

THE PERCEPTION OF NEOCOLONIAL RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES: NATIONALISM IN FILIPINO LITERATURE SINCE THE 1960s*

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The United States, after all, has been the single most influential foreign power in the Philippines and its political, military, economic and cultural interests have shaped, far more than any other external factor, the social environment in which Filipino writers have to function as human beings and as practitioners of their craft.

S.P. Lopez, *The Writer in a Society in Crisis*

The existence of the Filipino people, of which the writer is a part, is primarily defined by the neocolonial relations dominant in our society.

Luis V. Teodoro, Jr., *Literature and Social Reality*

The Persistence of Protest

The years following the declaration of martial law in the Philippines in 1972 which aimed, among other things, at clamping down on radical dissent, have witnessed the undiminished influence of the radical perspective in Filipino nationalist literature, as may be gleaned from the works of the present crop of poets and fictionists.

By radical perspective, we have in mind the primacy of social content projected by creative writers who were either activists or active sympathizers of the nationalist movement, the mass-audience orientation which emphasized clarity of presentation and clear-cut partisanship, and a literary symbology which dwelt on the basic issues confronting Filipino society, identified as *imperialism*, *bureaucrat-capitalism*, and *fascism* or *state violence*. It was, above all, the perception of an ideological imperative for this kind of literature to be developed and upheld as a criticism of social conditions and a call to action, if not to arms.

The call was for writers to write effectively and well, to write about and for the Filipino masses and, as much as possible, to go out among them in order to learn about their experiences, in the process not only gathering materials for their works but also transforming their generally petit-bourgeois class outlook. It was deemed

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the only way by which a writer who subscribed to the aims of the "national democratic movement" could honestly acquire a *proletarian* standpoint.

Political writers, historians and critics, echoing Claro M. Recto who is reported to have been the first to use the phrase, have referred to that period as a Second Propaganda Movement qualitatively different from the First Propaganda Movement, the campaign for colonial reforms waged by Filipino middle-class *ilustrados* self-exiled in *Madre España* in the 19th century, presumably because the contemporary writers engaged themselves politically as cultural activists in the revolutionary (not merely reformist) protest movement, demanding genuine post-colonial independence and social justice for their country which they held to be a neocolony.

This commitment they pursued by means of writing poems, stories, plays, and articles which dealt with the historical problems and present-day experiences of the majority of the Filipino people, that is to say, the peasants, workers, fishermen, urban poor, lumpen, and the middle-class; participating in mass actions, strikes and pickets; and conducting literature workshops and seminars for people with a bent for socially-conscious creative writing.

The radical perspective in the new literature required a reorientation in content and style. Content had everything to do with issues energizing the protest movement. Style (form and technique) followed content. The literary revolution within the social revolution itself became another issue. What was the function of literature? For whom did one write? Why write at all? In upholding the radical aesthetics of committed literature, the writers had to contend with the criticism of literary traditionalists and formalists who saw in committed literature nothing more than didactic moralizing or demagoguery (depending on the degree of derision) and was therefore impure art. In a word: ephemera, propaganda. Philosophical and literary discussions on the nature of art and literature during that period probed into the country's Western cultural legacy, and the (bourgeois) construal of art and literature "uncontaminated" by politics and ideology was taken to task by the Movement's writers as yet another proof of the colonial influence of culture on Filipino intellectuals and writers.

The nationalist literature spurred on by conditions in the early sixties and sustained by the fervor of the early seventies took many names: "committed", "protest", "progressive", "radical", "revolutionary", "activist", "proletarian". Some of these terms, including "nationalist", are not perfectly synonymous. In fact, the term "nationalism" had to be qualified early on. The old-style nationalism understood in terms of political separatism (or anti-colonialism) had been ren-

dered obsolete by the fact of formal decolonization (a colonial power divesting itself of extraterritorial possessions) and in its stead had reared postwar nationalism whose chief advocate in the Philippines had been the celebrated "voice in the wilderness," Senator Claro M. Recto. His nationalism struck at the roots of RP-US "special relations," and championed a genuine sovereignty for the Philippines, an independent foreign policy, and end to economic mendicancy, and laid down solid arguments against parity rights, American control of the country's politics and economy, (or, which is the same thing, Philippine subservience to America's interests), and the presence of military bases in the country which not only served as a built-in "magnet" for nuclear attack but were already spawning social problems for the Filipino communities around the bases.

The terms "committed" and "protest" are problematic. In many a literary workshop, a writer or critic of the universalist (i.e., belletrist) persuasion, would assail the appropriation of "commitment" by Movement writers, arguing that in the first place, the quintessential duty of the writer is to write well, and in the second place, commitment can take many forms: one is committed to writing well, committed to writing about "the highest humanist values," committed to writing about the True, the Good and the Beautiful, and about the Ugly, for that matter; in other words, committed to his Art.

"Protest", on the other hand, may conveniently serve as a generic term for all writing which raises any social, economic or political issue, but it is precisely this blanket anti-Establishment connotation that renders it inadequate to singularly describe the literature of the past two decades. Besides, it evokes too closely the counter-culture and counter-consciousness movements in the United States animated by different impulses, laying siege on different targets. Protest at Woodstock was qualitatively and contextually different from protest at Plaza Miranda. It may be pointed out that in some cases, during the early sixties, the effects of the Western cultural seepage into Filipino sensibilities produced a predilection for pacifism and anti-war angst, expressed in the singing of American protest folksongs, the reading of "existentialist" poetry by candlelight, all indicating a certain state of Revulsion against the order of things. Outside the classrooms and the bohemian cafés, the Revolution was beginning to shape up. A number of writers were to be drawn into it.

