different from past articulations about national myths and identities, and hostilities between the colonizer and the colonized, and to recognize that the only way we can go forward is if we bring about multiple ways of thinking, being, and remembering.

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[8] One of the reasons for Duterte's popularity is the spread of revisionist histories on social media thought to be funded by the Marcoses, praising the virtues of martial law and arguing for the need for a similar authoritarian regime.

Apostol's novels help us remember the legacies of violence that throw long shadows into the present and that can darken our futures. Given the events of 2020, and the strengthening of authoritarian regimes in the wake of the pandemic, reading Apostol is a start towards liberating those who have been oppressed or silenced. Her novels show solidarity with Filipinos in the homeland and in the diaspora. As examples of Filipino-American literature, her novels stage quiet revolutions against US colonial history—educating Americans about the violent US colonial past instead of the celebratory stance of American exceptionalism and liberal democracy. These novels about colonial and national violence transform identities and histories, creating hope for greater solidarity among the Filipino, Filipino-American, and American peoples, and providing important counter-memories of the silenced and marginalized in society.

These novels have more resonance when contextualized under the Duterte Presidency and the Trump Presidency in the US, as these legacies of violence may or may not continue indefinitely into the future, whether they may manifest in patterns and practices of state violence or those borne from neo-colonial policies. In the end, one can only hope that there will be enough people willing to confront and oppose these different kinds of violence, to stand in solidarity, cry out for justice, and move forward healed and whole. But there is no moving forward without clearly seeing the landscape below and ahead; there is no real direction without understanding the multiple narratives, histories, and counter-memories that make up the world.

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