The Neocolonial Nexus

British author Felix Greene, whose writings and films about Vietnam and China in the process of national liberation and socialist construction, respectively, had helped influence the internationalist fervor of Filipino activists, came out in 1970 with a book that

took its place alongside the revolutionary classics popular among students during the period, which included the works of Karl Marx, Lenin, Mao Ze Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap (*People's Army, People's War*), Franz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*), Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (*Reminiscences of the Guerilla War*), Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy (*Monopoly Capital*), Christopher Caudwell (*Studies in a Dying Culture*), Jose Ma. Sison (*Struggle for National Democracy*), and Amado Guerrero (*Philippine Society and Revolution*).

Greene's book was *The Enemy: Notes on Imperialism and Revolution*. In it he lays down a simple explanation of Neocolonialism:

The continued control of a former colony through economic and other means is the essence of neocolonialism.¹

This is of course followed up by a more involved discussion. Greene cannot be more succinct in his formulation than in the following:

The new state, though nominally 'independent', finds itself shackled by debt. It must continue to use its precious foreign exchange to pay interest and profit to foreign investors. The glorious future does not arrive, for political 'independence' has left the former colony in no better position to retain its surplus, to build up capital or to break down the feudal structure of its society. And the mass of the people are left with their age-old poverty.²

It is in this context that the nationalist writers of the period have understood the workings of Filipino society. Greene, of course, was just one of the many authorities, and merely one of the most recent. The nationalist writers, especially the most politically advanced and who had had more exposure to the Movement, were familiar with most of the authors mentioned above. In their poems, stories and plays, a basic recognition of the gravity of "special relations," or neocolonialism, was evident.

Political economy has seldom been the primary concern nor the province of the Filipino creative writer, but this may not be the case with many of the politicized or radicalized poets and fictionists who addressed themselves to the basic issues. Writers as well as critics who were part of the national democratic movement had to arm themselves with at least an appreciation of political economy and history if they were to comment correctly and incisively on Philippine society. A writer/critic like Dr. Lucille Hosillos would in recent years be addressing herself to the question of the economic and cultural decolonization, not only of the Filipinos but of the whole region,

¹ Felix Greene, *The Enemy: Notes on Imperialism and Revolution*, (Quezon City: Malaya Books, Inc.), p. 163.

² p. 164.

in fact. She looks at Southeast Asia as a region that has yet to attain the full measure of economic independence and human dignity.

In such a neocolonial milieu perpetuated by imperialist domination, Southeast Asia has become an agricultural region with a feudal economy with predominantly peasant communities. Its semi-industrialized cities are veritable slums overpopulated with the unemployed or low-salaried workers and its luxurious housing enclaves are inhabited by the political economic and social elite who control the life of its people through bureaucracies that function for their interest and those of their foreign partners.³

This is quoted here to underscore the fact that Filipino writers from the sixties onwards have long since gone beyond the bounds of Filipinist nationalism, but have found common cause with Afro-Asian and Latin American writers in an implicit universal denunciation of Western neocolonialist policies. One may refer to this as the Third World Consciousness in literature. Some contemporary Filipino poets are familiar with the works of Pablo Neruda, Jose Marti, Chairil Anwar, Dennis Brutus, W. S. Rendra, Kim Chi Ha, Nicolas Guillen and others.

Roots of the Nationalist Consciousness

What in general were the elements in that total milieu that catalyzed the new nationalist consciousness of the writers?

1. *The national situation.* Diosdado Macapagal came to power in 1961, his administration highlighted by the decision to lift the import controls instituted during the previous term of the "Filipino First" president, Carlos P. Garcia. Under the latter, the official national slogan was economic nationalism, although no amount of patriotic posturing could conceal the debilitating graft and corruption that contributed to the downfall of Garcia's Nacionalista administration in 1961. Grand economic plans of attaining the industrial take-off were in the air. But the Unfinished Revolution (the first in a series of official "revolutionary" pronunciamientos punctuating Philippine political culture during these past twenty years) was compromised right away and rendered infirm by the new president's imposition of full and immediate decontrol in 1962. Looking back on that presidential fiat, one of the first radical poets in the late fifties and early sixties who eventually turned polemicist and organizer pondered its general implications for the country:

This single presidential act has reinforced the supremacy of US imperialism, raw-material exporters and all the comprador capi-

³ Lucila Hosillos, "Nationalism and Southeast Asian Literature", *The Philippines in the Third World Papers*, Third World Studies Program Series, UP, 1977, p. 4.

talists within the country. While US business firms can remit their superprofits with impunity, those who export sugar, copra, hemp and other raw materials keep their dollar earnings without any consideration for the urgent need of developing industries to provide the increasing number of unemployed with jobs. These Filipino agents of US imperialism live in luxury while they fail to give a decent wage to their farm workers, sacadas and tenants. While there is a construction boom and luxury spending among the compradors, our masses live in dingy hovels, afflicted with poverty, bad health and illiteracy.⁴

The indictment which Sison levelled against the System, specifically the neocolonial nexus that explains the incredible linkages between Wall Street and Tondo or Negros, was echoed in the polemical and literary output of his contemporaries and those who were to follow in their footsteps.

2. *The international situation.* Wars of national liberation were the most significant political phenomena worldwide. These had actually been going on as a process of decolonization after World War II, and only caught fire in the popular imagination at least of Filipinos, after the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959, but especially during the Second Indochina War in the 1960s. The anti-war protest movement in the United States, precipitated by American intervention in the Vietnam war, had its counterpart in the Philippines. But here it was not so much anti-war as anti-imperialist and pro-Vietnam. It was launched not merely to demand the withdrawal of American troops but also to signify solidarity with the nationalist protracted guerrilla war waged by the National Liberation Front. And it was a denunciation of U.S. imperialism not only in Vietnam but in the entire Third World, including the Philippines. Among Filipino writers, the poets particularly, the unfolding Vietnamese saga was a lode of revolutionary inspiration and imagery for their own country's continuing nationalist struggle. The "first Vietnam"—the Philippines in the 1900s—was called to mind, and the war in Indochina was viewed as a logical development of America's colonial and neocolonial interests in the whole of Southeast Asia.

3. *The intellectual and cultural ferment.* To uphold revolutionary literature entailed not only a criticism of social conditions but also a revolt against the romantic and escapist tradition, the bourgeois and feudal sentimentalism, in Philippine literature. The new orientation, the new audience, demanded a new content and style: a new aesthetics.

⁴ Jose Ma. Sison, "The Economic Emancipation Movement Against US Imperialism," in *Struggle for National Democracy*, (Manila: Amado V. Hernandez Memorial Foundation, 1972), p. 137.

Meanwhile, historians were taking a hard second look at both Philippine history and conventional historiography. Renato Constantino had fired the initial salvos with his *Origins of a Myth* and other thought-provoking essays. The nationalist literature of the 1900s (the period of the seditious or revolutionary drama), the socialist writings during the Commonwealth and post-liberation period were rediscovered and pointed out as evidence of the unbroken tradition of anti-colonial resistance in Philippine letters.

Either as poem or fiction, or drama for that matter, the literary work infused with the new nationalist consciousness can be appreciated for having taken on the most fundamental reality in our national existence: neocolonialism, the evils attending it, such as the bleeding of a nation's resources, emasculation of the political will and of sovereignty, general underdevelopment, as well as the perverse multiplier effect of underdevelopment on society—the intensification of poverty among the lower classes and the increased affluence, political privilege and power of those who profit most from the neocolonial system.

1. *Poetry: The Metaphors of Resistance*

In 1961, a slim volume of poetry in English appeared with the title, *Brothers and Other Poems*. Its author was Jose Ma. Sison, then a young campus writer and instructor at the University of the Philippines. The first poem in the anthology, "Hawk of Gold", minces no metaphor, so to speak, in its symbolization of imperialism. The imagery, in fact, is rather conventional, a variation on a classic theme: the colonizer as a *bird of prey*.

Imperious hawk of burnished gold,
How sharp and sure you calculate
As you ripple the firmament with
your wings⁵

begins the poem. The picture of the swooping creature's unmitigated violence and the unequal contest between hunter and victim is maintained until the last lines.

Claim your chick, imperial aerialists, and
Race to a feasting crag as you raise phlegm
In your rough throat, O hawk of gold.
Burnish your plume and beak with helpless
blood.⁶

Seventeen years later, the poet finds himself inside a maximum security isolation cell, deprived initially of pen and paper. He com-

⁵ Jose Ma. Sison, *Brothers and other Poems* (Manila: Filipino Signatures, 1961), p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

poses lines, even whole poems, in his mind, and reconstructs them later. In one of these poems, "The Woman and the Strange Eagle," he takes up the old metaphor and builds familiar images around it. Instead of the imperious hawk, it is now the fiercer eagle. He talks about a woman (Filipino society) sailing a boat (the revolution) on a rough ocean (history). He depicts a hardy battle against the elements. The first part is a statement of what the voyage originally started out to be: a voyage to a perceived destiny, much like the fervid dream of ancient boatmen. Then the dream, at some point in time, turns into a nightmarish terror.

Yet a strange eagle shuts out the sun.
Its talons of steel drip with blood,
Its wings stir the wind and darken
the skies,
It has diamantine devouring eyes,
Shreds of flesh are in its razor bite.⁷

The strange eagle is no stranger at all. Reckoned as a historical metaphor, the eagle may represent the alien conqueror in the person of Admiral Dewey and the American expeditionary forces in the 1900s. But it may also be considered in a contemporary sense, and as a precautionary symbol. *Talons of steel*, wings which *darken the skies*, and *razor bite* are strongly evocative of the awesome war machine with which the war in Vietnam was waged.

If the eagle is the most appropriate metaphor in the bird-of-prey characterization of imperialism, why the occasional allusion among some poets to the hawk, a lesser bird? This is perhaps explained by the folklore—of which writers are surely aware—regarding the penchant of the native hawk for swooping down on hapless chicks for its meal. The hawk then becomes another embodiment of a strong, ruthless presence. There have been numerous poems written carrying the hawk imagery. Among the contemporary ones is a poem written by Lamberto Antonio, "Luzviminda: 1966 AD," which is typical of this poet's ability to fuse lyricism with historical insight. *Luzviminda* is a woman's name one may come across only in the Philippines, since it is a contraction of the country's three main regions (Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao). This is virtually a technically perfect symbolism: the country as an imperilled woman.

you shall behold
Reflected on the bloody cloud
The facelessness
of the hawk who waves his standards...
his talons clutching a strip of flag

⁷ In *Pintig sa Malamig na Bakal (Lifepulse in Cold Steel): Poems and Letters from Philippine Prisons*, Hongkong, 1972, p. 32.

bespeaking a drought
to come upon yet another Tomorrow!⁸

The word of warning seems to be inchoate still, even ambiguous, but any doubt is removed with a reference to "yet another Tomorrow." The poet warns against the repetition of the Philippines' unfulfillment. She had been thwarted in 1899, she continues to be thwarted still.

Federico Licsi Espino, Jr.'s poem in English, "Under The Eagle's Shadow," written in 1971, is more explicit. The poem is characteristic of Licsi Espino's style: clustering of metaphors, conjuring historical scenes, mythological allusions. The first part of this poem, *The Profile of the Beak*, narrates the onset of the Philippine war of independence against the United States.

The rice-bird bleeds; a contest, lopsided,
begins —
The talons of February amend Jefferson,
reveal the Eagle,
The juvenal plumage, the profile of the
beak, the pinions
Limned by Audubon . . .
The other rice-birds wheel; evening
Turns them into hawks, a clash of claws
ensuing.
Ares on Clio grinds — above the winding
river, the star—
Spangled night modulates into morning.
The battle Escalates: by the dawn's early
light, rifles crow —
Springfields and Krag's of Minute Men with
profiles
Aquiline against the Mausers and Murates
of snub-nosed
Young men dying.

The negation of America's own revolutionary and democratic tradition is summed up in Licsi Espino's phrase *the talons of February amend Jefferson*. Equally pointed is the parallel phrase occurring a few lines further: *Nebraska amends Philadelphia*. Philadelphia evokes not only the revolution of 1776, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (by extension, also the Declaration of the Rights of Man), the Liberty Bell, but also its own connotation, that of being a "city of brotherly love." That Nebraska should symbolize American foreign policy at the turn of the century serves to illustrate the fact that America's "humanist tradition" had become a perverse,

⁸ In *Manlilikha (Mga Piling Tula, 1961-1967)*, edited by Rogelio Mangahas (Manila: Pioneer Printing Press, 1967), p. 33.

I have taken the liberty of translating into English the Pilipino poems and stories (or passages therefrom) used in this study.

because false, missionary zeal. Nebraska was of course among the states which sent "volunteers" in the brutal, genocidal pacification campaign in the Philippines. *Minute Men* thus becomes sarcasm, the poet's way of pointing out America's travesty of its own professed democratic ideals.

Valerio Nofuente in his "Awit Sa Agila" (To the Eagle), also ascribes to the eagle the qualities of ruthlessness and overweening ambition. But as the resolution of the Vietnam war shows, the Almighty Eagle's wings can get badly clipped. The Third World voice of intransigence and defiance rings clear.

Wherever your dire talons alight
Bellies are emptied and mouths are sealed.
We protest, and will not be crushed
Ours is the voice of a world unyielding.
Ever alone, and enfeebled each time,
You shall be prey to us, and then fall.
Cruel as the dreams you dream in flight
Shall be your plummeting ashen death.⁹

The parallelism between the Philippines and Vietnam in terms of national experience vis-a-vis the United States is given another dimension by poet Edgar de la Cruz in a poetic tryptich entitled "Ilang Tagpi sa Gula-gulanit Nilang Kasaysayan" (Patches of Their Tattered History). The poet uses for an epigraph a *Newsweek* article about two Vietnamese orphans named Phuong and Sa who are whisked away to the USA in the controversial "Operation Babylift". Phuong and Sa are christened Christian and Adam by their foster parents. De la Cruz' poetic imagination leaps, and he discerns a comparison between the orphanization of Vietnamese children and that of Filipino children in the 1900s. However, he goes back much further in history and comes up with the symbolic figure of Rizal's tormented Sisa in *Noli Me Tangere*, looking for her two missing sons, Basilio and Crispin. The search extends to our own time. Basilio and Crispin are made to represent Filipino revolutionaries past and present. The third poem *Tanghaliang-tapat Sa Isang Tag-araw* (High Noon in a Season of Heat) proceeds to encapsulate Philippine history:

Hapless children! The crash of the Krag.
On your skulls still resounds in the ring
Of thirty silver pieces eagle-emblazoned,
Resounds in the wail of the sleepless child.
Phuong, Sa, be rid of Christian and Adam!
Basilio, Crispin, be rid of Clark and Subic!
Do you not hear the droning of eagles?¹⁰

⁹ *Diliman Review* (Literary Issue), (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1979), p. 15.

¹⁰ Philippine Collegian, June 30, 1975, p. 5.

The single biggest tissue or "irritant" in RP-US relations concerns the continued presence of American Military bases in the country. Base killings, such as the infamous "wild pig" incident, over which the host country still had to contest legal jurisdiction, touched off public outrage and demonstrations against the bases. The exclusiveness and the 'state-within-a-state' status enjoyed by the bases have driven poets like Rio Alma to write poems like "K-9, O Ang Sugat ni Ruben T. Valeinte" (K-9, Or, Ruben T. Valeinte's Wound). For an epigraph, Alma reproduces a front page item in one of the dailies of December 18, 1974, which reported that a *pan de sal* vendor from Mabalacat, Pampanga, had sustained eight wounds from bites on his arms, back and buttocks, inflicted by a guard dog turned loose on him by American military police in Clark Air Force Base.

When the white gods came
 Blue-eyed and hairy-armed,
 Their straining ward
 Baring ivory knives in the mouth,
 You were pounced upon
 Like a chick by an eagle
 Then whisked to their miniature
 Olympus ringed with steel.
 Is it not an honor for a wretch
 Like you to get in as a guest
 To that elite country of the elite
 Sentineled by a monstrous dog?¹¹

In the poem "Mga Kanyon" (The Cannons), Mike Bigornia muses on that symbol of Philippine-American partnership revered by the veterans of the Pacific War: the island of Corregidor, famous for its battery of now-rusting cannons. Military historians have invariably waxed lyrical and sentimental about the USAFFE's holding action on the island. Bigornia, in mock nostalgia, lyricizes too on the interaction between American and Filipino defenders. He succeeds in uncommemorating it, by posing the historical irony: the Filipinos were fighting a war not of their own making, together with the armed forces of a government that had controlled their country and would continue to control it after and beyond the war.

Noble is the heart that resists
 the caprices of any aggressor.
 Yet, is he not a better enemy
 who is visible to the eye
 than this friend who may be secret foe?
 Let us ponder it:
 helping hands and loving smiles
 are weapons too of vile ambition.¹²

¹¹ Virgilio Almarino (Rio Alma), *Doktrinang Anakpawis*, (Manila: Aklat Peskador, 1979), p. 17.

¹² In *Galian 2* (Quezon City: Galian sa Arte at tula, 1976), p. 12.

It certainly is not the poet's intention to ascribe hypocrisy at the level of personal relationship. Rather, his point is the need to reassess ties and recognize myths so that we are forewarned about the subtle danger lurking behind the improbable 'friendship' between two unequal countries.

A poem by Epifanio San Juan Jr., would be a marked contrast to Bigornia's "Ang Paghihimsik Ng Mga Anakpawis Laban Sa ESSO, Mobil Oil, Goodyear, Firestone, Bank of America At Iba Pang Kasangkapan ng Imperyalismong US" (The Revolt of the Workign Class Against ESSO, Mobil Oil, Goodyear, Firestone, Bank of America and Other Instruments of US Imperialism) bristles with militance, even anger:

From a gun's barrel, Esperanza,
My love shall blossom forth.
Dolefil pineapples, sugar, copra,
hemp, minerals
Hear the thunder of peasant and
worker armies
History breaks out into the warcloud
of our time.¹³

A most articulate and artistic, at the same time politically powerful indictment of neocolonialism is a poem written by Rogelio Mangahas with the innocuous-sounding title, "Bahay-bahayan" (Playhouse). Unlike some of the period poems which reeked of cordite and thundered with the staccato of AK-47s and armalites, "Bahay-bahayan" takes the point of view of the colonizer, and we see how he—in Mangahas' interpretation—looks at his subjects, at his victims. The imperialist as the *persona* in a poem was very rarely attempted, and Mangahas' imperialist unfolds the oppressor's attitude and philosophy in a manner possibly more morbid than if the victim had done the narration. The poem appears in a four-poem anthology entitled "Duguang Plakard at Iba Pang Tula" (Bloodied Placards and Other Poems). Managhas, one of the best poets of his generation and a stalwart of the old PAKSA, advises the reader to "observe the process of (the poet's) metamorphosis, from the rhetorical question of an indecisive petty-bourgeois in the first poem towards a radical, dialectical standpoint of a proletarian realist in the last poem."

The fourth poem is "Bahay-bahayan." The imperialist or colonizer as the *persona* casts himself in the role of a visitor enjoying all the benefits of "traditional Filipino hospitality." In fact he is more than an honored visitor. He proceeds to claim the choice spots, the best amenities in the house, the products grown around the house,

¹³ *Philippine Collegian Folio* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1971), p. 60.

and also the host's wife and daughter. He has ceased to be a transient. He has come to stay. The host has really nothing to lose, the imperialist says. He gets good advice, though not necessarily a helping hand with hard work around the place, he honors himself by sharing his bounty and everything dearest to him, and he is ennobled before the world.

The poem attempts to be a metaphor of underdevelopment. Recto, many years ago, had decried the fate of the Filipinos who had become mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for the neo-colonial master. Mangahas deepens the sense of outrage, and magnifies the patent absurdity of the relationship, for a more telling impact on one's consciousness.

...and now that our little hut
 is done
 built from twigs and rotting wood
 leaves of banana, acacia and *madrecacao*
 harken now to my decree
 I of the fair nose and skin.
 ...I shall descend
 and in the guava tree, be guava-bird
 and guava-worm.
 All for your sake, friend Juan,
 I'll peck and sip and mop up
 as I crawl. Now when it falls,
 if it should fall at all, the guava bit
 will also be food for your belly.
 I shall climb up to take my rest
 and claim the sala or the room
 that's meant for me.
 Be honored that I shall bed
 your wife, or anyone of your
 darling daughters,
 while your eyes are closed
 as you snore on so reposed.
 In the space of an hour, work the yard,
 raise and reap and mill and cook.
 Be honored, yes, be honored truly
 by serving this visiting bed-partner.
 How blessed is the thought that you
 and only you can claim
 the cuds, by-products, husk, fishbone, crumbs:
 all yours, rejoice! ¹⁴

As if this flagellation were not enough, the visitor makes another observation on how he expects the host to internalize and fully accept his presence. The line is formulated simply, but few other lines in Pilipino literature can achieve as much force in only a few words,

¹⁴ Rogelio Mangahas, *Duguang Plakard at Iba Pang Tula* (Quezon City: Manlapaz Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 51-52.

in commenting about the colonial acculturation (or the cultivation of a Stateside mentality) among Filipinos.

Bawat bagay na may halimuyak ng aking
 utot ay kanilang nanaisin.
 (Each object that reeks of my farting
 shall be the joy of their desiring.)¹⁵

Ten years have passed since *Duguang Plakard* came out. There is no end in sight for the writing of poems that aim to reveal the colonial umbilicals with which Philippine society and culture are still tethered to the Stepmother Country.

2. Fiction: Documenting the Counter-Consciousness

In the history of Philippine fiction in Pilipino, the anthology known as *Mga Agos Sa Disyerto* (Streams In The Desert) which appeared in 1964 and reissued in 1974 is said to have represented a major breakthrough in Philippine literature. The stories contained in the anthology were described as a watershed, collectively, of excellent writing skill and social relevance in literature. The writers who comprised the *Agos* group declared then, in their introduction, that there were some quarters who believed that literature in Pilipino up to that time, was "a sprawling desert, where one may only see dried skulls, rotting driftwood, sere grass ringing an already parched oasis." They refused, they said, to accept the "desert condition" of Philippine literature, and so they were offering their works as proof of the fresh trickles, streams rather, of a newer and more vigorous current of writing. In a way, they were correct. Their short stories did represent a radical parting of ways with the escapist, sentimental, phantasmagoric and even medieval themes materializing, out of nowhere, in Pilipino literature.

The decade from 1964 to 1974 witnessed the earlier streams of realist literature swell into a veritable flood-tide of revolutionary poetry, fiction and drama. The literary desert was no more. Many of the short story writers, like the poets, were drawn into the protest movement in the sixties. The early stories of these writers would already indicate the literary direction they were headed for. Their characters would usually be workers, share tenants, social outcasts, and others. Even before the fullblown literary revolution that accompanied the protest movement, these writers (including some in the *Agos* group) would not only turn their backs on conservatism and romanticism, would not only engage in social realism, but experiment as well with revolutionary realism, that is to say, introduce ideological content and even offering a revolutionary resolution of the conflict

¹⁵ p. 52.

developed in their stories. Their material was no long merely city slum and rural shack, no longer merely the despair of a jobless city bum or the sheer misery of a *kasama* or sharecropper; their material would now include workers' strikes, peasants' revolts, scenarios of a violent revolution.

Fiction writing during the past two decades has contributed somewhat in shaping the radical counter-consciousness in the movement. The greatest impact produced by the fictionists was not actually upon the mass audience but their fellow writers. Fiction writing, even as it bolstered the new nationalist approach and substance in literature, constituted a revolt against literary traditions and canons. Experimentations abounded, and some fictionists would not at all shirk from producing a work that actually run counter to the cherished ideal: readability for the sake of theoretical millions of the mass readership. Their works were technically intricate and sometimes affected a contrived stream-of-consciousness.

The most important reature in the new nationalist fiction, nonetheless, was the fact that it was either about any of the "Three Basic Issues in Philippine Society," or else it was about the period's historical protagonists acting on and reacting to those "Basic Issues."

One of the more frequently cited works in the genre is Domingo Landicho's *Elias at Salome*, a love story set during the period of activism. It is not a love story in the conventional sense, because what the writer consciously wants to play up is the process of consciousness-development in the characters. The writer attempts to cast love in a revolutionary mold: one does not exist for the other, one exists for the rest, or for the whole. The imperialist control of Philippine society, the cancer eating up that society, the hopelessness of peaceful reforms, the reasons behind the student protest movement, are not dramatized or fleshed out through the action of the characters, but are rather didactically presented in the dialogue between Elias' father and mother. He is an enlightened intellectual who understands, or thinks he understands, the revolutionary phenomenon. She is benighted, and sees only chaos and destruction all around and a hopeless love affair between her son and his activist girlfriend. It is in another of his stories where Landicho manages to create a scenario, a fictive docudrama in which the reader becomes privy to a hypothetical negotiation between a Philippine president and the American president. The story, "Golgota," appears to be half-allegory, half-burlesque in certain scenes. There is an air of authenticity in the dialogue where the unequal heads of state exchange pleasantries first and then go into the serious business of "national desiderata." Somehow, one feels that Landicho aims to chastice Filipino puppetry by

recreating his version of what goes on in state-to- (puppet) state negotiations. In mid-story, President Geronimo Lazaro (whom Landicho has interestingly invested with a self-wondering, sometimes anguished disposition about his country's condition) is in the United States on a state visit.

The following exchange has a morbid touch to it, and the allusion to constitutional tinkering for immoral political ends prefigures events beyond the time in which *Golgota* was written. The power play implicit in the following passage becomes an undisguised indictment of the United States' bullying tactics in dealing with client states.

"You are our hope in the East, Geronimo."

"I am confused."

"Well, use your power to revise the Constitution. Provide the people some entertainment."

"Make them hope only to end up frustrated?"

"That is within your power. And we're foursquare behind you."

"Suppose I'm not able to do it?"

"History teaches us that thrones fall easily!"¹⁶

Expository dialogue, on the other hand, is a rarity in a highly introspective work of fiction like *Elias at Salome*. What the fictionist has sustained is the contradiction which Elias is trying to resolve in himself: should he join the march of protesters or not? From where he is, he can see the multitude marching, waving placards and streamers, shouting anti-establishment slogans. He knows that Salome is among them. He finally breaks out of their house and pursues the Revolution that has gone on ahead without him. The final scene shows Elias getting doused by the gasoline that he spills as he stumbles. Fired up by the revolutionary ideals he has shared with Salome, fired up by the frenzy of the demonstrating crowd chanting cries of protest, and proclaiming to the world what he now deems to be the highest kind of love possible, Elias uses his lighter to turn himself into a human torch as the riot police close in. His final act is unpremeditated, making Elias a quasi-martyr.

The story "Ang Kamatayan Ni Tiyo Samuel" (Uncle Samuel's Death) by Efren Abueg is even more abstract and symbolic than Landicho's story, but here the allegory of Tiyo Samuel is pursued by the author as a tableau of historical characters. The main characters are also the main symbols: Felipe is the country, Ligaya, his woman, is freedom, and Tiyo Samuel is the enemy of both. The

¹⁶ Domingo Landicho, *Himagsik: An Anthology of Prize-winning Stories* (Manila: R.P. Garcia Publishing House, 1972), p. 75.

allegorical device is strongly reminiscent of the technique in the seditious drama of the 1900s. Tiyo Samuel is Felipe's uncle, who acts as the guardian of the wealth that his (Felipe's) father has left behind. Tiyo Samuel goes to all lengths alienating Ligaya from Felipe's affection, arguing that he deserved a better fate than getting involved with Ligaya. He shows off to him the wealth that would be his someday, provided he cooperate, provided that he help his uncle in financing business ventures that would realize greater riches for both of them.

Felipe recalls the time he was much younger and Tiyo Samuel was showing him the extent of his possessions. (The author pays strict attention to significant small details about the uncle's physical appearance.)

His Tiyo Samuel wore boots, a sevastopol hat, and with his cane pointed out to him the vast tract owned by his father.

"From here to there...all yours!"

"When you reach the age of 22, that will be yours and you ought to prepare yourself. So I want you to take up agriculture, since your father has all this land."¹⁷

The succeeding events in the life of Felipe rush headlong to a violent ending: he is influenced by newfound heretical (i.e., progressive) ideas that open his mind to possibilities other than living off the wealth he has inherited (and which his Tiyo Samuel is manipulating for personal interest), he meets Ligaya, a woman from the unprivileged ranks of the people, and he feels a different kind of love being kindled in himself, an attachment to those who have nothing in life, and for whom he entertains, one day, visions of a different social order—Socialism—until finally, he is drawn into the great tide of protest sweeping the land, aimed at the powerful friends of his Tiyo Samuel, aimed at the evil force represented by his Tiyo Samuel, and he joins the chorus of voices as the Movement gathers momentum:

Down with the imperialists!

but Tiyo Samuel drags him from the streets and brings him to where Ligaya is waiting: she is pregnant, but his uncle categorically forbids him from marrying the woman, insisting that they live worlds apart and thus can never be one. Felipe summons all his strength and resolve, whips out the *balisong* knife he carries with him and stabs Tiyo Samuel dead. The repression is over. A new history dawns for Felipe and Ligaya.

¹⁷ In Sigwa: *Antolohiya ng Maiikling Kuwento* (University of the Philippines, 1972), p. 23.

Efren Abueg's and Domingo Landicho's stories were among the last of their kind appearing at the period of the First Quarter Storm. During the martial law years, the subject of imperialism would be dealt with in a more subdued manner, relying on the device of irony to bring home the message of irreconcilability between the interests of a world superpower and an underdeveloped society. This is brought across in a story written by Virgilio Crisostomo, "Hindi Malayo Ang Biyetnam" (Vietnam Is Not Far Off) which touches on two related themes: the support wittingly or unwittingly given by Filipinos to the war effort in Vietnam, and the opposition to that war effort by the radicalized youth in Filipino society. In the story, the link between the two themes is the character Danny Crisol. He is a university scholar who gets involved in the students' anti-imperialist movement. His father, however, is a construction man who has applied for and found a job with an American communication engineering battalion in Saigon, Vietnam, helping put up camps, radio signal towers, communication centers, settlements for war victims. In a confrontation with his mother, the following exchange occurs (as overheard by the narrator, Danny's younger brother):

"There you go again. Is it a good thing, wanting to drive out the Americans from the Philippines? Oh, but you should have seen what the Americans did for us during the war!"

"That's what the old folks always say... the American sacrifices during the war. But that war was a war of ... (and *Kuya* would suddenly hesitate, not sure whether he ought to go on with what he wanted to say)... of the imperialists."¹⁸

A more indirect technique of presenting the problem is offered by fictionist Fanny A. Garcia in her story "Pina, Pina, Saan Ka Pupunta?" (Pina, Pina, Where Do You Go From Here?) The setting is the present. The very informal style of the straight narrative and idiomatic dialogue almost succeeds in projecting the story as purely naturalistic, but the allegorical intent of the author is brought out by the names the author gives to the heroine—Pina, a contraction for Filipinas—and to the anti-hero (in the sense of *contravida*) Sammy.

Pina is a woman from the slums who dreams of being liberated from the drudgery of poverty. She has visions of someday finding herself, like a famous Filipino movie actress who rose from 'rags to riches', another "slum Cinderella." She sends her name to an international pen-pal club and after screening the many letters she gets, decides on Sammy, an American businessman who comes to the Philippines to marry Pina, and who strikes the impressionable poor people of the *looban* (slum interior) as "lordlike of manner, tall and

¹⁸ In *Daluyan* (Special Issue, Literary Apprentice), UP Writers Club, 1978, p. 28.

straight as a pole, very fair of skin." He easily wins their affection. Pina and Sammy go out on several dates, and one day end up in a hotel room where Sammy initiates Pina into the ways of love (and sex). Sammy goes back to the States ostensibly for business matters. Pina gets pregnant but Sammy does not come back. She learns to her sorrow that he is a married man, that he is actually married to another Filipina, and that he has pulled the job on other Filipinas. Sammy is, in short, an exploiter. Pina suffers a miscarriage while taking a bath, and she feels a kind of liberation: from shame, from her nightmare, and from the dread of bringing into the world a modern-day GI baby.

No novel in Pilipino has been published yet that deals with the protest movement of the past two decades, especially about the critical period of the First Quarter Storm. Ceres Alabado wrote a novel in English in 1971, *I See Red In A Circle*. Having been written at that particular time of the "troubles," and containing as it does actual names of people involved and the places where the action happened, it has the ring of immediacy, authenticity, except that this is not pure novel but perhaps a *docunovel*. It is conceivable that Alabado may have reproduced here actual discussions, teach-ins, exchanges, and the only genuinely fictionalized part may be the *persona* narrating the events and talking to the other characters. The narrator is Maria or Mars, and the person playing Maria's mother is, quite obviously, Alabado herself.

It is through Mars that Alabado presents her own perception of what the history of **Philippine-American relations has been all** about. In Chapter 13, Mars is engaged in one of her many mental ruminations, pondering the myths and realities in Philippine history, digging out insights from books as well as from her own nascent political consciousness shaped by discussion and participation in mass actions. Thus:

America had been our Mother America. America had given us roads and bridges and schools, the English language and literature, toilets, Coca-Cola, and rock 'n' roll. Civilization, in other words. Weren't we grateful for all this?

I thought of the books which I had read in high school, and now in college, but outside, not in class. First, there was *Little Brown Brother* by Leon Wolff and *The American Occupation of the Philippines* by James Blount. You can imagine my shock at the discovery of a lot of things about America's conquest of our country, things which I had not known before, because all of our classroom books said America had saved us from Spain, and later from Japan...¹⁹

¹⁹ Ceres Alabado, *I See Red In a Circle*, Manila, 1972, p. 205.

A few months ago this year, a mimeographed, masking-taped and cardboard-bound, cheap-looking first edition of the novel "Hulagpos" came out. "Hulagpos" means *Breaking Free*. It was written by Mano de Verdades Posadas (Hand of Fettered Truths), obviously a pseudonym. It is not available in bookstores, but a handful of copies have managed, barely managed to pass from hand to hand and some copies have found their way to other countries where there are Filipino communities. It is said to be the first underground novel to have come out during the period of martial law. It is not a novel the way we construe a novel conventionally to be. It is not even a docunovel in the sense that Alabado's novel is. Rather, it is a fusion of fiction, field reports, journalistic features, and documentation of recent events in Philippine society. The novel traces the process of Tommy Guevara's enlightenment, and eventual participation in the Philippine resistance movement. Tommy is a balikbayan who is initially impressed by the achievements of the new dispensation. Then he learns his journalist father has been politically harassed and threatened and is confined in a hospital. He is mistakenly arrested, brought to a safehouse and tortured. He is transferred to a detention center where he finds time to reflect on his life, his family's fortunes, his friends' decision to commit themselves to the struggle, and he meets other detainees with whom he has interesting discussions. Tommy escapes after some time in prison, and goes to the countryside to join the forces of the revolution.

In a discussion between Cynthia, Tommy's activist girlfriend, and her unpoliticized brother Fred, the problem of U.S. imperialism is taken up. She clarifies one important point: the movement is not and never has been against the American people (a point patiently argued by Danny Crisol to his mother in "Hindi Malayo Ang Biyetnam") but rather against the state apparatus of imperialism in the world center of monopoly capital.

"Hulagpos," as a literary piece, leaves much to be desired. It is nevertheless an important documentation of the nationalist aspirations that have been and continue to be the motive force of progressive literature in the present stage of Philippine history.